
Agenda Item:	Seasonal Planting Strategy
Meeting Date:	19 May 2026
Contact Officer:	Head of Estates and Operations

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Seasonal Planting Strategy of floral displays within Witney Town Council's portfolio.

The Council recognises that floral displays contribute significantly to the appearance and character of the town. The council's objective is to create attractive, sustainable, biodiverse, and climate-resilient floral displays across Witney that enhance civic pride, support wildlife, improve wellbeing, and provide value for money through a balanced approach combining seasonal bedding and perennial planting.

Background

The Council cares for over 12 hectares of public open spaces, including parks, small green areas, flower beds, and shrubs. Seasonal floral displays including hanging baskets, lamp post brackets, and mounted floral standards bring colour to the town throughout the year.

Public green spaces play an important role in improving the appearance of communities, supporting biodiversity, and enhancing wellbeing.

The committee's decision in January 2026 was to move towards a mixed approach to planting combining perennials and bedding plants from the autumn onwards.

Current Situation

Witney Town Council Seasonal Flower Planting Strategy

Witney Town Council aims to create vibrant, colourful, sustainable, and biodiverse floral displays that enhance civic pride, strengthen the town's identity, and improve the appearance of parks and public spaces throughout the year.

Floral displays are recognised as an important feature of the town, contributing positively to the experience of residents, businesses, and visitors while also supporting wildlife and environmental sustainability.

The strategy seeks to ensure that planting schemes are visually striking and memorable, helping Witney stand out as an attractive and welcoming market town, whilst balancing environmental responsibilities and long-term financial sustainability.

Strategic Objectives

The Council will maintain bright and attractive floral displays in key locations while increasing the use of sustainable perennial planting across suitable public spaces. Planting schemes should provide colour, texture, and visual interest throughout the seasons and contribute positively to the character of the town.

The strategy also aims to support pollinators and biodiversity, reduce long-term maintenance requirements, and improve climate resilience through more sustainable planting practices. Annual themes and commemorative displays may continue to be incorporated where appropriate to celebrate civic events and important occasions.

Strategic Planting Approach

Witney Town Council will continue to adopt a balanced planting model that combines seasonal bedding in high-profile locations with perennial planting in parks, verges, and wider green spaces.

Seasonal bedding will continue to play an important role within the town centre, memorial areas, hanging baskets, gateways, and other prominent civic spaces where bold colour and immediate visual impact are desirable. These displays help create a welcoming environment and contribute to the town's overall attractiveness.

Perennial planting will increasingly be used within parks, road verges, roundabouts, and green corridors where longer-lasting planting schemes can provide colour over extended periods while improving biodiversity and reducing maintenance requirements.

All planting schemes should be designed to maximise visual impact through strong colour combinations, varied textures, and long flowering periods. The Council recognises that sustainability improvements should not result in displays appearing dull or neglected, and planting designs should therefore remain vibrant, attractive, and well-maintained throughout the year.

Seasonal Planting Framework

Spring and Summer Displays

Spring and Summer planting should focus on delivering bold and colourful displays that enhance public spaces and create a positive impression for residents and visitors. Seasonal bedding plants such as antirrhinums, begonias, geraniums, petunias, cosmos, and marigolds will continue to provide strong seasonal colour in focal areas.

Perennial planting will increasingly be integrated into these schemes through the use of species such as lavender, rudbeckia, salvia, echinacea, sedum, penstemon, and ornamental grasses. These plants not only provide extended flowering periods and visual structure, but also improve biodiversity and drought tolerance.

Planting designs should ensure that displays remain full, colourful, and visually engaging throughout the season. Hanging baskets and raised displays should continue to use cascading and trailing plants to maximise visual appeal within the town centre and other key locations.

Autumn and Winter Displays

Autumn and winter planting should continue to provide colour and structure during the darker months and prevent public spaces from appearing empty or unattractive. Winter bedding plants including pansies, violas, wallflowers, cyclamen, and polyanthus will continue to be used in prominent areas where winter colour is most valued.

These displays should increasingly be complemented by evergreen shrubs, ornamental grasses, heucheras, hebes, skimmias, and winter-flowering plants to provide year-round

interest and structure. The use of contrasting foliage colours and textured planting should help maintain visual quality during the winter season.

Location-Based Planting

High-profile civic spaces, including the town centre, memorials, entrance gateways, floral towers, and public seating areas, should continue to receive the most colourful and formal displays. These locations are important in shaping first impressions of the town and should therefore maintain a high standard of presentation and seasonal interest.

Within parks and open spaces, planting schemes should balance naturalistic perennial planting with carefully designed feature beds that continue to provide colour and visual attraction. Meadow-style planting may be introduced where appropriate, although care should be taken to ensure areas continue to appear managed and welcoming rather than neglected.

Road verges, roundabouts, and green corridors are particularly well suited to drought-tolerant perennial planting. These areas can provide waves of seasonal colour while reducing watering and maintenance requirements and improving the overall appearance of the town.

Biodiversity and Sustainability

Under the Environment Act 2021, the updated Biodiversity Duty legally requires all public authorities in England, including town and parish councils, to actively conserve and enhance biodiversity.

The Council's planting strategy will contribute positively to biodiversity and environmental sustainability while retaining strong visual appeal. Increasing the use of nectar-rich plants will support pollinators including bees and butterflies, while reduced soil disturbance and fewer seasonal replacements will help improve soil health and reduce waste.

The Council will continue seeking opportunities to reduce water consumption, and lower carbon emissions associated with plant production and transportation. Biodiversity-focused planting should demonstrate that environmentally sustainable landscapes can also be colourful, attractive, and beneficial to the wider community.

Annual Themes and Civic Events

Seasonal displays may incorporate themes that recognise important civic events, commemorations, and celebrations throughout the year. These will include Remembrance displays and may include heritage-themed planting for national commemorations, Pride displays, royal celebrations, and environmentally themed planting schemes.

Thematic displays should be concentrated within highly visible locations to maximise their impact and should complement the wider planting strategy while remaining appropriate in scale and cost.

Equality and Community Wellbeing

The Council recognises that attractive and well-maintained public spaces contribute positively to mental wellbeing, civic pride, and community identity. Floral displays should therefore be distributed fairly across the town so that all communities can benefit from attractive and welcoming environments.

Planting schemes can also help encourage greater use of parks and public spaces, support social interaction, and improve perceptions of safety and care within the local environment.

Maintenance and Operational Considerations

The strategy seeks to maintain high visual standards while reducing unnecessary maintenance burdens over time. Increasing the use of resilient perennial planting will help reduce watering requirements, minimise seasonal replacement work, and improve the long-term sustainability of planting schemes.

The Council will continue to monitor plant performance and public feedback and may trial new drought-tolerant and long-flowering species where appropriate. Opportunities to improve storage and overwintering facilities may also be explored to support future planting efficiencies.

Monitoring and Review

The planting strategy should be reviewed annually to assess visual quality, biodiversity outcomes, maintenance costs, water usage, and public satisfaction. Planting schemes should remain flexible to allow for improvements and adjustments based on operational experience and changing environmental conditions.

A wider strategic review should take place every five years to ensure the approach continues to meet the Council's objectives and the expectations of residents and visitors.

Summary

A balanced approach that combines colourful seasonal displays with increased perennial planting is considered the most effective and sustainable strategy for Witney Town Council. This approach will maintain the town's reputation as an attractive and welcoming destination while supporting biodiversity, climate resilience, and long-term value for money.

The strategy ensures that public spaces remain vibrant, visually distinctive, and enjoyable throughout the year, helping floral displays continue to serve as an important attraction within the town and its green spaces.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

5. A Beautiful Witney

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

While perennial planting may require similar levels of initial investment, it is expected to provide improved long-term value through reduced replacement costs, lower watering requirements, and less intensive maintenance. Seasonal bedding will remain important in key locations where strong visual impact and civic presentation are priorities.

The Council will continue to seek an appropriate balance between financial sustainability, environmental responsibility, and maintaining high-quality floral displays.

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.