

Yeovil Town Council



Town House
19 Union Street
Yeovil
Somerset
BA20 1PQ

Leisure and Environment Meeting

Leisure and Environment Committee

Monday 11th November 2024

7:00pm

Hybrid Meeting:

Face-to-face at Town House, 19 Union Street, Yeovil

BA20 1PQ; and virtual using Zoom meeting software

For further information on the items to be discussed, please contact town.clerk@yeovil.gov.uk.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda Card'.

Amanda Card, Town Clerk
5th November 2024

This information is also available on our website: www.yeovil.gov.uk

Members of Yeovil Town Council are summoned to attend:

Jade Cabell

Jane Lowery

Tareth Casey

Ashley Richards (*Vice Chairman*)

Emma Jayne-Hopkins

Andy Soughton

Andy Kendall (*Ex-officio*)

Roy Spinner (*Chairman*)

Jamie Lock

Adrian Wilkes

Tony Lock (*Ex-officio*)

Dave Potten (*co-opted non-voting*)

Public Comments at meetings (held via Zoom)

Members of the public may attend the meeting either physically or via zoom.

If you would like to join the meeting via zoom, please e-mail ytic@yeovil.gov.uk by 9:00am on Monday 11th November 2024. Instructions will be sent to you to view the meeting.

Equality Act 2010

The general public sector equality duty places an obligation on a wide range of public bodies (including town and parish councils) in the exercise of their functions to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The protected characteristics are:

Age	Race
Disability	Religion or Belief
Gender Reassignment	Sex
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Sexual Orientation
Pregnancy and Maternity	

Recording of Council Meetings

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 allows both the public and press to take photographs, film and audio record the proceedings and report on all public meetings (including on social media).

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Members of the public exercising their right to speak during the time allocated for Public Comment who do not wish to be recorded or filmed, need to inform the Chairman who will instruct those taking a recording or filming to cease doing so while they speak.

A G E N D A

Public Comment (15 Minutes)

Due to the confidential nature of the business of items 11/206, under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s3, a motion to exclude members of the public and press during discussion of this item will be considered by the Councillors. *Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s3*

11/208. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO CONSIDER THE REASONS GIVEN

Council to receive apologies for absence and consider the reasons given. *LGA 1972 s85(1)*

11/209. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members to declare any interests, including Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) they may have in agenda items that accord with the requirements of the Town Council's Code of Conduct and to consider any requests from members for Dispensations that accord with Localism Act 2011 s33(b-e). (NB this does not preclude any later declarations).

11/210. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meetings held on 9th September 2024.

11/211. FEEDBACK FROM YEOVIL ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION BY THE REPRESENTATIVE FROM YEOVIL TOWN COUNCIL

To receive any feedback via Cllr Spinner.

11/212. FEEDBACK FROM CO-OPTED NON-VOTING MEMBER

To consider a verbal update (subject to the outcome of agenda item 11/198).

11/213. MINUTES OF THE LAST YEOVIL IN BLOOM MEETINGS

To consider the minutes from the Yeovil in Bloom meetings held on 3rd June and 5th August 2024 attached at pages 6 to 10.

11/214. LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

To consider the report by the Director of Leisure and Environment attached at pages 11 to 16.

11/215. UPDATE REPORT ON THE TRANSFER & FUTURE OF THE IN BLOOM PROGRAMME

To consider the report by the Director of Leisure and Environment attached at pages 17 to 20.

11/216. PROPOSED GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN FOR YEOVIL

To consider the report by the Director of Leisure and Environment attached at pages 21 to 25.

11/217. BUDGET SETTING 2025/26

To consider and recommend to Policy, Resources and Finance Committee the draft budget for 2024/25 to follow.

11/218. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee will consider passing a resolution to exclude the press and public from the *next items* in accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

11/219. MONKSDALE HEDGE (CONFIDENTIAL)

To consider the confidential report by the Deputy Town Clerk (to follow).

Yeovil Town Council

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Mayor: Cllr A Kendall, Town Clerk: Amanda Card BA(Hons), FCPFA, BSc(Open)
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Minutes of the meeting of Yeovil in Bloom Steering Group held on Monday 3rd June 2024 held at The Town House, 19 Union Street, Yeovil, BA20 1PQ.

