

Cheltenham Borough Council
Cabinet –12th December 2017
Public Realm Planting Strategy Review

Accountable members	Councillor Chris Coleman, Cabinet Member Clean & Green Environment
Accountable officer	Mark Sheldon, Director of Resources
Ward(s) affected	All
Key/Significant Decision	Yes
Executive summary	<p>This report outlines proposals to adopt an alternative planting strategy for Cheltenham's public realm.</p> <p>This report considers the business case for the change in approach which compares three options for the council's future planting strategy.</p> <p>Each option assesses the community, economic, environmental, legal, HR and technological implications. A detailed financial assessment of each option is also provided.</p> <p>The proposals have generated significant public interest resulting in 2 petitions, one against the proposals specifically in the Imperial Gardens and the Long Gardens and one in favour. The petition against the proposals received 2,436 signatures and triggered a debate in council and further work being undertaken on the options.</p> <p>As a result of the opposition, an option 2, to move to perennial planting in all locations except Imperial Gardens and the Long Gardens was developed. The business case comparing all options was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny committee on 27th November 2017 and the committee were broadly in support of option 2.</p> <p>The Cabinet acknowledges the concerns and objections raised during the review, and is mindful that moving to a perennial planting in all locations requires further work and consultation, and as such is recommending an interim proposal which moves towards more perennial planting.</p>
Recommendations	<p>Cabinet is recommended to:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve option 2 i.e. retain seasonal bedding in the Long Garden and Imperial Gardens, change to perennial planting in all other locations over a phased period of 3 years. 2. Undertake further work and consultation in respect of the Imperial Gardens and the Long Gardens.

Financial implications	<p>A summary of the business case that has been created for the 3 options is included at section 5 and a detailed analysis of the business case is set out at Appendix 2.</p> <p>Contact officer: Andrew Knott andrew.knott@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>
Legal implications	<p>Any purchasing requirements of the Council will need to be carried out in accordance with the Council's contract rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.</p> <p>Contact officer: Donna Ruck donna.ruck@teWKesbury.gov.uk</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>There are no direct HR implications arising from this report for employees of Cheltenham Borough Council.</p> <p>Contact officer: Julie McCarthy julie.mccarthy@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>
Key risks	<p>If the public do not support the move to perennial planting then the council may suffer negative publicity.</p>
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>This review supports our environmental and corporate outcomes within the corporate strategy, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “vision for Cheltenham’s town centre and its public realm” (ENV2); • Place Making strategy, “a place where everyone thrives” by demonstrating creativity and nurturing a sustainable environment.
Environmental and climate change implications	<p>The recommendation to move to perennial planting supports environmental benefits of greater ecological biodiversity throughout the town and a reduction in energy and water requirements.</p>
Property / Asset implications	<p>Significant and immediate investment is essential in order to keep Arle Nursery fit for purpose.</p> <p>Contact officer: David Roberts david.roberts@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>

1. Background

- 1.1 Unchanged since the 1950's, Cheltenham's current approach to planting is to use spring and summer bedding plants. Town floral displays have won many awards in the past from Britain in Bloom and have been well supported. However Britain in Bloom judging criteria has changed over recent years. The judging guidelines specifically state "Seasonal displays are an important element but must be proportionate to areas of sustainable planting and permanent landscaping within your entry."
- 1.2 The Green Space Commissioning Review of 2013 identified that the appeal of high maintenance floral bedding within townscapes is diminishing and many towns and cities in the UK and across Europe have moved away from this style of planting to alternative more sustainable planting regimes in order to improve the environment, increase biodiversity, reflect changing trends and reduce costs.
- 1.3 Since the review of 2013, bedding plant revenue sales, supplied from the nursery for commercial use, have reduced year on year as public sector cuts drive reductions in contracts. The seasonal bedding plant displays currently produced and featured in much of Cheltenham's public realm, are becoming more expensive to produce, are resource hungry and short lived. They need a substantial quantity of water to maintain them in healthy conditions, especially in periods of dry and hot weather; conditions that are on the increase due to climate change.
- 1.4 The three planting strategy options identified have been subject to a detailed appraisal and a business case developed. A financial summary can be seen in section 5 and the full business case can be found in Appendix 2.
- 1.5 Perennial planting is a type of planting which uses perennial herbaceous plants, shrubs and grasses that are suited to the local climate, soil, site ecology and improve biodiversity in a number of ways, i.e. supporting the bee and insect population. The multiple benefits of these long lived plant species provide increased interest, structure and visually pleasing results all year round.
- 1.6 The council has recently submitted two European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) bids to help fund development of schemes to improve biodiversity. The aim of each bid is to create and connect habitat in central Cheltenham, thereby increasing biodiversity and enhancing flood resilience in the much wider context of a very urban environment. If successful the council would build small scale 'nature refuges' through Cheltenham's urban core to form a network allowing species migration, linking each refuge into a single sustainable system.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1. The council is committed to development of the Place strategy. A move to a perennial planting strategy provides the opportunity to reflect new planting trends and make a significant contribution to the core values of a creative, nurturing, pioneering spirit within Cheltenham's Place making agenda.
- 2.2. Revenue savings identified through changes to planting regime will contribute to MTFS targets.
- 2.3. The council is committed to delivering on the environmental outcomes within its strategy.

