

## Review of Grounds Maintenance for 2011/12 and 2012/13

### SUMMARY

- 1.1 Following a review of the service as part of the budget process the Council proposes to reduce expenditure on the grounds maintenance service by £325,000 in 2011/12 and a further 160,000 in 2012/13.
- 1.2 The savings will be achieved through the reduction in the frequency of grass cutting, the reduction in the provision of seasonal flower bedding displays, the subsequent closure of Markeaton Glasshouse and the reduction in other miscellaneous non-routine grounds maintenance services.

### RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To approve the reduction of the frequency of general amenity area grass cutting from 18 per annum to 12 per annum on all on parks, open spaces and other relevant Council land apart from the exceptions detailed in 2.2, but increase the frequency of highway verge grass cutting from 10 per annum to 12 per annum to achieve a consistent standard on all areas. The reduction would save £152,000.
- 2.2 To maintain a standard of up to 18 cuts per annum on cemetery and crematorium grounds, football and cricket pitch areas of parks and selected social service establishments. The reductions will also not apply to other fine turf sports and ornamental areas on parks. It would also not apply to Derby Homes land.
- 2.3 To approve a reduction in budget availability for miscellaneous non-routine grounds maintenance works, saving approximately £163,000.
- 2.4 To approve the reduction in seasonal flower bedding displays by approximately 40% across the city, saving approximately £70,000. As a consequence, to approve the closure of Markeaton Glasshouse and the outsourcing of the remaining bedding plant provision, the growing of hanging baskets and the provision and maintenance of indoor decorative plants for civic buildings, saving in total a further estimated £90,000.

## REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The reasons for the recommendations are financial. Grounds maintenance services are discretionary and budgetary pressures dictate that the Council gives priority to other statutory services.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### Grass Cutting

- 4.1 Currently most general amenity areas are cut up to 18 times per annum, consisting of 15 routine cuts and 3 optional cuts depending on growing conditions. Amenity areas can be classified as those areas maintained by mowing machinery that does not collect the cut grass and cuts to a finished grass height of around 20mm. The majority of the city's grassed areas fall into this category.
- 4.2 The minimum frequency of cut to general amenity areas using existing plant and equipment would be 12 per annum. A cutting frequency of less than 12, on parks areas in particular, would involve major re-tooling and the use of large scale tractor mounted flail or rotary mowers and would produce an unacceptable standard of finish for amenity park land.
- 4.3 It is proposed that certain Council land is still maintained at the existing levels of up to 18 cuts. These areas are :-
- Cemeteries and the Crematorium
  - Selected premises such as older persons' accommodation and young children's nurseries
- 4.4 It is also proposed that an increased frequency of cutting is maintained on football pitch and cricket outfield areas of parks during their respective playing seasons.
- 4.5 The proposals do not affect Derby Homes land. Derby Homes have their own standards for grounds maintenance.
- 4.6 The proposals will save £152,000 per annum and will be implemented from the start of the 2011 grass cutting season in April 2011.
- 4.7 The reasons for this service change are purely financial and it is inevitable that standards of appearance of the city's grassed areas will deteriorate when compared with past years. This could lead to increased complaints and dissatisfaction from the public.

### Reduction in Non-Routine Work

- 4.8 Grounds Maintenance consists of "routine work" i.e. pre-planned known work such as grass cutting, flower bed weeding, bin emptying, hedge cutting etc, and "non-routine work" i.e. unplanned work such as attending to vandal damage, tree planting and maintenance, sports pitch repairs and renovation, watering, treating unforeseen pests and disease, litter and fly-tipping removal and so on. A 15% reduction in the budget would save £163,000.

- 4.9 The unplanned nature of the work means that it is difficult to predict the precise impact of the budget reduction. Managers will use their knowledge and experience to minimise the impact of the reductions and spread the remaining budget accordingly.
- 4.10 It is also difficult to predict the impact on staffing as this would depend on whether the reductions were made in areas of work that are predominantly labour intensive. It is estimated that there will be up to 6 job losses. If this was done through redundancy then there would impact on the savings in 2011/12 for which an allowance has been made.
- 4.11 The long term appearance of parks and grounds may suffer as a result of reduced maintenance.

### **Seasonal Flower Bedding**

- 4.12 Seasonal flower bedding is planted on the major parks around the city as well as on traffic islands and other areas, mainly in the city centre. It consists of summer bedding, planted in June and removed in October and spring bedding, planted in October and removed in June. The vast majority of the plants are grown at the Council's own Markeaton Glasshouse. The annual revenue cost of growing, planting and maintaining the plants is approximately £175,000.
- 4.13 In order to save approximately £70,000, it is proposed to discontinue the provision of around 40% of the seasonal flower bedding across the city.
- 4.14 In making the reductions, priority is given to retaining flower bedding in "gateway" areas of the city. Where possible, the flower bedding on the traditional ornamental areas of the major parks, including the terrace areas at Markeaton Park and Darley Park would largely be retained, although there are deletions proposed elsewhere on those parks. Every effort would also be made to retain flower bedding in the city centre.
- 4.15 The sites where the flower bedding is to be discontinued are as follows :-
- Allestree Lane/Birchover Way junction
  - Allestree Park
  - Bishops Drive Island, Oakwood
  - Broadway/Duffield Road Island
  - Calvert Street
  - Council House
  - Curzon/Abbey Street
  - Darley Abbey riverside
  - Darley Park (FB22 only - butterfly garden bed)
  - Five Lamps Island
  - Lodge Lane Island
  - Maine Drive, Chaddesden
  - Markeaton Park (FB25 to 28, FB30 only)
  - Mount Street
  - Pride Park Island 4 (FB1 & 4 reduced in size)
  - Riverside Gardens
  - Roman House

- Sir Peter Hilton Garden
- Spondon Centre (tub flower beds)
- Spondon Community Centre

4.16 Many of the changes involve the removal of entire flower beds and a sum of £20,000 has been allowed for the first year re-instatement of abandoned flower beds. Depending on the location, this will involve either grassing them over or re-planting with permanent lower maintenance plants.

4.17 Some beds are a combination of permanent planting and seasonal flower bedding. Here, it is only the seasonal bedding that will be discontinued and replaced by additional permanent planting. This occurs at the following sites :-

- Allestree Lane/Birchover Way junction
- Bishops Drive Island, Oakwood
- Broadway/Duffield Road Island
- Darley Abbey riverside
- Darley Park (FB22 only - butterfly garden bed)
- Five Lamps Island
- Maine Drive, Chaddesden
- Sir Peter Hilton Garden
- Spondon Community Centre

4.18 It is possible that Neighbourhood Boards in some areas of the city may wish to allocate funding from their devolved budgets in order to retain flower beds.

### **Closure of Markeaton Glasshouse**

4.19 The knock-on effect of reducing the flower bed requirement would be to increase unit costs of plants grown at Markeaton Glasshouse and bring into question the continued viability of this method of procuring the flower bedding. Major costs such as staffing and heating would not correspondingly reduce.

4.20 The Glasshouse provides other services to the Council in addition to the flower bedding, such as the internal floral decorations for civic buildings, the planting up of hanging baskets and procurement of the Council's tree and shrub requirements and has running costs of approximately £325,000. It is estimated that the closure of the Glasshouse and the outsourcing of these services will be in the region of £90,000.

4.21 If the Glasshouse was to continue to be used for growing plants, investment in the region of £30,000 would be needed in the short to medium term for a replacement boiler and structural repairs. Consideration would also need to be given to converting the drainage system for the recycling of water.

4.22 A decision on the future of the Glasshouse following closure will be needed. Streetpride will work with Parks and Property Services to look at options. Due to the nature of its construction and its secluded location, it would, especially if left unoccupied, be susceptible to vandalism and could conceivably become only suitable for demolition and clearance.