Present: Alice Edmonds (Love Yeovil, virtually); Steve Fox (SC); Andy Kendall; Tony Lock; Tamara McKay (SC); Liz Pike; Joe Knights (Able2achieve); Natasha Rand (Yeovil Art Space, virtually); Wes Read; David Recardo; Manny Roper and Rob Stickland (virtually).

In Attendance: Sally Freemantle – Deputy Town Clerk

1.30pm – meeting commenced.

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the last meeting held on 22nd April 2024.

Resolved: that the Minutes of the meeting of Yeovil in Bloom Steering Group held on 22nd April 2024 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3. Yeovil in Bloom Update

Steve informed the Steering Group that the quality of plants from Bristol City Council are excellent and all peat-free. Planting out has started in St John's Churchyard and will move to Town House/Bond Street and other bedding areas. Most of the baskets have been potted up and there are 16 large hanging baskets. Some will be installed this week and others in a fortnight.

Advice is being sought from highways with respect to the watering of the flower troughs along the railings at Reckleford and team members were receiving relevant training to ensure compliance.

Resolved: that the update be noted.

4. RHS Regional and National Competition Update

The date for the RHS Regional in Bloom Competition has been set for 18th July at 10am. The Mayor and the Town Crier have been asked to attend and all Steering Group members are welcome as the judges would like to meet as many people as possible. The judges will be Rod Pooley and Nick Jones.

RHS National in Bloom judging will take place on 29th July. The judges will be Ray Beckwith and James Cordingly, head gardener at Dunster.

Tam is creating a portfolio which will be the same for both judging days. This will also be provided in a PDF format for the judges.

The route will be the same for both days, starting in St John's Churchyard and walking to Princes Street to view the shop window displays, then The Quedam. The judges will then be driven to Yeovil District Hospital, Milford Allotments, Kenmore Drive, an example of an outstanding back garden (Yeovil Gardening Competition), the Country Park, and ending up at Yeovil Recreation Ground with refreshments at the café. As it is so close to the end of term, there will be filming of schools to be included in the presentation.

Steve will email the details to everyone.

Resolved: that the information regarding the entry into the regional and national competitions be noted.

5. Any Other Business

- There will be a plant giveaway/swap in St John's Churchyard on 20th June from midday until mid-afternoon. Community groups will have stalls and there will be plant pot painting. Natasha added that 16 schools had been contacted.
- David offered to promote the event as Town Crier. Andy suggested that the information about the event be posted on our noticeboards.
- It was reported that the responses from social media had improved and commented that it would be useful to see the analytics of the pages.
- Joe explained that he was reaching out to community groups which don't fall within the remit of Yeovil.

- Andy stated that he had received comments from members of the public who were grateful that the floral displays were still being planted out in light of the financial situation.
- In answer to a query about the willow crown, Natasha said this would be addressed.

6. **Date of Next Meeting**

Resolved: That the date of the next meeting of the Steering Group will be Monday 5th August at 1.30pm at the Town House.

The Meeting Closed at 2.04pm



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Mayor: Cllr A Kendall, Town Clerk: Amanda Card BA(Hons), FCPFA, BSc(Open)
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Minutes of the meeting of Yeovil in Bloom Steering Group held on Monday 5th August 2024 held at The Town House, 19 Union Street, Yeovil, BA20 1PQ.

Present: Steve Fox (SC); Liz Pike; Joe Knights (Able2achieve); Wes Read; David Recardo; Manny Roper.

In Attendance: Sally Freemantle – Deputy Town Clerk

1.30pm – meeting commenced.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Tamara McKay and Cllr Rob Stickland.

2. Minutes

To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the last meeting held on 3rd July 2024.

Resolved: that the Minutes of the meeting of Yeovil in Bloom Steering Group held on 3rd July 2024 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3. Yeovil in Bloom Update

Steve informed the Steering Group the team did an amazing job planting up the baskets from the plugs and appreciated the help from volunteers, Joe and his team. As mentioned at the last meeting, all the baskets are now completely peat free. Watering would commence soon after the meeting, but due to three personnel leaving, this would be carried out by one team member.

