

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive for Decision 01 March 2021

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| <b>Portfolio:</b>            | Streetscene   |
| <b>Subject:</b>              | <b>Interim Arrangements for Floral Displays and In Bloom 2021</b> |
| <b>Report of:</b>            | Head of Streetscene   |
| <b>Corporate Priorities:</b> | Protect & Enhance the Environment                                 |

**Purpose:**

To agree interim arrangements for the planting of floral displays and, South East in Bloom and Fareham in Bloom competitions, in 2021.

**Executive summary:**

As a result of the pandemic that struck in the Spring of 2020, the planting of floral displays was suspended, Fareham in Bloom took place as a virtual competition and there was no entry in South East in Bloom.

Although there is hope of returning to normal in 2021, the continued uncertainty and impact of the pandemic, presents difficulties in planning and implementing the traditional arrangements for floral displays and organisation of the In-Bloom competitions.

In view of the current situation, consideration has been given to interim arrangements for 2021 that take account of the need to protect employees and volunteers, adhere to Government guidance and the constraints on the Council's grounds maintenance team.

Proposals for the interim arrangements for floral displays, South East in Bloom and Fareham in Bloom competitions in 2021 are set out in this report.

**Recommendation/Recommended Option:**

It is recommended that the Executive agrees the interim arrangements for floral displays, South East in Bloom and Fareham in Bloom competitions in 2021, as set out in the report.

**Reason:**

To ensure effective deployment of staff resources and to safeguard the health of volunteers and employees against the risks presented by the Covid-19 Coronavirus.

**Cost of proposals:**

The cost of the proposals in the report can be met from within existing Streetscene budgets. Any savings resulting from the service changes will help to reduce the pressure on the Council's budget arising from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Appendices:                      None**

**Background papers:    None**

**Reference papers:            Covid-19 Public Spaces Recovery Plan – Executive 3  
August 2020**

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Executive Briefing Paper

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Date:</b>        | 01 March 2021  |
| <b>Subject:</b>     | Interim Arrangements for Floral Displays and In Bloom 2021 |
| <b>Briefing by:</b> | Head of Streetscene  |
| <b>Portfolio:</b>   | Streetscene  |

#### INTRODUCTION

1. As a result of the pandemic that struck in the Spring of 2020, the planting of floral displays was suspended, Fareham in Bloom took place as a virtual competition and there was no entry in South East in Bloom. The hope was there would be a return to normal in 2021 and this would enable the resumption of the In-Bloom activities and planting of floral displays.
2. Unfortunately, the consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic and the continuation of associated restrictions, means there remains uncertainty about the situation in the spring and summer of 2021.
3. Arrangements for the floral displays and In Bloom activities need advanced planning, which is difficult given the constraints outlined. Therefore, consideration has been given to interim arrangements for 2021, that take account of the need to adhere to Government guidance and the constraint on resources.
4. This report sets out proposals for interim arrangements for South East in Bloom and Fareham in Bloom annual competitions and planting of floral displays for 2021.

#### BACKGROUND

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the Council and the local community. In 2020, immediate response efforts were required to maintain key Council services and to rapidly adapt to new requirements which helped to support residents and businesses in the Borough.
6. After the first national lockdown, to guide the on-going recovery process following the lockdown, a COVID-19 Recovery Framework was devised to focus on key areas of recovery. This was approved by the Executive at the meeting on 3 August as was the Public Spaces Recovery Plan which included elements of the Streetscene services.
7. The grounds maintenance team was impacted by staff shortages during the first lockdown period with over a third of staff unavailable for work because they were

shielding. This meant that services had to be prioritised and some suspended to make sure that the most essential tasks carried out by the service could continue.

