



Minehead Town Council Floral Bedding Provision Options Paper

1. Summary

Minehead Town Council faces a strategic challenge in managing its floral displays, balancing traditional annual bedding practices and public expectations with evolving environmental and financial considerations. Currently providing seasonal flowering displays through spring and summer plantings, we recognise the growing tension between maintaining aesthetic floral displays and addressing sustainability concerns.

In 2024/25, the total annual costs, including water and associated expenses, were approximately £12,000 including VAT. Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of these costs, specifically highlighting expenditures with MTC areas but recognising the costs of Blenheim Gardens and The Quay. These additional areas were funded by MTC following Somerset Council's decision to discontinue financing annual bedding displays.

Beyond environmental and financial requirements to review existing practices, it is worth acknowledging the volatility of the plant production industry. Readjusting the approach will help mitigate vulnerability to potential supply chain disruptions, ensuring greater resilience in floral display provision.

Over the years, Minehead has been renowned for its horticultural excellence over the years, including success in national competitions like Britain in Bloom. However, MTC has begun transitioning towards more sustainable approaches. The Amenities Team has already started reducing dependence on annual bedding by introducing permanent herbaceous plantings and strategically reducing hanging basket installations.

With extended production lead times that can exceed five months and increasing costs, the council must now develop a strategy that considers environmental impact, community expectations, and fiscal responsibility in flower bedding provision.

2. Options Available

Option 1: Carry on as We Are (Appendix 2)

Summary

The amenities team will continue to gradually reduce dependence on annual bedding by converting some planters to permanent displays using ornamental grasses and flowering perennials. Some flower beds will be reduced in size, blending permanent and annual elements with potential future expansion to Blenheim Gardens if acquired by MTC. Annual bedding will remain part of the strategy, with minimal impact on hanging baskets although this would include trialling the provision of some hanging baskets with perennial alternatives and the strategic removal of some in selected areas only. Some planters such as the harbour and quay will be left empty through the winter and cake stand planters will be reduced to single tier planters through the winter as they are now.

Estimated Costs

MTC can maintain annual bedding budgets at approximately £10k per year, with costs likely decreasing as perennial bedding requires only initial investment.

Benefits

- Ensures Minehead's floral display recognition
- No further/limited negative public reaction to current transitions
- Incremental preparation for potential future reductions
- Allows Clerk & amenities manager flexibility in display management
- Prepares MTC for any future supply challenges with annual bedding
- Maintains continuity with existing landscaping and public expectation
- Allows for a gradual adaptation

Disadvantages

- Continues annual cost for floral displays
- High maintenance requirements for summer displays in particular
- May not fully meet sustainability expectations
- Potential performance issues with spring bedding due to changing climate
- Prolonged transition may increase overall long-term costs
- Potential inconsistent aesthetic during transition period
- Risk of mixed planting reducing overall visual impact

Option 2: Transfer Entirely to Permanent Bedding Displays from May 2025 (Appendix 3)

Summary

This option involves complete replacement of spring bedding with permanent displays in May 2025, requiring higher initial investment and careful plant selection. The approach would reduce long-term maintenance and could provide immediate cost savings from the second year onward, though it may challenge public expectations.

Estimated Costs

Initial investment of £15-£20k, with potential savings of approximately £10k annually after the first year.

Benefits

- Potential £10k annual savings after first year
- Reduced maintenance requirements
- Most environmentally and financially sustainable approach
- Frees up amenities team resources
- Ensures no future annual bedding supply issues
- Immediate demonstration of environmental commitment
- Potential for more diverse and resilient plant ecosystems

Disadvantages

- Significant initial budget increase
- Extensive planning and plant sourcing needed
- Potential public opinion challenges

- Different aesthetic compared to traditional annual displays
- Potential loss of traditional horticultural practices
- Risk of reduced visitor and community engagement
- Requires significant expertise for successful implementation

Option 3: Continue with Current Approach but Extend Summer Displays (Appendix 2)

Summary

This option would see the continued transition away from high dependence on annual bedding with annual bedding remaining part of the strategy, following a similar approach to option 1 through the summer months. With changing seasons, there is potential to extend the summer bedding period beyond the traditional late September/October timeframe, providing conditions remain consistent with recent milder winters. There would still be a need for providing some spring bedding but this would be greatly reduced and with trial areas identified initially, could be further extended based on feedback provided.

Estimated Costs

As with option 1, this will see a consistent summer expenditure for annual bedding, but it will allow for less expenditure for the spring displays. There would still be staffing costs to consider in maintenance and summer watering.

