

AGENDA 12, Enc xii) Report on Annual Floral Planting on Station Road & Station Bridge (Troughs and Hanging Baskets)

Executive Summary

This report considers the future of the annual floral planting contract for hanging baskets and troughs on Station Road and Station Bridge. The current 3-year contract is due to expire after the 2024 summer season.

The report outlines the key considerations in whether to renew this contract, including the sustainability of the planting approach, the resource implications of maintaining the plantings, issues with vandalism and damage, and the upcoming changes to the Wansbeck Square area as part of the town's regeneration.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council does not renew the annual floral planting contract at this time. However, the Council should keep open the option to revisit environmental enhancements in this area once the new public realm around Wansbeck Square has been developed.

Background

The Council currently has a 3-year contract with Plantscape/Idverde Ltd for the provision of annual summer and winter floral planting on troughs on Station Bridge and summer planting of hanging baskets on Station Road. This contract was agreed in 2022 and is due to expire after the 2024 summer season.

The planting schemes were introduced to provide colour and visual interest, particularly on Station Bridge given the architecture and limited opportunities for other types of planting. The annual cost of the contract is approximately £3,750.

Sustainability Considerations

In recent years, the Council has been focused on more sustainable planting approaches, such as the beds on Station Road and bulb/wildflower planting around the town. The annual floral displays are at odds with this more environmentally friendly strategy, and sustainable planting in terms of the wastage and the watering required.

Additionally, as the trees in the town centre have matured, there is less reliance on the hanging baskets to provide visual impact, and they are obscured by the trees.

The new public realm being developed around Wansbeck Square also provides an opportunity to incorporate sustainable planting schemes into the design.

Resource Implications

Maintaining the annual planting, particularly during the summer months, requires a significant resource commitment from the Neighbourhood Services team. Around 4 hours of staff time per week is needed, along with over 1,000 litres of water. In periods of hot weather, the maintenance increases to twice weekly.

This resource commitment limits the team's ability to focus on other areas, including the Council's new sustainable planting initiatives on Station Road and the Gateways into the town.

Vandalism and Damage

The annual planting on Station Bridge has been subject to a significant amount of vandalism and anti-social behaviour over the past 3 years, with many of the troughs being damaged and the planting destroyed. The new town centre CCTV system may help to reduce these issues, but it remains a persistent problem.

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Wansbeck Square Redevelopment

The planned demolition and redevelopment of Wansbeck Square is another factor to consider. As this area is transformed, there will be opportunities to incorporate new sustainable planting schemes as part of the public realm improvements. This may further reduce the need for the annual floral displays on Station Road and Station Bridge.

Public Perception

It is recognised that the annual floral displays do receive positive comments from members of the public, particularly when our Neighbourhood Services team (Ryan and Mark) are out maintaining the plantings. The Council will continue to provide floral displays in other areas of the town through the use of existing planters and tubs.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Taking all of these factors into account, the recommendation is for the Council to not renew the annual floral planting contract at this time. The focus should be on the Council's sustainable planting initiatives and allowing the new public realm around Wansbeck Square to be developed before considering any environmental enhancements in this area.

However, the Council should keep open the possibility of revisiting this decision in the future, once the Wansbeck Square redevelopment is complete and the full impact of the sustainable planting schemes can be assessed.

Stephen Humphrey
Assets & Development Manager
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