
Agenda Item: Seasonal Planting in WTC Public Spaces

Meeting Date: Monday, 13 January 2026

Contact Officer: Head of Estates and Operations

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the planting of floral displays across the green spaces Witney Town Council manage.

Background

Public green spaces such as council's parks, the town centre and housing estates play an important role in improving the appearance of communities, supporting biodiversity, and enhancing wellbeing.

Local authorities and organisations often choose between seasonal bedding plants (changed every summer and winter) and perennial planting schemes.

This report compares these approaches in terms of cost, maintenance, environmental impact, and visual effect within the UK climate.

Current Situation

The council plant seasonal bedding twice a year that typically consists of begonias, petunias, and geraniums for the summer bedding, and pansies, violas, and wallflowers for the Winter bedding.

These plants provide bright, short-term displays and are removed and replaced each season.

Advantages

- Provides immediate, colourful impact
- Allows for seasonal themes and designs
- Familiar and popular with the public
- Useful for high-profile areas such as town centres and memorial spaces

Disadvantages

- Higher cost due to regular plant replacement
- Labour-intensive planting and removal
- Requires frequent watering and feeding
- Creates large amounts of green waste
- Limited benefits for wildlife
- Higher carbon footprint due to plant production and transport

An alternative is to use perennial plants which are long-lived plants that can return several years. Examples include lavender, ornamental grasses, sedum, rudbeckia, and shrubs. Once established, they require less frequent replanting.

Advantages

- Lower long-term costs
- Reduced labour and maintenance
- More drought-tolerant once established
- Improved biodiversity, supporting pollinators
- Reduced waste and environmental impact
- Naturalistic appearance that fits modern landscape design

Disadvantages

- Slower to establish visual impact
- May appear less colourful in winter
- Requires good design and planning
- Some public resistance due to less formal appearance

When we consider the environmental aspects, perennial planting is generally more sustainable as it:

- Reduces carbon emissions from plant production
- Improves soil health
- Supports insects, birds, and pollinators
- Reduces water use

Seasonal bedding has a higher environmental cost due to repeated planting cycles and maintained and conditioned soil.

Cost and Maintenance Comparison		
Factor	Seasonal Bedding	Perennial Planting
Initial cost	Medium	Medium
Long-term cost	High	Low
Labour	High	Low–Medium
Water use	High	Low
Lifespan	3–6 months	Several years
Biodiversity value	Low	High

If we consider the suitability for the town council's public spaces, we can determine the seasonal bedding is best suited for areas where a striking colourful floral display will have the greatest impact for the residents, businesses and tourists.

Perennial planting can be considered to be ideal in areas such as our parks and green corridors, housing estates, road verges and roundabouts.

Witney Town Council have been using a mixed approach, combining seasonal bedding in key locations with perennial schemes elsewhere. Officers continue to look at ways to maximise the level of perennials plants and achieve the correct balance that provides many benefits to the town's occupants and visitors.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality - is linked to seasonal floral display planting through fair access to attractive public spaces, inclusive decision-making, and representation of diverse communities. When planting is focused only on affluent or tourist areas, it can reinforce inequality.
- b) Biodiversity - seasonal floral displays in Witney are used as a tool to enhance urban biodiversity, support pollinators, and meet sustainability goals, while still improving the appearance of public spaces.
- c) Crime & Disorder - research shows that well-maintained green spaces (including parks, landscaped areas, and planted public spaces) tend to be associated with lower rates of crime and vandalism, especially when they are attractive, visible, and actively used by the community.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency - Local governments and environmental campaigns in the UK are responding to the climate emergency by expanding urban planting initiatives including trees, wildflowers, shrubs, and other vegetation to help mitigate climate impacts and support biodiversity.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Financial implications

- None to report for this report.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report and recognise that a balanced approach prioritising the use of perennials while retaining seasonal displays in key locations is considered the most effective and sustainable strategy.