Steve also reported that thanks to Tamara the social media for Yeovil in Bloom this year had been outstanding with 20,000 people being reached through social media and over 100 subscribers to the newsletter.

Steve was thanked for all his hard work

David raised concerns regarding storage of plants over the winter period and discussions took place regarding polytunnels. Steve explained that this matter would be taken further with Sally and Katy Menday, Director of Leisure and Environment at Yeovil Town Council.

Steve would be leaving Somerset Council at the end of September and Tamara would be looking after Yeovil in Bloom until a decision was made on the future management of the initiative.

Resolved: that the update be noted.

4. **RHS Regional and National Competition Judging Days Feedback**

The RHS Regional in Bloom Competition judging took place on 18th July by Rod Pooley and Nick Jones. The feedback was really positive, and Steve congratulated the team on their efforts in making the day such a success.

RHS National in Bloom judging took place on 29th July. The judges were Ray Beckwith and James Cordingley and the day also went well but the judges were less vocal than when the regional judging took place.

Resolved: that the information be noted.

5. **RHS Regional and National Competition Awards Ceremony Attendance**

The date for the regional award ceremony was set for Tuesday 8th October and it was agreed that it would be attended by Steve, Manny, Tamara, Joe and Andy.

The date for the national award ceremony was set for Monday 21st October and it was agreed that Steve, Manny, Tamara, David and Joe would attend.

Resolved: that the above attendance be agreed.

6. **Any Other Business**

- It was suggested that a letter of thanks be written to Able2Achieve for all the support they had provided to the Yeovil in Bloom initiative.
- It was suggested that the presentations for the Yeovil Gardening Competition (and Best Kept Allotments) take place in the Wheeldon suite at Westlands.

7. **Date of Next Meeting**

Resolved: That the date of the next meeting of the Steering Group will be Monday 4th November at 1.30pm at the Town House.

The Meeting Closed at 2.55pm

11/214. LEISURE & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

Introduction

The new Directorate of Leisure and Environment was created at Yeovil Town Council as a response to the devolution of services from Somerset Council to the Town Council starting in the summer of 2024. On the 1st August Yeovil Country Park and Yeovil Recreation Centre devolved. Staff have TUPE'd across and a license to occupy was signed in advance of the freehold transfer of the land in 2025. In early 2025, the town's open spaces and play areas will devolve alongside management of the In Bloom program.

At the time of committee the directorate includes twenty eight members of staff working across countryside services, two cafes, grounds maintenance and sports facility management. Land amounting to nearly 200 acres has transferred, including the biggest open spaces in the town. These new services have required the implementation of a number of new systems and policies to ensure the Council is complying with legislation and operating safely.

This report aims to briefly describe the work completed to date and seek Member approval on the three recommendations below.

Decisions

- 1) Members are asked to note the report & proposed reporting cycles
- 2) Members are asked to approve the use of an external Health & Safety specialist to perform an audit on policy and practice related to Health and Safety across the Council

Main Report

Fleet

When staff and services transferred on August 1st a small fleet of vehicles and machinery also transferred. The Council now has seven vehicles that are registered with the DVLA. Including two VW caddy vans and a range of agricultural machinery from All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) to compact tractors and mowers. A new fleet administrative system has been set up to record the management and maintenance of this fleet. As none of these vehicle are over 3.5 tonnes the Council does not need an O license, or a fleet manager as O license holder. This situation may need to be reviewed as the devolution of Open Spaces management progresses.

In addition to the vehicle management a regular system of driver checks including DVLA licenses and driving assessments has been implemented.

The comprehensive approach is set out in the new fleet management and driver policy (which includes a driver handbook). The policy was adopted by Policy, Resources and Finance Committee on September 24th 2024.

The following service standards will be monitored and reported annually to this committee;

- Completion of daily user checks on all highway vehicles
- Completion of walk around checks on all other vehicles
- Quarterly driver licence checks
- Driver assessments every other year
- Annual service for all vehicles including small plant
- Annual MOT for all highway vehicles
- Fuel use recording

Somerset Council will perform a free audit of our operations in January 2025 to provide a critical friend analysis of management to date and recommend any improvements required.

