

PROVISION OF FLORAL DISPLAYS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In 2021 the Council agreed to a savings package of £10,000 relating to the nursery growing service. This report confirms that a financial saving has been achieved and also sets out the challenges in delivering spring bedding largely due to market changes which were not reasonably foreseeable at the time the savings package was developed. This report also sets out a range of possible options for dealing with planting beds in future years, including community involvement.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee:-
- i. Consider the options in Table 1 of this report for future service delivery of floral displays;
 - ii. Agree to progress Option 4 in Table 1 based on this being the most affordable solution for the Council. One-off funding could be met from the Nature Restoration Fund and a report will be brought to the Policy and Resources Committee in October in respect of this; and
 - iii. In addition to Option 4, agree to also progress Option 6 to continue to pursue community groups across the Council area to take over maintenance of floral displays.

3.0 DETAIL

HOW THE SAVING HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

- 3.1 In 2021 the Council agreed to a savings package of £10,000 relating to the nursery growing service. A financial saving was achieved through a reduction in materials budget, comprising reductions in equipment and materials for plant production no longer required. However, the way in which the saving has been delivered is different to that originally proposed due to changes in the market place, availability of plants and price increases. In practice the spring bedding has not been delivered due to market availability.

- 3.2 The previous in-house service was delivered across two facilities – Ardenraig Nursery in Rothesay, which provided bedding plants for Bute, and Kilmory Castle Nursery, which provided bedding plants for the rest of Argyll and Bute. These facilities grew, from bought in plugs, annual bedding plants used for floral displays across the council area.

CURRENT POSITION

- 3.3 Over the last two years the procurement process was successful in securing a supplier for the summer bedding but unfortunately did not secure a supplier for the spring bedding. This would suggest that the market has changed from when this initial saving was considered. Whilst we don't have a full understanding of what has happened with the market, it is assumed that this is linked to conditions in respect of availability of workforce and the increased costs of utilities and heating. A similar situation had been experienced earlier this year with many supermarkets having limited availability of some produce which are not produced in the same volumes in the UK as previously.
- 3.4 When this savings option was developed in 2020, there was no indication that the market would not be able to fulfil our requirement. We had discussions with a number of other local authorities who source their bedding plants externally and there was no reason to expect that we would not be able to secure an external supplier.
- 3.5 At the Council Meeting on 29 June 2023, the following motion was agreed:-

At the budget meeting in February 2021, the Council agreed to a saving of £10,000 to stop the nursery growing service. It was agreed that spring and summer bedding plants would still be provided by being sourced externally. The previous decision was taken with the best intention, but due to changes in market and circumstances it has not been successful in practice.

Carrying out a full procurement exercise only resulted in securing a supplier for the summer bedding and not both the spring and summer beddings.

Officers are asked to give consideration to the future arrangements for the delivery of planting across Argyll and Bute, with particular reference to the unique circumstances of Rothesay which was served by Ardenraig, and bring a report back to EDI on 31st August, on options that could be delivered for 2024.

- 3.6 As per this Council decision, officers now present a range of options for future service delivery of planting. Existing budgets are under pressure with forecasts of c£10M of a revenue reduction for 2024/25 and further budget reduction forecast for future years. Officers will not be able to deliver all of the Council services that are currently being delivered.

Table 1

Option and description	Advantages	Disadvantages	Work required	Additional Costs over current costs/Potential Savings
<p>Option 1 – continue to purchase annual bedding as per the budget savings option agreed in 2021 but without spring bedding which has not been delivered in the last 2 years due to changes in the market</p>	<p>No need for in house growing</p> <p>Removes spring bedding which has limited life with displays often suffering due to poor spring weather conditions.</p>	<p>In light of current financial challenges facing the Council, it could be considered wasteful with bedding plants being used for a time limited period before being dug up and composted</p>	<p>Continuation of existing arrangements whilst formalising the removal of spring bedding, which is the de facto position due to current market failure</p>	<p>Existing budget</p>
<p>Option 2 – revert to growing plants from bought in plant plugs for summer bedding only in both Kilmory and Ardenraig.</p> <p>Note this option would remove spring bedding</p>	<p>Assuming plugs are available for purchase, the Council would have control of growing and supply.</p> <p>This option pays due regard to the Rothesay plants served by Ardenraig.</p>	<p>Resource intense</p> <p>High consumption of energy and water with increased costs from pre-pandemic</p> <p>Would need to operate two growing sites across the Council area</p> <p>In light of current financial challenges facing the</p>	<p>Would need to maintain growing facilities in two locations.</p>	<p>Estimated additional cost £33.5k</p> <p>Increased due to inflation for materials, utility costs etc.</p>

		<p>Council, it could be considered wasteful with bedding plants being used for a time limited period before being dug up and composted</p> <p>More pressure on operational team – currently limited resilience</p> <p>There would be cost pressures on existing budgets, reinstating this option would cost significantly more than the original saving due to inflationary pressures</p>		
<p>Option 3 – revert to growing plants from bought in plant plugs for summer bedding only at Kilmory (Kilmory has sufficient capacity to serve the whole of Argyll and Bute)</p>	<p>Assuming plugs are available for purchase, the Council would have control of growing and supply</p> <p>Focusing on one growing site will bring economies of scale</p>	<p>Additional costs incurred in terms of original savings and also additional costs incurred due to price increases</p>	<p>The Kilmory nursery would still be able to achieve this with the solar panel array in place although existing functional greenhouses at top of nursery complex would need to be located.</p>	<p>Estimated additional cost £20k.</p>
<p>Option 4 – plant out all existing beds with perennials/shrubs</p>	<p>Invest to save option</p> <p>Improved carbon credential removing the</p>	<p>Plants would take 1 or 2 seasons to get established, although with careful choice of planting,</p>	<p>Plant out all beds with perennials as an invest to save initiative.</p>	<p>One off investment required – circa £80k.</p> <p>Potential savings of</p>