3. Key recommendations

- 3.1. The recommendation is to adopt a more sustainable perennial public realm planting strategy phased in over a three year period.
- 3.2. Hanging baskets and window boxes are proposed to be retained along with some existing seasonal floral displays in key locations, in keeping with Cheltenham's recent heritage.
- 3.3. The proposal provides for an attractive public realm that can incorporate both formal and informal planting styles.
- 3.4. The business case demonstrates that adoption of option 3, perennial planting in all public realm locations, is the lowest cost solution and most environmentally friendly outcome. However, this option has met with some opposition, specifically in two locations within the borough.
- 3.5. Option 2 provides an opportunity to move towards more wide spread use of perennial plants in all other locations except for the Long Gardens and Imperial Gardens, where it is proposed that seasonal bedding is retained. This allows further time for additional stakeholder engagement and the development of option 3.

4. Options considered

Option 1: Retain all seasonal bedding.

Option 2: Retain seasonal bedding in the Long Garden and Imperial Gardens, change to herbaceous perennials in all other locations.

Option 3: Change to herbaceous perennials in all locations.

5. Financial summary

- 5.1. A high level summary is stated below. A full assessment detailing the planting cost projections over the next 10 years is captured in the business case at Appendix 2.

PLANTING COST PROJECTIONS SUMMARISED 2017-2027						
	OPTION 1:	Option 1	OPTION 2:	Option 2	OPTION 3:	Option 3
	Retain all seasonal bedding plant schemes in all gardens		Retain seasonal bedding in the Long Garden & Imperial Gardens, change to herbaceous perennials in all other locations		Change to herbaceous perennial planting in all locations	
ESTIMATED ONGOING COST OF SERVICE FOR 10 YEARS		2,362,150		1,942,968		1,358,128
ADDITIONAL BUDGETARY REQUIREMENTS (AFTER 10 YEARS)						
ANNUAL BASE BUDGET 2017/18		101,638		101,638		101,638
ANNUAL ESTIMATED INCREASE IN COST OF SERVICE IN 2027/28	* based on assumptions regarding future costs and income levels.	115,791	* based on assumptions regarding future costs and income levels.	56,277	* based on assumptions regarding future costs and income levels.	-21,329
ANNUAL BASE BUDGET 2027/28		217,429		157,915		80,309

- 5.2. The adoption of a perennial planting strategy presents a significant opportunity to reduce costs over the next ten years against the current planting regime.
- 5.3. Option 1, retaining the existing seasonal bedding, will cost £2.3m over a ten year period from 2017/18.
- 5.4. Compared to option 1, the projected saving in option 2 is £419,182 over a 10 year period from 2017/18.
- 5.5. Compared to option 1, the projected saving in option 3 is £1,004,022 over a 10 year period from 2017/18.
- 5.6. All options assume that Arle Nursery is retained as a going concern.
- 5.7. The cost of plant production, nursery income, planned maintenance and inflation are factored in to all options.
- 5.8. Hanging baskets and window boxes are retained in all options.