Health & Safety

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS). Both the Country Park and grounds team at the Recreation Centre operate a range of powered tools and plant that could cause damage to health if team members were over exposed to noise or vibration. To ensure the Council is protecting the health of its workers a monitoring system has been implemented that annually measures the vibration rating of each tool. This is combined with staff recording their length of use of each tool / machinery to give them a daily and weekly exposure level. They must not exceed certain exposure levels set by the 2005 Regulations. The weekly record sheets are collected and saved for monitoring purposes.

Health Monitoring. Every year team members that are exposed to vibration or noisy machinery will have a health monitoring appointment with the newly appointed occupational health company. The confidential appointment will assess their health and discuss their exposure levels. The company will make recommendations to the Council if they have concerns about any team members and also escalate any health concerns.

The company will also provide a range of general occupational health services to the Council.

Health and Safety Policy. A new Health and Safety Policy for the Council is in development. It covers the broader range of buildings, services and operations that the Council now owns and operates. It will set out how responsibility will be designated and how things like accidents and incidents will be monitored. It is recommended that at the end of this financial year an external Health and Safety advisor is contracted to perform a critical friend audit on the Council position and help resolve any outstanding issues.

The management team for the Council will review accident, incident and near miss reports on a quarterly basis (to the Service Committee, as appropriate) and an annual

report will be submitted to both the Service Committee, as appropriate and the Finance and Policy Executive.

Climate

In September 2024 the Council were offered (sponsored by Somerset Council) a number of free licenses to [Zellar](#) an online sustainability, carbon footprint & monitoring system.

Zellar is a dashboard that calculates emissions by site, it gives advice on reducing emissions and sets targets for site teams to meet. Bespoke reports help drive change and track the Council's journey to net carbon neutral.

The sites participating are; The Town House, Westlands Entertainment Venue, Ninesprings building, the two pavilion buildings at Yeovil Recreation Centre and Milford Hall.

In addition to electricity and gas usage the site teams will input waste and recycling rates, water meter reads and fuel use (e.g. petrol & diesel), plus any positive offsetting activities like tree planting at the Country Park.

By January time we anticipate having some meaningful data (a baseline footprint) that can help create action plans for the sites, these will be across short-, medium- and longer-term goals depending on scale and cost. Some simple behaviour changes may save money and carbon (e.g. turning off lights) but larger investment may be required to fully realise carbon savings (e.g. investment in LED's).

The site action plans will come together to provide an updated Action Plan for the Council overall.

The Deputy Town Clerk (HF) has reviewed the energy supply invoices and usage since handover of Ninesprings, Westlands and Yeovil Recreation Centre on the 1st August. With advice from the Zellar team new supply contracts have been signed with EcoTricity, a green energy provider whose supply is sourced from wind farms in the south west.

Yeovil Country Park

A new Biodiversity Ranger has been recruited to join the existing countryside ranger at the site. The country park transferred carrying a vacancy as the original ranger had left. The new ranger will provide specialist advice and lead practical works to ensure wildlife thrives at the site. The role is also due to provide advice and support to other communities across the town to increase space and access to nature. New volunteering opportunities will be established and wildlife monitoring schemes implemented.

The part funded Community Heritage Officer continues to deliver a range of events and activities at the country park from scything days to bat walks. A new service level

agreement is being drafted between Yeovil Town Council and Somerset Council to detail the arrangements & reporting for this role.

The volunteer teams and rangers have been issued with new Yeovil Town Council uniform.

Key performance data continues to be gathered for the site including volunteer days donated, events organised and trees planted. This will be reported annually to committee.

The previous GIS mapping system used by the rangers for all site infrastructure and tree stock inspections is supported by Parish Online, the system already used by Yeovil Town Council. Data layers have transferred and so inspections and reporting continue as previously. Rangers use an iPad for inspecting and recording the state of repair and completed works to trees, bridges, benches and other park infrastructure. This ensures a comprehensive record remains available, even across the transfer period. Wildlife sightings and surveys are also input to track the presence / absence of species and enable evaluation of the success of habitat management works.

