

Environment & Assets Committee

Report Title:	Improving biodiversity in our green spaces
Meeting Date:	3 September 2024
Contact Officer:	Becky Reid, Environmental Project Officer Andrea Oughton, Operations Manager

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To update the Committee about action being taken to improve biodiversity in the green spaces in Thame that we are responsible for.

2. Background

- 2.1. Thame Green Living Plan, adopted by Thame Town Council in 2020, includes the following:

Section 1.2: Identify new areas for biodiversity enhancement

- *OBJECTIVE: Seek community input into new proposals*

ACTIONS:

- *Develop community planting schemes.*
- *Work on enhancement proposals with partners (e.g. Residents' Associations (RAs), District and County Councils, 21C Thame).*
- *Help to identify suitable sites and species to support 21C Thame tree-planting initiative.*

Section 1.3: Improve Biodiversity in existing public spaces

- *OBJECTIVE: Implement more sustainable working practices consistent with Thame Town Council's Environmental Policy*

ACTION:

- *Identify relevant areas and current approach for research and discussion, including more beneficial planting and mowing practices for wildlife and carbon capture.*

- 2.2. In order to make steps towards achieving these actions several projects have been implemented on our green spaces over the past few years. These have included:
- Planting additional trees on 'Table Top', the green next to Hamilton Road,
 - A project to wild our verges,
 - Replacing the boundary fence of the Elms Park play area with a hedge,
 - Establishing a pollinator bed within Memorial Gardens,
 - Planting trees on the area known as 'The Triangle', next to the Skate Park,
 - Planting trees within Queen Elizabeth Circle play area,
 - Planting trees on Langdale Road.

- 2.3. Below are details about the next project to be delivered.

3. Current projects

- 3.1 **Churchill Crescent Public Open Space / Play area**. Over the last year this area has seen the loss of a large Black Poplar. Rather than replace it with a similar tree the decision was made to instead plant some groupings of trees, increasing the biodiversity of the area. This project was supported by 21st Century Thame. They developed a planting plan with the advice of a local tree expert which they subsequently distributed to residents who border the play area, asking for their feedback. They received various written submissions and also visited the park twice by arrangement with residents to listen to concerns and suggestions, meeting with most of the people living in the houses immediately adjoining the park on these visits. This feedback was used to adapt the proposal, and the final planting plan includes:
- Planting located in the half of the park away from the houses,
 - An area of winter-interest hedge of holly, hornbeam and beech for year round biodiversity,
 - No large trees near any houses to avoid significant garden shading,
 - Inclusion of fruit trees and other trees which would offer features such as blossom, locating the fruit trees away from the children's play area,
 - Spacing the trees well and avoiding tight clustering,
 - Trees to include apples, pear, pink blossom bird cherry, Silver Birch, Whitebeam, Guelder rose, Black elder, Wild service tree, Hornbeam and a Plum tree.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 Thame Town Council will complete relevant utility checks and ensure the final planting areas will not cause any issues to normal maintenance work being completed at each site.
- 4.2 21st Century Thame will seek external funding for this project so that they are delivered at no cost to Thame Town Council. This will be supported by Thame Town Council's Environmental Project Officer as needed.
- 4.3 The projects will be delivered by 21st Century Thame who will mobilise a team of volunteers to help deliver the work. This will be supported by Thame Town Council's Operations Manager as needed.
- 4.4 Maintenance of the planting after it is completed will initially be delivered by local residents who have agreed to take on watering responsibility. Thame Town Councils Maintenance team will adjust their working practices in the area to accommodate the new planting schemes in both cases.

5. Future Projects

Work is currently underway to develop planting plans for other areas, including Lenthall Green and Brookside Green. All planting proposals will go through the same consultation process with near residents, applications for funding and implementation in partnership with 21st Century Thame. Updates on progress will be brought to future meetings

6. Action required:

- i) To note the report.*