4.23 It is therefore important that decisions over the future of the structure are taken fairly quickly. A figure of £10,000 has been set aside for the worst case scenario of demolition.

- 4.24 Four permanent staff employed at the Glasshouse – 1 x Glasshouse Manager, 1 x Glasshouse Supervisor, 1 x Glasshouse Assistant/Florist and 1 x Glasshouse Assistant. Six casual Glasshouse Assistants working variable hours are also employed.
- 4.25 Whether grown at the Glasshouse or by an external grower, the growing cycle for the seasonal bedding plants needed for summer 2011 commences in January. In order to ensure that the Council has the plants for its remaining flower beds, a decision was taken in January to seek quotations and place orders as required with an external provider.
- 4.26 Markeaton Glasshouse has an excellent reputation for providing the city with high quality seasonal bedding plants and hanging baskets. The closure of the Glasshouse and the outsourcing of the flower bedding requirement will be unpopular with the public and may have an affect on the quality of the plants and appearance of the flower beds and hanging baskets.

## OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 Consideration may be given to the Glasshouse remaining open and attempting to replace its lost income by providing plants to other local authorities. The problems associated with this approach are :-
- Other local authorities are also likely to be reducing their own requirements
  - They are likely to have by now already placed orders for their 2011 requirements
  - Markeaton Glasshouse would still be growing 60% of the original requirement for Derby and the remaining space is unlikely to be sufficient for the entire requirement of another authority
  - Enquiries have suggested that the Glasshouse would not be competitive when compared with private sector growers
  - A failure to recover the lost income would mean that the Council would not achieve its savings targets for 2011/12

**This report has been approved by the following officers:**

<b>Legal officer</b> <b>Financial officer</b> <b>Human Resources officer</b> <b>Service Director(s)</b> <b>Other(s)</b>	Stuart Leslie Toni Heathcote Jane Dukes Tim Clegg
---	--

<b>For more information contact:</b> <b>Background papers:</b> <b>List of appendices:</b>	Ian Wheatley 01332 641530 e-mail <a href="mailto:ian.wheatley@derby.gov.uk">ian.wheatley@derby.gov.uk</a> None Appendix 1 - Implications
---	--

**IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial**

1.1	Budget savings 2011/12		Budget savings 2012/13	
	Grass cutting reductions	£132,000	Grass cutting reductions	£20,000
	Non-routine work reductions	£103,000	Non-routine work reductions	£60,000
	Flower bed reductions and closure of Glasshouse	£0	Flower bed reductions and closure of Glasshouse	£160,000
	Total	£235,000	Total	£240,000

**Legal**

- 2.1 All services affected are discretionary and there are therefore no legal implications of the reductions.

**Personnel**

- 3.1 As a result of the reduction in the grass cutting service, the non-routine grounds maintenance work and the 40% reduction in flower bedding, the Council would reduce the employment of summer temporary or agency staff. In addition, a further six permanent Gardener posts would be at risk. Four posts are currently vacant
- 3.2 The posts of four permanent staff at Markeaton Glasshouse would be placed at risk. In the event of them not finding suitable redeployment within the Council they would be made redundant.
- 3.3 The Glasshouse staff have been consulted on the proposal. The 30 day consultation period came to an end on 24 January 2011.

**Equalities Impact**

- 4.1 None identified.

**Health and Safety**

- 5.1 None identified.

## **Carbon commitment**

- 6.1 The reduction in the frequency of grass cutting reduces the carbon emissions from grass cutting machinery over the summer season.
- 6.2 Having plants delivered from elsewhere instead of growing locally increases the carbon footprint. However, this is likely to only involve two deliveries in June and two deliveries in October. The Glasshouse already requires deliveries of seedlings and young “plug” plants.
- 6.3 The Glasshouse would require investment in a new heating and water recycling system in order to improve its energy efficiency standards.

## **Value for money**

- 7.1 The changes would represent good value for the reduced standards of service

## **Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

- 8.1 Delivering value for money.