

Report to: Environment Committee 19 July 2022

Report of: Corporate Director - Operations, Homes and Communities

Subject: WARD BIO-DIVERSITY DELIVERY UPDATE

1. Recommendation

1.1. That the Committee notes the content of the report and progress made to date.

2. Background

- 2.1 Wildflower areas are becoming increasingly popular because of the way in which they enhance and support biodiversity.
- 2.2 Previously all areas of wildflower have been almost exclusively over the city's nature reserves and conservation land, consisting of native and naturally occurring species.
- 2.3 In 2019 new wildflower trials were undertaken on roundabouts, roadside verges, parks and some green spaces, a total of eight areas. These trials involved the planting of a non-native wildflower seed mix (**Appendix A**). This mix was chosen for its aesthetics as well as its biodiversity benefit. A seed bank to become established can take between three to five years.
- 2.4 Although this non-native mix is very visually pleasing it does not offer as much benefit to nature as the native alternative.
- 2.5 In 2020 the Worcester Environmental Group (WEG) highlighted an area of roadside verge off Dugdale Drive Warndon that was particularly well suited for a wildflower transformation. This area already had an abundance of native wildflowers growing amongst the grass (**Appendix B**).
- 2.6 This area of Dugdale Drive was taken off the usual grass cutting schedule and put onto a wildflower encouraging tri-annual cut and collect resulting in the development of one of the current Native Flower patch areas in the City.
- 2.7 In 2021 another wildflower seeded area was installed on a roadside verge off Droitwich Road
- 2.8 As a result of these management changes these once lawn-like areas, that offered little in terms of biodiversity, are now colourful wildflower patches teeming with life.
- 2.9 In 2020 Worcester City Council declared a biodiversity emergency, recognising that action needs to be taken immediately to stop the decline of our native species.

2.10 This commitment is supported by the Council's Biodiversity Action Programme which sits under the Council's Environmental Sustainability Action Plan. The Action Programme includes a specific action to review management plans for Council maintained land.

3. Information

3.1 Wildflower areas under Worcester City Council management fall under three categorisations; Grass Meadow, Wildflower seeded and Native flower patches, all of which require different management techniques.

3.2 **Grass Meadow** is the first stage prior to any areas developing into Native Flower patches. Areas of grass can grow and then need to be maintained using a tri-annual cut and collect method, firstly cutting and removing grasses in early spring to allow room for more delicate species. The second late summer once the flowers have dispersed their seed and finally mid-winter before the first frost to replicate natural grazing. In doing this, the nutrients absorbed by the plant life is taken away lessening nutrient levels in the soil. It is in this low nutrient environment that wildflowers thrive.

3.3 To help show that these Grass Meadow areas are being deliberately managed in this way they are framed with a border of low cut, lawn like grass.

3.4 In addition to the tri-annual cut and collect, footpaths are cut more regularly within the Grass Meadow to ensure that these sites can be enjoyed by the public year-round (**Appendix C**). This is done using one of the Kubota ride-on mowers we have in house.

3.5 **Wildflower Seeded** areas are maintained in a very different manner as these species do not occur naturally and must be planted in preprepared rotavated soil. These can then be left to bloom into flower for the whole season until they begin to dry up and wilt.

3.6 Once they have reached this stage they are then cut at the base and left on the ground to allow for seed dispersion. After a few weeks they are then cultivated back into the ground. Although these species aren't as good for biodiversity as the native alternative, they are certainly more eye catching and therefore contribute by raising awareness of the changes we are implementing.

3.7 **Native flower patches** develop from a Grass Meadow. Until the area is left it isn't known whether native wildflowers will grow or not. These are small areas of grass left to grow with a mowed border. This form of wildflower also requires a cut and collect routine similar to the Grass Meadow so as to encourage the wildflower and reduce grasses.

3.8 Currently, to maximise the impact of wildflowers around the city some areas have been left as Grass Meadow but with a Wildflower Seeded area within them.

3.9 For 2022, wildflower expansion covered areas on the main arterial routes into the City for maximum impact, including some roadside verges and also some smaller green open spaces predominantly in Warndon Villages for Grass Meadow.

3.10 (**Appendix D**) shows the current situation of the type of area by Ward.

3.11 The City Council are working closely with the WEG as they are experienced in surveying areas and assessing the suitability of the ground for Native flowers.

