



**REPORT TO: ECONOMIC GROWTH, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE ON 1 DECEMBER 2020**

SUBJECT: WILDFLOWERS IN THE LANDSCAPE

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND
FINANCE)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The Committee is invited to note the benefits of wildflowers in the landscape and to approve proposals for the introduction of additional wildflower schemes into the communities of Moray.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Economic Growth, Housing and Environmental Sustainability Committee following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to agree a simplified committee structure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of this committee the combining of the delegated responsibilities of Economic Development and Infrastructure, Community Services (Housing and Property) and Finance (budget, capital and revenue monitoring) (para 9 of the minute refers).

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that Committee :**
- (i) note the importance, and benefits that can arise from introducing wildflowers into the landscape;**
 - (ii) note the initiatives that are already being taken to introduce wildflowers into the landscape;**
 - (iii) note the lessons from the initiatives, research, benchmarking and staff experience; and**
 - (iv) approves the proposal to introduce additional areas of wildflowers into communities across Moray.**

3. BACKGROUND

The benefits of wildflowers

- 3.1 At the Special Meeting of Moray Council on 3 March, 2019 (paragraph 3 of the minute refers) it was agreed that a report be brought forward, initially to the Economic Development & Infrastructure Services Committee on the possibility of introducing meadows in some locations. This could be a potential spend to save option as well as contributing to carbon reduction and biodiversity.
- 3.2 Due to the many environmental challenges in the world today, there is a need to broaden our approach to the way that we manage our open spaces. Moray Council's diverse network of open spaces, parks and cemeteries have an increasingly important part to play in providing a place for nature.
- 3.3 It is widely acknowledged that the numbers of pollinators such as bees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies have declined in recent decades raising concern on future food supplies. There are also benefits to mental health and since the outbreak of Covid-19 more people have been making use of the open spaces in their local communities.
- 3.4 The introduction of wildflowers plays an important part in improving the biodiversity of our open spaces and in turn helps wildlife, people and the environment in general.

Examples of initiatives that have already been undertaken

- 3.5 Moray Council have implemented some small scale initiatives to increase biodiversity by planting wildflowers and changing grass cutting regimes. Examples of best practice include:
Initiative 1: Replacement of Annual Bedding area and Shrub Bed area with planted wildflower mixes. APPENDIX 1.
- 3.6 In 2016 what was previously an annual bed on the Esplanade, Lossiemouth was sown with a Wildflower mix. In the same year what were shrub bed areas in Lossie Wynd Car Park, Elgin were replaced with wildflower mixes.
Initiative 2: Trial Area, Changing Amenity Grass Areas into Wildflower Meadow. APPENDIX 1.
- 3.7 Between the months of March to October this year, phase one of a trial to turn small areas in Forres from amenity grass areas to wildflower meadows began at Castlehill Monument and Bogton Playing field, Forres. The sites were chosen in consultation with the Forres Green Space In these specified areas the grass was allowed to grow until it reached the peak of its growth. It was then cut, clippings removed and disposed of on land with the same classification as where the trial was held. The process is being repeated until the end of October 2020. This process starves out nutrients in the soil. Wildflower meadows need poor quality soil to be allowed to grow as in good quality topsoil the grass will outcompete the wildflowers affecting the quality of the wildflower meadow and the overall biodiversity of the site. The North East Biodiversity Partnership offered to provide some wildflower seeds for the trial areas.
- 3.8 The benefits of these projects are increased biodiversity and reduced maintenance costs when compared to that of Annual Bed and Shrub Bed

maintenance. The wildflower bed in Lossiemouth generated positive publicity by brightening up what had become rather a dull section of the Esplanade.

- 3.9 Moray Local Development Plan (MLDP) 2020 includes policy EP2 requiring all new developments to protect and enhance biodiversity and the creation of wildflower meadows and verges is identified as a way of achieving this. On that basis there will be more wildflower areas incorporated into open spaces in built development.

Lessons learned from research, benchmarking and staff experience.

- 3.10 It is important to identify appropriate areas that can be transformed to wildflowers and to choose an appropriate seed mix for the location and soil conditions. Areas that can be considered include road verges, open spaces in housing areas, parks and cemeteries.
- 3.11 Communities play an important role in creating better local environments and places. Some of the most successful open spaces are created and cared for by the community. Wildflower areas can create a sense of place and community and it is our intention to work with the Communities Support Team to ensure that communities are engaged and empowered throughout the development of the proposed wildflower areas.
- 3.12 Where significant financial savings can be made, it is in areas where there has been traditional intensive and high maintenance horticultural landscape features such as traditional Victorian type bedding schemes. Additionally, where councils are responsible for managing grassland adjacent to dual carriageways, the wildflowers only require to be cut once per year and therefore the need for road closures linked to verge cutting, which are expensive, is significantly reduced.
- 3.13 As Moray Council is no longer responsible for traditional bedding schemes and is not responsible for the management of dual carriageways, the opportunity for any significant financial savings will be minimal.
- 3.14 **Table 1** below illustrates the estimated differential in costings between managing grassland and developing and managing planted wildflower areas. Over a five year period it is estimated that there will be an additional cost of £140 per 100 square metres to develop and manage the wildflower areas in comparison to managing the grassland.

