

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to Streetscene Scrutiny Panel

**Date**                    **15 July 2021**

**Report of:**            **Head of Streetscene**

**Subject:**              **FLORAL DISPLAYS AND IN BLOOM ARRANGEMENTS**

#### **SUMMARY**

The report sets out proposals for the future provision of the Council's floral displays and In Bloom activities; which focus on the development of sustainable planting and activities which have the potential to make a significant contribution to the Council's Climate Change objectives.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Members of the Panel are invited to scrutinise the proposals in the report and contribute ideas and suggestions for how the future provision of floral displays and Fareham in Bloom can champion the Council's ambition to reduce the use of natural resources and to negate impact of climate change.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. As a result of the pandemic that struck in the Spring of 2020, the traditional 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.
2. Due to the implications of the coronavirus pandemic, and the continuation of associated restrictions in the spring of 2021, the Executive approved alternative arrangements at the meeting of the March Executive.
3. The report to the March Executive set out alternative display arrangements that had been introduced during the pandemic. These colourful floral displays maintained the high horticultural standards that have become familiar to Fareham 'residents but were more sustainable and less resource intense, which is in line with the Council's approach to climate change.
4. The alternative arrangements also helped to reduce the demand on Grounds Maintenance staff resources during the peak growing season which helped to manage the demand with grass growth and overhanging vegetation, which peaks in early summer.
5. This report sets out proposals to continue with the more sustainable alternative arrangements and to continue to develop a sustainable approach to planting of floral displays in the future. It also highlights the potential for Fareham in Bloom to champion the Council's ambition to reduce the use of natural resources and to negate impact of climate change.

## **BACKGROUND**

6. In December 2020, 70,000 bulbs were machine planted on Segensworth roundabout and herbaceous planting added to the cemeteries display beds, as part of a sustainable bedding trial. The bulbs have provided a biodiverse mix of 14 colour species which are pollen and nectar rich, helping to support early season insect life and provide a colourful display from March until May.
7. Three display beds in Roman Grove, Wickham Road and Crofton cemeteries have been planted with a predominance of herbaceous perennials that provide a changing palette of colour, texture, and shape. The main season of display is from late spring to autumn with the addition of winter structure in the form of small evergreen shrubs and underplanting of small spring flowering bulbs for early colour. The scheme will also be beneficial to wildlife using both nectar and pollen rich cultivars.
8. The herbaceous plants and bulbs planted remain in situ permanently, require no watering after the first season and produce an annual seasonal display. The maintenance regime is much less intensive and achieves a reduction in carbon emissions due to the reduction in vehicle and machinery use required for maintenance visits.
9. In 2021, the pandemic and associated restrictions meant that traditional summer bedding was planted in the Civic Gardens, Westbury Manor and the Sensory Gardens only. All other floral beds in the Borough were planted with an annual wildflower meadow seed mix which provides a burst of vibrant colours when the plants bloom in the summer and provide a food source for pollinating insects and other wildlife.

10. No hanging baskets or floral troughs were erected in the Borough, but several floral pyramids are located in West Street, Fareham town centre shopping area, to provide welcoming eye level displays.
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, that has been a key component of Fareham In Bloom, will reduce with some of the more senior volunteers no longer able to continue.
13. Local businesses have continued to support the sponsored roundabout initiative throughout the pandemic. Although the level of traditional floral displays has changed, the relevant signage displaying the sponsors name and logos has remained in a prominent position on the key strategic roundabouts in the Borough.

### **FLORAL DISPLAYS**

14. Fareham is rightly proud of the high standard of presentation accomplished in its public gardens and other areas of strategic planting in the Borough. These displays help to reflect the Council's vision of the Borough as a prosperous and attractive place to live and work.
15. Traditional bedding and other floral display features are designed each season by the Council's Horticultural Officer and the plants purchased under a tendered contract with a supplier.
16. The traditional 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 and formal parks in the Borough. Previously when the summer bedding was being planted, three additional Gardeners were moved from duties in the grounds maintenance team to make a display team of six for a five-week period. This team then reduced 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.
17. Fareham's traditional bedding is transported by road twice a year from the producer in West Sussex and many of the plug plants and seed used in the designs are sourced from around the world. This is not a very sustainable outcome and adds to the carbon footprint of the product. Plastic trays and pots are also used to grow the plants ready for delivery and keeping traditional bedding irrigated during hot dry spells in the summer can use over 30,000 litres of water in a week.
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 traditional bedding at these sites is less resource intensive to maintain.
19. Hanging baskets and troughs have been 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.

20. 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.
21. Vehicle journeys to irrigate and maintain the hanging baskets and roadside troughs average 138 miles a week throughout the relatively short 15-week season of display. An estimated additional 130 miles is travelled to erect and dismantle the baskets and troughs. Giving a total mileage for the seasonal 15-week basket and trough display period of approximately 2,200 miles.
22. Floral towers are hired for a period of around twenty weeks from mid-June. They are placed predominantly in Fareham West Street's 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.

### **FUTURE FLORAL DISPLAY PROVISION**

23. The results of the 2020/21 trial sites have been successful and provide a sustainable and attractive alternative to traditional floral bedding. Replacing some of the traditional floral displays will help to reduce the Council's carbon footprint whilst also reducing the amount of water that is needed to keep the traditional seasonal displays in prime condition.
24. Reducing the use of water is a key target for the south east region as climate change predictions indicate drier and warmer summers that will put increased pressure on water supply availability.
25. Public demand for open spaces to be managed more sustainably and a desire to focus on biodiversity and resource reduction is growing year on year. This has been recognised by organisations such as the environmental charity, Plantlife, who produce the good verge guide, and Friends of the Earth.
26. The South and South East in Bloom organisation has also placed increased importance on these issues by the introduction of two new awards in 2021 for the competition as outlined below.
27. A new Community Award has been introduced - The Planting with A Purpose Special Award: Plants play an important role in solving everyday problems and improving all of our lives, such as dealing with issues like noise and air pollution, heatwaves, and flooding, as well as climate change. This category focuses on how groups are using plants and gardens in creative ways to address specific challenges in their communities.
28. South & South East in Bloom is keen to understand the efforts being made by communities and groups to respond to the challenges of climate change and global warming. Wetter winters and hotter summers put a tremendous strain on the environment, and they would like to know what a group or community is doing to respond to this locally.
29. The In Bloom Environmental Challenge Award, sponsored by Southern Water, seeks to find the groups/communities that contribute in caring for our fragile environment and support a reduction in scarce resources such as water.

## **SOUTH EAST & FAREHAM BLOOM**

30. 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.
31. 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.
32. This proved a great success in enabling residents to participate in the competition with over 100 entries received and provided a sustainable way of judging the entries rather than having to drive around the Borough.
33. The Executive approved that these arrangements for In Bloom to continue in 2021 following presentation of a report to the March Executive.
34. The annual presentation evening for Fareham In Bloom, which is normally held at Ferneham Hall, did not take place during the pandemic. Given that Ferneham Hall is now closed for the foreseeable future, there is an opportunity to present the awards in a different way that is more sustainable, both from a climate change perspective and the resources required to organise the event. Catering, printing, floral displays and the many vehicle journeys involved in the setting up for the event and for participants to attend and staff and volunteer resources required to organise and deliver the event are significant.
35. Several of the In-Bloom volunteer group were required to shield during the pandemic 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.
36. 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.
37. All the related events require lead in time from inception of an idea through to planning, promotion and ultimate delivery and rely heavily on volunteer support. Without this vital support, it has not been feasible to deliver a programme of events to support a main entry as traditionally been the case. The indications are that previous levels of volunteer support will not be likely to return.
38. 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. The indication is that these businesses wish to continue that support.
39. 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, it was agreed by the Executive for 2021 to not enter in the small city category.

40. In 2021 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.
41. The above entries are considered sustainable and can be managed within the current Streetscene resource availability. By entering the above sites and continuing to develop and encourage community driven entries, Fareham can continue to play its part in a respected campaign that delivers social and environmental benefits, including pride of place, environmental awareness, and community participation.

## **PROPOSALS**

42. In line with the Council's commitment to reduce the impact of climate change, the proposal is to continue to develop an alternative approach to traditional seasonal planting and prepare environmentally friendly, more sustainable options based on specific site suitability.
43. Given the success of the sustainable planting trials it is proposed that Streetscene Officers draw up options for replacing the majority of the traditional bedding features alongside roads and on roundabouts with the new styles of planting from 2022.
44. Each site previously planted with traditional bedding will be assessed so that the overall welcoming impact of these display areas can continue to provide residents and visitors with a positive impression of a well-cared for Borough, showcasing good quality horticultural displays.
45. It is proposed that traditional bedding would still be planted in the Town Centre Civic Gardens and Westbury Manor Gardens to ensure this style of horticulture is still a feature in the Borough but at a much reduced level to help the Council meet biodiversity, carbon emission and climate change goals.
46. It is intended to retain the annual floral tower features in the pedestrian area of West Street as they provide a welcome burst of eye level colour to help improve the visitor experience for users of the main shopping area.
47. Alternative planting schemes will not only provide environmental benefits but once established could also achieve revenue savings of circa £15,000 per annum in reduced bedding and material costs.
48. The proposal is to continue with a virtual Fareham In Bloom resident's gardening competition that provides every resident and business in the Borough the opportunity of sending photos of their entries for judging. This offers the opportunity for wider participation and a more sustainable approach to judging than travelling around the Borough to visit entries. Options for introducing a virtual awards evening involving

volunteers will also be explored.

49. Entry into the Green Flag Award for Holly Hill Woodland Park and Sensory Gardens will continue as in the previous years.
50. As the volunteer group numbers and commitment to events remain unknown it is proposed to continue to enter our main parks and conservation areas into the South and South East in Bloom competition and to support local groups and neighbourhoods to enter this respected campaign but not to enter the small city category.

## **CONCLUSION**

51. 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 Streetscene team and in particular the ground's maintenance service during times of the service's peak seasonal workload.
52. Prior to the Pandemic, Streetscene had been looking at options to introduce more sustainable planting of floral bedding in conjunction with the Council's Climate Change objectives. The trial planting of sustainable bedding has proved a success and has the potential to provide a viable alternative to the approach which can contribute to reducing the impact of climate change.
53. The pandemic that hit in the Spring of 2020 resulted in alternative provision being made for the Borough's floral displays and horticultural competitions for the past two years. This continued in 2021 with approval from the Executive and has provided colourful floral displays maintained the high horticultural standards that have become familiar to Fareham residents but are more sustainable and help to reduce CO2 emissions.
54. The new normal that is emerging post pandemic and the Councils climate change objectives, provides a unique opportunity to review the way floral displays and the In-Bloom activities are delivered.
55. This report sets out proposals to continue with the development of sustainable planting and activities which have the potential to make a significant contribution to the Councils Climate Change objectives.
56. Members of the panel are invited to contribute ideas and suggestions for how the future provision of floral displays and Fareham in Bloom can champion the Council's ambition to reduce the use of natural resources and to negate impact of climate change.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

57. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

**Enquiries:** For further information on this report please contact: Mick Gore (Ext 4459)

**Appendices:** None

**Reference Papers:** 01 March 2021 Executive Report - Interim Arrangements for Floral-Displays and In Bloom 2021.