6. Consultation and feedback

- 6.1. For the purposes of a high level view to assist in informing the report, a number of stakeholders including Friends groups, community groups and commercial groups, were approached for initial feedback on the option to move to public realm perennial planting. Feedback is captured in the business case at Appendix 3.
- 6.2. A member seminar was held on 11th October 2017 to provide members with a detailed understanding of the proposal to adopt a perennial planting strategy.

- 6.3. A petition signed by over 2,436 people, requesting the council to “continue to plant Imperial Gardens and the Promenade Long Gardens with formal seasonal flowers in October and June” was discussed in Council on 16th October. In direct response, option 2 was developed as part of the options assessment within the business case at Appendix 2.
- 6.4. A second petition requesting the council to “promote and implement, where practicable, sustainable planting across all of Cheltenham’s parks and gardens including Imperial Gardens and the Promenade Long Garden” is due to close on 30th November 2017.
- 6.5. Initial feedback from stakeholders has raised opposing views on the proposal. There is strong support for the proposal to adopt perennial planting, based on aesthetic, environmental and financial benefits and the subsequent enhancement of Cheltenham. There is also strong support from a number of groups who have concerns relating to heritage, visual impact and maintenance levels from the proposed planting strategy and potential adverse effect on Cheltenham.
- 6.6. Information on perennial planting has been available on the council website with the aim of informing the public on the proposals, in greater detail.
- 6.7. An Equality Impact Assessment has also been undertaken to assess the impact of moving to perennial planting. The assessment indicates that for people experiencing sensory challenges or disabilities, this style of planting would be of greater benefit as, unlike, seasonal bedding it engages all the senses, smell, sound, touch and even taste, rather than just visual.
- 6.8. The council’s own conservation officer was been asked to look at the history of planting schemes within the town and found that the image of Cheltenham’s Regency terraces with large numbers of colourful bedding plants is largely a late Victorian fashion and not the original intentions of its architects and designers. In Regency times it is likely that lightly wooded, sinuous shrubberies, with beds of herbaceous perennials would have been used in areas such as the Long Gardens, and in the gardens once found on the Promenade. The proposed approach, therefore, strongly links back to the town’s original heritage. A full report can be found in Appendix 4.
- 6.9. The business case comparing all 3 options was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny committee on 27th November 2017. Whilst there were still concerns about the change in approach to planting, the committee were supportive of option 2 i.e. to retain seasonal planting in the Imperial gardens and the Long Gardens and to move to perennial planting in all other locations.

7. Performance management –monitoring and review

- 7.1 The project team have provided regular updates to the lead Cabinet member to ensure their draft output has been within the requirements of the brief.

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Appendices	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Risk assessment2. Options appraisal and business case3. Equality impact assessment4. History & conservation planting report

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
AN005	If cabinet members decide not to select option with greatest financial benefit then the MTFS will be negatively impacted	Mark Sheldon	19.7.17	4	2	8	Reduce	Ensure the options appraisal covers all options, considerations and assumptions to enable an informed decision to be made	12.12.17	Andrew Knott	no
SP001	If cabinet members decide not to select option to move towards perennial planting then the reputation of the council as a supporter of environmental sustainability may be damaged	Mark Sheldon	19.7.17	2	3	6	reduce	Ensure the options appraisal gives a detailed understanding of the environmental benefits of perennial planting	21.11.17	Emma Morgan	no
SP002	If the public do not support the move to perennial planting then the council may suffer negative publicity that will impact its appeal as a destination for visitors	Mark Sheldon	19.7.17	3	4	12	reduce	Ensure a robust stakeholder engagement plan is in place that presents perennial planting proposals and enables discussion and feedback from key groups, the media and the public.	30.9.17	Emma Morgan	no
	If the alternative approach to planting is unsuccessful it may have a negative impact on residents and visitors perception of Cheltenham.	Mark Sheldon	19.7.17	3	4	12	reduce	Ensure that the design of alternative planting schemes are high quality and meet public expectations.	30.9.17	Adam Reynolds	no
Explanatory notes Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical) Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6 (1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability) Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close											