- 3.12 The WEG and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust have delivered a day of training to our Grass cutting team, Parks teams and Place teams, sharing information relating to grassed areas and their benefits. This was successful and regular training will be carried out in the future.
- 3.13 The intention is to improve Biodiversity around the City by expanding the number of Grass meadows and Wildflower Seeded types of area on a yearly basis. Streetscene staff will work closely with Elected Members to determine new sites and utilise local knowledge and expertise.
- 3.14 All future planning will be in line with the current Council Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 3.15 Future expansion is planned for some of our larger green open spaces with the inclusion of footpaths to encourage their use.
- 3.16 All Premier Park Green Flag Management Plans carry a section on Biodiversity and improvements to existing wildflower areas will be led by the Council Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 3.17 The WEG have also discussed biodiversity in relation to the Allotments around the City with the Allotment Officer with plans to let areas grow wild or to have planned wildflower seeded areas. The approach will be phased and will depend upon the allotment site suitability.
- 3.18 It is important to make the public aware of the benefits associated with Grassed Meadow and wildflowers, so information boards, wildflower signs and QR codes will be utilised for this. See (**Appendix E**) for our current Wildflower signage.

It should be noted that plans of expansion can only be made in the best areas suitable for Grassed Meadow, Wildflower seeded or Native flower patches so some Wards may not have as many areas as others.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 A review of the management plans and practices for Council maintained land is being commissioned as previously approved by this committee.
- 4.2 We are currently evaluating additional grassed areas to ensure biodiversity is enhanced, taking independent advice to create more wildflower meadows/roadside verges and will be working with the WEG and Ward members to achieve this.

Ward(s): City Wide
Contact Officer: Mark Baylis, Environmental Operations Team Manager – Street Scene Tel: 01905 752981 Email: mark.baylis@worcester.gov.uk

Background Papers:

- Appendix A – Wildflower Seeded Areas 2019**
- Appendix B – Native Flower Patches – Dugdale Drive**
- Appendix C – Example of a footpaths through a Grass Meadow**
- Appendix D – Wildflower Area Type by Ward**
- Appendix E – Wildflower Signage**

Appendix A

Wildflower Seeded Areas 2019:



Example of wildflowers from seed – Droitwich Road

Appendix B

Native Flower Patches – Dugdale Drive



Appendix C

Example of a footpaths through a Grass Meadow



Appendix D

Wildflower Area Type by Ward

Ward	Grass Meadow	Wildflower Seeded	Grass Meadow & Wildflower Seeded	Native Flower Patch
Arboretum		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Georges Square • Gheluvelt Park conservation area 		
Battenhall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norton Close island 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elm Green 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battenhall Rise Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battenhall Rise Park
Bedwardine		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada Way • New Road Island • Bromwich Road • Weyburn Close • Riverside Park – Bromwich Parade • Lower Wick Green 		
Cathedral		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMG roundabout • City Walls Road – central reservation • Outside Fownes Hotel • Cathedral Ward • Croft Road • Fort Royal Park • Tallow Hill car park 		
Claines			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Droitwich Road • Northwick Lodge • Perdiswell Park 	
Gorse Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windermere Drive 			
Nunnery			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ronkswood Community Centre 	
Rainbow Hill	Area being evaluated for potential biodiversity enhancement			
St Clements	Area being evaluated for potential biodiversity enhancement			
St John		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Road Island • Cripplegate Park conservation area • Riverside Park – Hylton Road • Bromyard Road 		
St Peters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Peters Drive – Bath Road 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duck Brook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duck Brook • Broomhall Way 	

Ward	Grass Meadow	Wildflower Seeded	Grass Meadow & Wildflower Seeded	Native Flower Patch
St Stephen		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Droitwich Road Island 		
Warndon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windermere Drive 			
Warndon Parish North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolton Avenue green space opposite Auckland Close 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parsonage Way – Warndon Way roundabout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hastings Drive 	
Warndon Parish South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dugdale Drive • Mabbs walkway path • Dugdale Drive to Newtown Road walkway, along the cycleway parallel to Grange Way • B4637 along Tolladine Road 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dugdale Roundabout – B4638 • Woodgreen Drive Roundabout 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dugdale Drive

Wildflower Signage