8. The most recent guidance for shielding has enabled some Operatives to return to work. However, there are currently members of the grounds maintenance team that have been classified as extremely clinically vulnerable and need to self-isolate at home. This situation looks likely to continue, at least into the spring growing season, adding further uncertainty and pressure on the service.
9. As a result of the guidance on social distancing, there are restrictions on the number of Operatives that can travel in a vehicle. In the case of most of the ground's maintenance vehicles, only one Operative can occupy a vehicle at a time. These restrictions constrain the number of tasks that can normally be undertaken by the team.
10. This is particularly challenging in the spring and summer growing season when the demand on the service reaches its peak. In addition to the grass and hedge cutting, throughout the growing season additional scheduled tasks are undertaken that draw resource from the teams work programme.
11. Organisation and preparation of the In-Bloom competitions relies on assistance from many support volunteers who help with events, open their gardens and liaise with the wider community.
12. Understandably COVID-19 has had an impact on people's personal lives, priorities and interests. As a result, the indication is that the volunteer network will reduce with some of the more senior volunteers no longer able to continue.
13. However, there are volunteers that are keen to support In-Bloom in some way going forward, although to what degree will be defined in time as things return to some degree of normality. At present there is ongoing concern over transmission of the virus, and many are understandably reluctant to return to community work until such time as it is safe to do so.
14. Local businesses have continued to support the sponsored roundabout initiative throughout the pandemic. The company who sponsor the Segensworth roundabout had raised concerns about their level of sponsorship going forward. However, they were pleased with the new sustainable bedding and have now decided to continue the arrangement with the Council.
15. Although the level of floral displays has reduced, the relevant signage displaying the sponsors name and logos has remained in a prominent position on the key strategic roundabouts in the Borough. This has helped the Council to maintain the level of income received from sponsorship.

## **FLORAL DISPLAYS**

16. Bedding and other floral display features are designed each season by the Council's Horticultural Officer and the plants purchased under a tendered contract to a supplier.
17. The current seasonal bedding schemes require removal and re-planting twice a year. There is a display team of three Gardeners whose job is to maintain all the floral displays in the Borough. When the summer bedding is being planted, three additional Gardeners are moved from duties in the grounds maintenance team to make a display

team of six for a five-week period. This team then reduces to five for a further eight to ten-week period to cover the watering of the bedding displays, which is dependent on the weather conditions.

18. The traditional floral displays in Civic Gardens, Sensory Gardens and Westbury Manor Gardens are either equipped with a dedicated irrigation system or have on site water points. This means that there is no requirement for bowser irrigation and therefore less resource intensive.
19. In December 2020, 70,000 bulbs were machine planted on Segensworth roundabout and herbaceous planting in the cemeteries, as part of sustainable bedding trial. The bulbs will provide a biodiverse mix of 14 colour species which are pollen and nectar rich, helping to support early season insect life and provide display from March until May.
20. The herbaceous plants and bulbs planted remain in situ permanently, require no watering and produce annual seasonal display. Therefore, the maintenance regime is much less intensive which also means a reduction in carbon emissions.
21. The results of the trial will be reported to the Streetscene Scrutiny Panel later in the year and if successful could provide a sustainable alternative to traditional floral bedding which will help to reduce the Council's carbon footprint.
22. Hanging baskets and troughs are traditionally erected throughout the Borough each summer. Two Gardeners are re-deployed from existing grounds maintenance team for three weeks to erect the baskets and troughs at the start of the season and then a further two weeks at the end of the season to take them down.
23. An additional staff resource is required to maintain and water the displays which means operatives performing other grounds maintenance functions must be redeployed at a busy time when grass and vegetation is growing prolifically.
24. Watering is undertaken during the evenings and at night due to the need to avoid peak traffic flows, as the features are usually located alongside carriageways, and to ensure evaporation is reduced to allow maximum water to reach the plants.
25. Floral towers are hired for a period of around twenty weeks from mid-June. They are placed predominantly in Fareham West Street pedestrianised area. The hire company places the units in position, maintains and waters them. They also come with insurance, so should they fail or suffer significant vandalism they would be replaced.

### **SOUTH EAST & FAREHAM BLOOM**

26. Along with all other Council events, Fareham in Bloom in 2020 was cancelled due to restrictions and concerns about the pandemic and there was no entry in the South & South East in Bloom competition.
27. Several of the In-Bloom volunteer group were required to shield and were unable to leave their homes so were unable to participate in the coordination of activities in the community. The vulnerability of the volunteers who play such a big part in the organisation and success of the In-Bloom activities was a big concern and continues to be so in the current environment.
28. A virtual Fareham in Bloom 2020 was launched as an alternative competition. Residents

uploaded photos of their entries online and the most 'liked' photos were shortlisted with the winner being selected by a panel of judges. This proved a great success in enabling residents to participate in the competition with over 100 entries received.