Table 1 Financial implications of planting and managing planted areas of wildflowers over a five year period.

Year (five year cycle)	Average cost to manage 100 square metres of grass per annum.	Average cost to transform 100 square metres of grass to a wildflower area per annum.	Average cost to manage 100 square metres of wildflowers per annum.	Total differential between managing 100 square metres of grass in comparison to transforming 100 square metres of grassland and managing it.
Year 1	£41	£165	£36	£160 expenditure
Year 2	£41	£0	£36	£5 saving
Year 3	£41	£0	£36	£5 saving
Year 4	£41	£0	£36	£5 saving
Year 5	£41	£0	£36	£5 saving (after five years we will need to start process again depending on natural regeneration and unwanted weeds etc.)
Total over five year period	£205	£165	£180	£140

3.15 Another method of increasing biodiversity and introducing wildflowers is to increase the height of cut in appropriate areas to create living lawns providing additional habitats for wildlife and additional colour and interest. This concept is based on a trial at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, part of the Edinburgh Living Landscape Strategy to improve the city for nature.

3.16 A past trend in society towards perfectly green and uniform lawns has resulted in a few grasses dominating and low-growing flowers, sometimes referred to as weeds, being removed. An immaculate lawn provides little resources for bees, flies, moths, butterflies, wasps and beetles which rely on a rich diet of pollen and nectar and there is little structure for insects and other invertebrates to shelter. This approach encourages low growing flowering

plants such as dandelion, daisy, clover and yarrow and is likely to be cost neutral.

- 3.17 The following link to a short video clip provides some background as to the many benefits to people and wildlife and the intended visual impact <https://vimeo.com/306775827>

Proposals to introduce additional wildflower areas in communities

- 3.18 Planted wildflowers – staff in Lands, Parks & Countryside (L P & C) will work with the Community Support Team and communities to identify, develop and manage up to eight appropriate locations across Moray per annum over a period of three financial years, commencing financial year 2021/22. Opportunities for external funding, volunteering and the possibility of communities adopting areas with support from Moray Council will be explored.
- 3.19 Living lawns - staff in LP & C have identified a pilot area within Cooper Park in Elgin to carry out a trial of the Living Landscape approach. The proposal is for the trial to commence during financial year 2021/22. To ensure that people understand the objectives of the pilot project a media release will be issued in advance of the proposed change.
- 3.20 MLDP 2020 - includes policy EP2 requiring all new developments to protect and enhance biodiversity and create areas of wildflower meadows and verges will result in more wildflower areas being incorporated into open spaces in built developments across Moray.
- 3.21 The effectiveness of the proposals will be reviewed and opportunities to extend them and further enhance our natural environment for the benefit of both people and wildlife in additional ways will seriously considered. An end of project information report to be completed and made available to ED&ISC.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

Ensuring people have access to attractive, accessible open spaces and supporting communities to take on more responsibilities.

(b) Policy and Legal

Nature Conservancy (Scotland) Act 2004.

2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity A Strategy for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland.

MLDP 2020 - policy EP2.

Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

(c) Financial implications

The proposal to introduce up to 8 pilot areas would be contained within existing human and financial resources. The opportunity to work with communities to identify external funding will be fully explored.

(d) Risk Implications

The risks to the council are minimal.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

(f) Property

There are no Property implications associated with this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

The proposal has the potential to contribute to the capacity building of local groups in support of Moray Council's aims in relation to community engagement.

(h) Consultations

Head of Environmental and Commercial Services; Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance); Legal Services Manager; Principal Accountant; Equal Opportunities Officer; Principal Planning Officer; Acting Community Support Manager, Acting Lands & Parks Officer and Lissa Rowan, Committee Services Officer have been consulted and their comments integrated into the report.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Due to the many environmental challenges in the world today, there is a need to broaden our approach to the way that we manage our open spaces. Moray Councils diverse network of open spaces, parks and cemeteries have an increasingly important part to play in providing a place for nature.**
- 5.2 The introduction of wildflowers plays an important part in improving the biodiversity of our open spaces and in turn helps wildlife, people and the environment in general.**
- 5.3 The proposed approach will help benefit the community and wildlife and has the potential to build on the strong partnership with the community and build community resilience.**

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Background Papers:

Ref: