

CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 10 August 2021

Title: Wildflower Planting at Recreation Grounds

Contact Officer: Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer - Angus Whitburn

Background

The wildflower area at King Georges has become very well established and feedback from the residents of witney has been positive. The only negative feedback has been when the grounds contractors have cut into it. More areas could be prepared ready for wildflower planting by volunteer groups.

Current Situation

Area's for Wildflower Planting

The leys recreation ground would be a difficult place to create a wildflower area without disrupting the users of the field. Areas near the trees are often used for shade and the open areas of the field are used heavily. If a wildflower area was established it would likely receive accidental damage. The most viable section of land is at the bottom of the events field running by station lane. However, this is used by events so would receive heavy foot traffic over it.

Eton Close, Burwell Field and Oxlease would be seen as the three viable recreation fields for wildflower planting. To further add to the installation of the tiny forest at Eton close a wildflower circle could be established around the fenced area. Both Burwell and Oxlease recreation grounds do have areas that could be used for wildflower planting.

Alternatively, there are many pockets of amenity land around Burwell that would benefit from council projects. On their own attention would be limited but grouped into a larger project could be seen as a very positive approach. These areas are also too small for heavy foot traffic caused by recreation use so it would help to ensure the patches of wildflower don't get accidentally damaged.

Method

The grounds contractors have offered to help in the same way they did for King Georges. However, officers would recommend a different method to establish these areas of wildflowers. The works team could remove completely the turf from identified areas. This would remove the need to seed yellow rattle to kill off grasses. The soil can then be cultivated using a tiller by the works team and the prepared ground can then be passed to community groups to sow wildflower seed.

To ensure these areas aren't cut down but also to draw attention to them coloured twine could be used to identify them. This would then help grounds contract to cut around them, draw positive attention to them and symbolise they are purposeful.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Wildflower areas encourage pollinators and if the council are selective in the plants they plant this dwindling population of pollinators could be helped to increase. If officers order wildflower mixes that contain nectar-rich species it would be an added benefit.

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.

If the council selected too many areas to establish wildflowers it could make implementation and maintenance very troublesome. Travel would add to the overall task time and some areas would inevitably become unmanaged.

The reaction to no-mow May to help to establish wildflowers has been mixed across the UK. The most successful areas have been those that look intentional and are not large banks of grass that have become difficult to maintain and look messy. Short strips of cuts with well-cut grass in between have been largely successful along with small banks.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

If the works team are to be used for wildflower preparation then a tiller will need to be ordered. This can be ordered from the equipment budget and can be used for multiple tasks so would be a useful piece of equipment. It would be an added benefit if the equipment budget could be increased to allow for this purchase.

- Cost of the Works Team to carry out the preparation – unquantifiable at this stage
- Multitool Tiller Attachment: £160.00
- 1kg of 100% Wildflower Seeds: £160.00 (coverage approx. 200m²)

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Commit to using the works team for ground preparation.
2. Discuss and confirm the locations for wildflower planting.
3. Officers to communicate with volunteer groups to organise dates for planting.