

Decision Maker: PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR SUSTAINABILITY, GREEN SERVICES AND OPEN SPACES

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY AT ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday 16 March 2023

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: PROPOSALS FOR SUSTAINABLE PLANTING

Contact Officer: Hannah Jackson, Assistant Director Carbon Management and Green Space
Tel: 0208 461 7690 E-mail: Hannah.Jackson@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Director of Environment and Public Protection

Ward: Beckenham and Copers Cope; Chislehurst; Crystal Palace & Anerley, Kelsey & Eden Park; Hayes & Coney Hall; Penge & Cator; Shortlands & Park Langley; St Mary Cray.

1. Reason for decision/report and options

1.1 This report sets out the case for considering sustainable planting in the borough's flower beds and recommends commencing a three-year trial at ten sites to assess the suitability of the planting, the impact on biodiversity and to collect feedback from residents on the impact to the environment. Public feedback will be reported after the first year to coincide with the end of the two-year Nature Friendly Verges trial (**ES202230**).

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 The Environment and Community Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee are asked to review the proposals for a sustainable bedding trial set out in this report and provide their comments to the Portfolio Holder.

2.2 The Portfolio Holder for Sustainability, Green Services and Open Spaces is asked to:

- **Approve the proposal to trial sustainable planting at the ten sites identified in Appendix 1.**

- **Approve the allocation of £75k from the Invest to Save Earmarked Reserve for the upfront costs associated with establishing regenerative planting, to realise an annual saving of £29k from a variation to the management regime applied to the ten sites under the contract with idverde for park management and grounds maintenance.**
- **Approve the variation of the idverde contract of £75k as a one-off cost to cover the purchase, preparation, and installation of the regenerative planting schemes at the ten trial sites.**

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: It is unlikely that the proposed trial will have any direct and specific impact on vulnerable adults or children.
-

Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy: Open Space Strategy (Objective 2.1)
 2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority:
 - (4) For residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean and green environment great for today and a sustainable future.
 - (5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.
-

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated Cost: An initial cost of £75k is required to establish the trial to create an annual saving of £29k
 2. Ongoing costs: Non-Recurring Cost
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Parks and Green Space
 4. Total current budget for this head: £6.25m
 5. Source of funding: Invest to Save Earmarked Reserve
-

Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): N/A
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
-

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: None:
 2. Call-in: Applicable
-

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: The relevant approvals should be obtained for the proposed contract variation with the change managed through the relevant contractual process.
-

Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: N/A
-

Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: Regenerative planting produces better carbon benefits than seasonal bedding.
-

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (current and projected): Unknown
-

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Yes
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

Hayes and Coney Hall

Cllr Turrell commented: 'I very much welcome the inclusion of Coney Hall Recreation Ground on this list. I feel the project is incredibly important and recognise the environmental benefits outlined the report. I whole heartedly support this initiative. Coney Hall Recreation Ground is an excellent inclusion given the work already be done on the site by the fantastic Friends group and Environment Action Coney Hall (E.A.C.H).'

Cllr Michael commented: 'I confirm that I accept the prairie planting style bed for the car park bed at Coney Hall Recreation Ground. More generally, I would ask that the sustainable planting includes plenty of colour all around the year to stimulate visual interest. I like the idea of herbs being planted. On the suggested trial site, it is mentioned that flower beds are often trampled over and damaged. I would ask that special care is taken to protect the sustainably planted beds from vandalism and damage.'

St Mary Cray

Cllr Bear requested that colourful plants were used in the bed in St Mary Cray High Street and that colour and interest were planned to ensure attractiveness all year round, for example snowdrops in January and fushias which will still be colourful in November. Cllr Bear added: 'I have a filly perennial garden myself so know from experience that this can be achieved'. Cllr Bear was also keen to ensure that the perennials will receive the appropriate maintenance for the success of the bed.

3. COMMENTARY

Background

- 3.1 The council is responsible for over a hundred traditional annual flower beds across the borough measuring almost 6,900m², and containing over 150,000 bedding plants.
- 3.2 At their meeting on 6th September 2022, a member of Environment & Community Services PDS requested that Portfolio Holder for Sustainability, Green Services and Open Spaces allow the committee to review the floral bedding arrangements in the borough. The Portfolio Holder advised that officers had already been instructed to review arrangements and a report was added to the committee's forward plan.
- 3.3 This report sets out the initial review of the floral bedding arrangements in the borough and notes that there could be biodiversity, carbon reduction and cost benefits from implementing more sustainable, regenerative planting in beds across the borough. This report recommends a trial of regenerative planting at ten sites.