29. Over recent years there has been a growing number of independent entries into South East In Bloom from Fareham community groups and businesses. In 2020, Titchfield In Bloom, Portchester Memorial Gardens, Portchester Crematorium, Wynton Way Horticultural site, Red Barn Allotments, Fareham Allotment & Garden Association and Burnham Wood Residents Association submitted their own entries. The indication is that these groups intend to submit independent entries again in 2021.
30. It has not been possible to hold the community gardening and horticultural events over the past year which make a significant contribution to the presentation of Fareham's main South East In Bloom entry in the 'small city' category.
31. All the related events require lead in time from inception of an idea through to planning, promotion and ultimate delivery. Therefore, it is not now feasible to deliver a programme of events before the judging period in July, being mindful that it is likely some form of restrictions and the need to maintain social distancing will remain.
32. The Council has established good relationships with several business sponsors which enhance the delivery of the In-Bloom competition entries as well as providing financial support. This includes funding for elements of the judging day and wider activities, as well as their support for events and promotion which has been a key part of Fareham's success.
33. The indication is that these businesses wish to continue that support. However, with so much still unclear and with no defined timelines on when or what can be delivered going forward, then it is not realistic for them to commit at the current time.

## **PROPOSAL FOR FLORAL DISPLAYS**

34. The constraints on the Streetscene Grounds Maintenance team and the ongoing uncertainty presented by the Coronavirus pandemic, means effective planning for the planting of floral bedding for spring and summer 2021 is difficult.
35. In order to ensure efficient deployment of staff resources and avoid budget being spent on displays that cannot be effectively maintained, interim arrangements for floral displays in 2021 have been developed.
36. In addition to the sustainable bedding that has been planted as part of the trial at Segensworth roundabout and the beds in the cemeteries, the proposal for floral displays in 2021 is as follows:
  - a) Spring and Autumn floral bedding will be planted in the Civic Gardens, Westbury Manor and the Sensory Gardens only.
  - b) All other floral beds in the Borough will be planted with wildflower meadow seed which will provide a burst of vibrant colours when the plants bloom in the summer.
  - c) There will be no hanging baskets or floral troughs erected in the Borough but there will be several floral pyramids located in West Street, Fareham town centre shopping area.

## **PROPOSAL FOR IN BLOOM COMPETITIONS**

37. At the time of writing the report, the South East in Bloom organisation is accepting entries to the 2021 competition. However, they have not decided whether the judging will be virtual online or live attendance by the judges.
38. The traditional centre piece for the Fareham entry is the small city category which requires advanced preparation of the route and attendance by different community groups on judging day. Given the logistical challenge of preparing and organising the entry for judging, the proposal is to not enter in the small city category.
39. There will be entries for the sites listed below which require limited preparation and minimal social contact for judging. In addition, local businesses and neighbourhoods that enter independently will also be encouraged to enter again where possible:
  - a) Sensory, Civic and Westbury Manor Gardens;
  - b) Coldeast and Portchester Common conservation entries;
  - c) Warsash Common large conservation area entry;
40. With regards to the Fareham In Bloom competition for 2021, the proposal is to continue with the successful virtual Fareham In Bloom competition that involved residents sending photos of their entries for judging.
41. There will be no presentation evening that has traditionally been organised to present the Fareham In Bloom winners with their awards.
42. Entry into the Flag Award for Holly Hill Woodland Park and Sensory Gardens will continue as it did in 2020.

## **CONCLUSION**

43. As a result of the pandemic that hit in the Spring of 2020, the planting of floral displays was suspended, Fareham in Bloom took place as a virtual competition and there was no entry in South East in Bloom.
44. The preparation and maintenance of the extensive traditional seasonal floral displays and competition entries are very resource intensive and place pressure points of demand on the ground's maintenance service during times of the service's peak seasonal workload.
45. Although there is hope of returning to normal in 2021, the continued uncertainty about the impact of the pandemic presents a challenge to planning for the arrangement of floral displays and entries for the South East in Bloom and Fareham in Bloom annual competitions.
46. There is also a need to safeguard volunteers and Council employees from the risks associated with the COVID-19 virus and to ensure that all relevant Government guidance is followed.
47. In order to ensure effective deployment of staff resources and to safeguard the health of Council employees and volunteers, the proposal is to implement interim arrangements for floral displays and In Bloom activities in 2021.

48. Consideration will be given to future arrangements, post pandemic, and more detailed proposals will be brought forward when things hopefully return to normal.

**Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact: Mark Bowler] (Ext 4420)