Benefits

- With spring bedding displays becoming less suitable to the conditions, ensures money is not wasted
- Retains summer displays and a positive public reaction
- May be considered a 'best of both worlds' approach
- Prepares MTC for any future supply challenges with annual bedding
- Ensures absolute 'value for money' with summer bedding
- Demonstrates adaptive management approach
- Maximises existing plant investment

Disadvantages

- Continues annual cost for floral displays
- Continued high maintenance requirements for summer displays
- May not fully meet sustainability expectations
- Possible negative public opinion to winter stock reduction/removal
- In particularly cold winters/early frosts, fallow periods could be 5+ months
- Potential aesthetic inconsistency during these extended periods
- Increased complexity in maintenance scheduling
- Risk of public perception of neglect during fallow periods

Option 4: Carry on as We Are but Continue to Reduce Annual Bedding Stock until complete removal

Summary

This will follow option 1 but stock would be gradually reduced year on year until bedding is entirely permanent. Although the timeframe is difficult to entirely identify, the transition would probably be complete within no more than 5 years based on the current transitional work.

Estimated Costs

The annual spend on bedding would remain relatively consistent whilst this is ongoing, as annual bedding requirement reduces, there will be a need to replenish with permanent which is more expensive. However, there will come a point where no annual bedding will be provided and there will be a large annual cost saving of approx. £10k per annum at that point. There will also be a notable saving on staff maintenance costs.

Benefits

- Potential £10k annual savings once fully transitioned
- Reduced maintenance requirements
- An environmentally and financially sustainable approach that will be gradually implemented
- Frees up amenities team resources over time
- Public may be more accepting of a gradual move away from annual bedding
- Prepares MTC for any future supply challenges with annual bedding
- Allows for iterative learning and adjustment
- Minimises a one-off financial shock
- Provides opportunity for community feedback and engagement

Disadvantages

- Will not bring an instant monetary saving
- Will require careful planning and consideration through transition process
- Potential public opinion challenges
- Potentially different final aesthetic once transitioned
- Extended period of visual inconsistency
- Potential ongoing public communication challenges
- Risk of prolonged transitional maintenance complexities

Conclusion

Having presented four options for the future of floral bedding provision in Minehead, councillors are now requested to carefully review the analysis of each approach. Each option presents unique benefits and challenges in terms of financial implications, environmental sustainability, maintenance requirements, and community impact.

Councillors are asked to:

- Examine the estimated costs and long-term implications of each option
- Consider the balance between aesthetic expectations, environmental sustainability, and financial prudence
- Discuss the potential community reception of each proposed approach
- Select the most appropriate strategy for Minehead Town Council's future floral displays

Ben Parker

Town Clerk

December 2024

Appendix 1

Floral Displays costings 2024/25				
Blenheim Gardens, Harbour & Quayside				
Supplier	Item	Net	VAT	Gross
Bristol City Council	Summer 2024 bedding plants& perennials	£1,460.55	£292.11	£1,752.66
Bristol City Council	Autumn 2024 bedding plants & bulbs	£1,767.00	£353.40	£2,120.40
Water2Business	water- unknown currently paid by SC	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	Total	£3,227.55	£645.51	£3,873.06

Town Tubs/Cakestands, Ave, Parade planters, Ellicombe/A39 bed, Alcombe tubs (MTC Areas)					
		Net	VAT	Gross	
Bristol City Council	Summer 2024 bedding plants & perennials	£4,009.05	£801.81	£4,810.86	
Bristol City Council	Autumn 2024 bedding plants & bulbs	£1,500.00	£250.00	£1,250.00	
LBS Worldwide Ltd	Compost, slowrelease feed, water retaining crystals	£571.78	£114.36	£686.14	
LBS Worldwide Ltd	Compost- tubs, cakestands	£403.41	£80.68	£484.09	
West Somerset Garden Centre Ltd	Slug Pellets	£13.32	£2.66	£15.98	
Water2Business	Water Ave & Parade planters 29.03.2024-7.10.2024	£385.58	£0.00	£385.58	
Water2Business	Water Ellicombe/A39 bed 29.03.2024-7.10.2024	£319.09	£0.00	£319.09	
Water2Business	Water Ave & Parade planters 8.10.2024-31.03.2025	£100.00	£0.00	£100.00	estimate
Water2Business	Water Ellicombe/A39 bed 08.10.2024-31.03.2025	£60.00	£0.00	£60.00	estimate
pipework repairs	couplings	£13.32	£2.67	£15.99	
pipework repairs 2025	stop ends, couplings	£100.00	£0.00	£100.00	estimate
	Total	£7,475.55	£1,252.18	£8,227.73	

Summary

Hanging Baskets	£ 1,525.15
Minehead	£ 2,126.25
Blenheim & Quay	£ 1,552.35
Total (Exc. VAT)	£ 5,203.75

Appendix 3

[illegible]