Existing arrangements

- 3.4 The council contracts parks management and grounds maintenance responsibilities to idverde. In compliance with the specification, idverde are required to design, procure, and maintain seasonal bedding schemes in permanent beds, planters and tubs in parks and open spaces, countryside sites and highway amenity areas.
- 3.5 This includes maintaining a programme of annual bedding in flower beds (6,890m²) and flower tubs (72 units) to ensure that they are attractive and kept in an optimum condition and are free of weeds, litter, and leaves. Specific responsibilities include implementing appropriate irrigation or watering systems, managing soil health, treating pests of diseases, and removing and replacing dead or inappropriate plants with healthy and suitable varieties.
- 3.6 Annual plants live for only one growing season meaning that they are replaced yearly. Beds are also dug over, firmed and the surface raked in preparation for planting. The programme is resource intensive and attracts a significantly higher cost than other types of horticultural features, such as shrubs or herbaceous borders.
- 3.7 Maintaining annual flower bedding currently costs the council approximately £317k per annum. Costs are based on a square meter rate for flower beds, and a unit rate for each tub.
- 3.8 It should be noted that there are several floral beds, usually in high profile highways sites that are sponsored. Sponsorship is administered by Market Force via a direct contract with the council and generates in the region of £55k per annum.

The case for more sustainable planting

- 3.9 Seasonal flower beds are attractive and traditionally been valued by Bromley residents as contributing to the quality of our green and built environments.
- 3.10 However, seasonal bedding relies heavily on annuals and is not particularly sustainable; it is expensive and resource intensive to maintain, does not maximise opportunities for biodiversity gains and are produces more carbon per square meter than potential alternative management regimes.
- 3.11 In terms of biodiversity, annuals are one of the least valued habitat types; they are intensively produced and provide a monoculture environment which doesn't allow wildlife to flourish, including pollinators.

- 3.12 Additionally, annuals require intensive watering. In the hotter weather experienced in the last few years, maintaining floral bedding to the required standards has been challenging and required use of scarce natural resources.
- 3.13 For these reasons, those managing public spaces are increasingly moving from planting regimes using degenerative single use products to regenerative planting schemes, making more use of perennials.
- 3.14 Perennial planting is advantageous because:
- It is less expensive to maintain, saving up to £40 per m² at current contractual rates
 - It can be dynamic in colour and form in summer months whilst also providing interest in the autumn and winter
 - They provide mini-ecosystems and habitats for wildlife to thrive, including pollinators
 - They can be selected to be drought tolerant, with plants reviewed for their suitability to the prevalent environment
 - Less cultivation of the beds improves soil structure and allows earthworms, mycorrhizal fungi to flourish supporting plant life.
 - There is a reduction in carbon produced through the less resource intensive management regime.

Trial of sustainable planting in the borough

- 3.15 Changing the planting approach in flower beds in the borough to sustainable, regenerative planting would be a significant change in the way that the green environment is managed, and therefore a trial is recommended to gather feedback from those who live, work, study or visit in the borough to inform decision making around the future of these beds.
- 3.16 It is recommended that a trial commence in the autumn 2023 with feedback on the changes collected during the 2024 season. It is recommended that the trial is for three years (for the reasons set out in paragraph 3.22 below), with a review of the feedback from public engagement after the first year to tie in with the end of the Nature Friendly Verges trial (**ES202230**) and to inform next steps.
- 3.17 A selection of 10 sites is proposed for this trial, with more information on these sites provided at **Appendix 1**. Sites have been selected in a range of locations across the borough, and because they have historically struggled to thrive under the existing management arrangements. The sites recommended for inclusion in this trial are:
- Waterman's Square (Penge & Cator)
 - Beckenham Green (Beckenham Town & Copers Cope)
 - Elmers End Green (Kelsey and Eden Park)
 - Betts Park (Crystal Palace & Anerley)
 - Kelsey Park (Kelsey and Eden Park)
 - St Mary Cray High Street (St Mary Cray)
 - Shortlands Green (Shortlands & Park Langley)
 - Croydon Road Recreation Ground (Kelsey & Eden Park)
 - Coney Hall Recreation Ground (Hayes & Coney Hall)
 - Chislehurst High Street (Chislehurst)

- 3.18 It is proposed that these beds are planted with a mix of shrubs and flowering plants and herbs, with some beds being planted with prairie planting styles, and some that are designed specifically for pollinators, depending on the local conditions of the bed itself. Critically, all plants will be selected to be of value to pollinators and to avoid planting anything of an invasive nature.
- 3.19 Example images of the types of aesthetics that can be achieved with regenerative planting are provided below:

Example of perennial bedding



Example of prairie planting in the autumn



Public Engagement

- 3.20 The primary purpose of the trial is to seek feedback from residents on the regenerative planting schemes. A communications plan for the trial is attached at **Appendix 2**, with a focus on explaining the rationale for the change to the bedding approach and capturing feedback on the trials to inform future decision making on next steps.