<p>Examples of perennial displays can be seen in Appendix 5. Note these images have been taken from existing council beds in Hermitage Park and community maintained beds in Campbeltown.</p>	<p>need to dispose/compost annual plants each year</p> <p>Plants remain all year round with varying displays. In winter months particularly perennials will brighten up the bedding areas which would be empty with only bare soil with the existing annual planting.</p> <p>Ability to repurpose both nursery complexes</p> <p>Reduction in utility costs</p> <p>Reduction in fuel costs and transport</p> <p>Utilise staff on keeping beds tidy rather than annual planting providing improved resilience</p> <p>Perennial plants provide a habitat for insects, bird and other mammals year round providing biodiversity benefits. This also aligns with SG's Nature</p>	<p>colourful displays should be available in the first season.</p>	<p>This initiative may be eligible for funding through SGs Nature Restoration Fund.</p>	<p>£31k per annum (current cost of purchase of plants).</p> <p>This assumes care and maintenance remains at similar level. However, potential savings which will be better understood post implementation.</p>
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	Restoration Funding requirements.			
<p>Option 5 – plant out all existing beds with perennials/shrubs, in all areas other than Bute, and reopen Arden Craig growing facility to serve the Isle of Bute for annual summer bedding plants</p> <p>Note this option would remove spring bedding</p>	<p>This option pays due regard to the Rothesay plants served by Arden Craig.</p>	<p>Reduced recurring revenue saving.</p> <p>Inequity of provision across the Council area.</p> <p>Loss of other opportunities to repurpose Arden Craig nursery.</p>	<p>Plant out all beds with perennials as an invest to save initiative (as Option 4).</p> <p>Reopening of Arden Craig growing facility and purchase of plant plugs.</p>	<p>One off investment required – circa £65k.</p> <p>Potential savings of £31k per annum (current cost of purchase of plants).</p> <p>Estimated cost associated with reopening Arden Craig and growing plants £13.5k.</p>
<p>Option 6 – continue to pursue community groups across the Council area to take over maintenance of floral displays. Note this option could be progressed in conjunction with Options 1- 5 above.</p>	<p>No need to grow in-house bedding plants. Allows for a better utilisation of Council staff and reduction in fuel costs.</p>	<p>Sustainability. Officer time in setting up agreements however once set up only infrequent contact should be required.</p>	<p>Setting up agreements with established groups. Carry out agreed actions whether supplying the necessary materials or planting the area for the community partner to maintain.</p>	<p>Unable to quantify until agreements in place.</p>

- 3.7 Officers have appraised the various options listed in Table 1 and from a delivery and sustainability perspective, the option to provide perennial plants across the council area is the recommended option (Option 4). However, it is recognised that Bute has historically benefitted from extensive annual bedding which have been nurtured locally from externally supplied plant plugs and therefore, this has been included as another option for consideration (Option 5).
- 3.8 Appendices 1 - 4 detail all council maintained planting beds across the council area with the exception of Hermitage Park which has been excluded due to the Heritage Lottery Fund capital grant for its redevelopment which is contingent on a specification as per existing planting within the park.
- 3.9 Appendix 5 shows a range of images of perennial plants. Note these images have been taken from existing council beds in Hermitage Park and community maintained beds in Campbeltown and Cowal.
- 3.10 The Nature Restoration Fund is a fund launched by the Scottish Government, and aims to support large-scale, multi-year, multi-partner projects which deliver transformative change to drive forward nature recovery. Local Authorities are provided with a share of that funding, and officers believe that the recommended option presented in this paper would fit with the criteria for this fund.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 This report confirms the budget savings for bedding plants agreed in 2021 which has been achieved and recommends that we move to a model using perennial planting which would provide a more sustainable model and also provide year round displays enhancing the current offer from annual bedding plants.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – this report provides a number of options for the delivery of planting across Argyll and Bute.
- 5.2 Financial – the preferred option carries comes at a one-off cost of £80k and it is suggested that this if funded from the Nature Restoration Fund. An annual revenue saving of £31k is also anticipated.
- 5.3 Legal – none known.
- 5.4 HR – none known.
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: none known.
- 5.5.1 Equalities – none known.
- 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – none known.

5.5.3 Islands – none known.

5.6 Climate Change – due regard will be given to climate change with a view to minimising any climate change impact and these will be considered as and when they arise. There is scope to reduce carbon footprint associated with planting through the introduction of perennials.

5.7 Risk – none known.

5.8 Customer Service – none known.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Flower bed locations Mid-Argyll and Kintyre

Appendix 2 Flower bed locations Oban and Lorn

Appendix 3 Flower bed locations Bute and Cowal

Appendix 4 Flower bed locations Helensburgh and Lomond

Appendix 5 Examples of perennial plants