Cost and Savings Associated with the Trial

- 3.21 There is a one-off cost associated with purchasing, preparing and installing the regenerative planting schemes in the ten trial locations, which is estimated at £75k (£100 per m², including contingency to deal with any plants that fail to establish). However, removing seasonal bedding from these sites and replacing it with regenerative planting does result in an annual grounds maintenance contract saving of approximately £40 per m², which for this trial equates to £29k per annum.
- 3.22 Savings would therefore be realised in Year 3 after having recouped the initial outlay. If these beds were retained for 10 years, the trial has the potential to make a cumulative saving of £215k, as set out in table 1 below:

	£,000
One off costs	75
Annual cost impact	-29
Year 1	46
Year 2	17
Year 3	-12
Year 4	-41
Year 5	-70
Year 6	-99
Year 7	-128
Year 8	-157
Year 9	-186
Year 10	-215

Next Steps

3.23 It is recommended that the trial lasts for at least three years in order to recoup the one-off up-front costs for the regenerative planting scheme. However, public engagement responses will be reviewed after one year to coincide with the end of the Nature Friendly Verges Trial, with a view to considering options, which may include:

- Extending the trial to additional beds
- Stopping the trial and reverting to annual bedding after year 3
- Recommending a permanent change to the way some or more of the flower beds are planted.

4. TRANSFORMATION IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The proposal for sustainable planting supports the Council's Corporate Strategy: Making Bromley Even Better, specifically in relation to ambition 4: or residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean and green environment great for today and a sustainable future. It supports our objectives for a clean and green environment and a carbon neutral environment.

4.2 The proposal will also result in an annual saving, to be realised after year 3. Therefore, this trial has the potential to contribute towards ambition 5: to manage our resources well, providing value for money and efficient and effective services for Bromley residents.

4.3 The proposal will also support delivery of the Open Space Strategy, specifically Objective 2.1: Natural, Cultural and Historical Assets – Ecological Resilience, through adoption of management regimes...that support biodiversity, ecology, and sustainability across the portfolio.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There is no cost implication with this proposal, however there is a cost saving in the form of reduced contract costs. The annual saving is expected to be £29k which over a 10-year period would save the council approximately £215k after the invest to save expenditure has been utilised.

5.2 As this proposal is requiring the use of the invest to save reserve to fund the expenditure, there is a requirement of offering up the annual saving as a budget reduction, therefore if this proposal is approved, the relevant budget will be reduced by £29k to reflect the contract saving.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 This report relates to a contract for parks management and grounds maintenance the Council has with idverde, dated 28 March 2019.

6.2 The estimated contract value for this contract was £37.5m at the time of award, this variation is for £75k.

6.3 Officers have indicated that idverde have agreed to the reduction in price and the cost savings are based on the tendered rates.

6.4 The services as recommended in this report are incidental to those under the contract, and the value of the variation is less than 10% of the value of the contract.

6.5 The recommendations as outlined would be in line with the Council's Best Value obligations.

6.6 Risk of a procurement challenge would be assessed as low.

6.7 The Portfolio Holder can approve the report if so persuaded.

6.8 Legal are available to work with Officers as needed.

7. PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This report seeks to vary the Council's contract with idverde at a value of £75k for the provision of purchase, preparation, and installation of the regenerative planting schemes at the ten trial sites.

7.2 The Council's requirements for authorising a variation (change control) are covered in CPR 23.7 and 13.1. For a contract of this value, the Approval of the Budget holder must be obtained. In accordance with CPR 2.1.2, Officers must take all necessary professional advice.

7.3 Following Approval, the variation must be applied via a suitable Change Control Notice, or similar, agreed with the Provider.

7.4 The actions identified in this report are provided for within the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, and the proposed actions can be completed in compliance with their content.

8. CARBON REDUCTION/SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Converting bedding from use of annuals to perennials requires less soil disturbance and can lead to greater soil stability, allowing for a greater accumulation of soil organic matter. The sequestration of carbon in soil organic matter can be an effective climate mitigation strategy for removing carbon from the atmosphere.

Non-Applicable Headings:	Impact on Vulnerable Adults or Children, Personnel Implications, Property Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Open Space Strategy 2021 – 2031: Open Spaces Strategy for 2021 to 2031 (bromley.gov.uk)