Some services required by the country park for general operations are likely to be at a higher cost than previously under Somerset Council – this includes waste lifts by the Streetscene team, previously completed for free, and management of the fleet, previously completed by the Somerset Council Fleet garage. The team have sought savings in other externally sourced areas like arboricultural works and printing.

The Yeovil Country Park Countryside Ranger, Biodiversity Ranger and Community Heritage Officer (Somerset Council post with a £10,000 contribution from Yeovil Town Council) will attend committee in March 2025 to report on their work across the Country Park and heritage of Yeovil.

The most successful Halloween trail ever ran on Thursday 31st October – conservative estimates are 600 children plus families, so at least 1500 attendees / participants.

Yeovil Recreation Centre

The site has shifted into winter delivery with football and hockey featuring in core bookings and winter maintenance of the athletics arena and equipment underway.

The team have met with the Yeovil and Sherborne Hockey Club and Yeovil Olympiads Athletics Club (YOAC) to confirm the ongoing Community Use Agreements and arrangements. New conversations have been held with Yeovil College's sports department to ensure the College and its 150 sports students have access to the facilities, and that an even wider range of students can participate on a Wednesday afternoon during enrichment activities.

Supported by the Community Ambassadors the site is looking to host an unpaid work team on site to provide greater capacity for a range of maintenance and enhancement jobs across the site.

Recruitment to the grounds team will commence in November as the team transferred in August carrying a vacancy, this will ensure that the team is able to operate fully at the beginning of the spring season.

A succinct action plan is being developed for the Recreation Centre to bring together and allocate tasks across the activity and grounds staff and with partners – these cover short, medium and long term activities including securing Somerset Football Association funding for goal and net replacements and looking for funding for an outdoor gym.

A new annual Festival of Sport is being scoped with Yeovil College and YOAC continue to project manage the retrofitting of the Joanna France Clubhouse with British Gas funding, with solar panels due to be installed in 2025.

Devolution Tranche 2

The Council have proposed the 1st February 2025 for tranche 2 of devolution to take place.

At the current time the following issues need consideration as this phase progresses;

- Lack of knowledge on staff proposed to TUPE, and likely very few staff to TUPE, need to progress development of a new structure and recruitment ready for transfer of services.
- Provision of a depot and yard space for the open spaces vehicles and team. Some space can be made at Yeovil Recreation Center, but extra yard space should be sought via Somerset Council specifically around the small compound adjacent to Birchfield open space.
- Understanding of equipment to transfer and likely gaps in provision as Somerset Council will need to keep equipment to enable their ongoing works.
- Lack of growing space for In Bloom. Members are asked to consider the use of the bottom of the old ski center site as an accessible site, with parking where poly tunnels and nursery infrastructure could be developed. A number of other sites across the town were looked at but none provided the size, access and also security that the ski center does. A recommendation in the associated In Bloom committee report asks that the Director of Leisure and Environment can progress to secure quotes to clear an area, lay water and power and erect poly tunnels. The provision of composting toilets and rest facilities will also be considered.
- Known budget gap for delivery of Yeovil In Bloom
- The extra financial pressures of the above items.

The Committee are **RECOMMENDED**:

- 1) to note the report & proposed reporting cycles; and
- 2) to approve the use of an external Health & Safety specialist to perform an audit on policy and practice related to Health and Safety across the Council

Note: This Committee will be asked to recommend to the Finance and Policy Executive Committee, the proposal to progress costings to provide a new Growing Space at the bottom of the old ski centre site as detailed further in the separate In Bloom report

*(Katy Munday, Director for Leisure and Environment -
katy.munday@yeovil.gov.uk)*

11/215. UPDATE REPORT ON THE TRANSFER & FUTURE OF THE IN BLOOM PROGRAMME

Introduction

Yeovil Town Council has agreed, through the programme of devolution, to take on the management of the Yeovil In Bloom programme previously run by Somerset Council. This report summarises the financial challenges of that change and proposes an altered approach to enable future delivery of an In Bloom programme.

Recommendations

- 1) Members are asked to consider the report and agree to progressing a new community led and sustainable approach to the In Bloom scheme
- 2) Members are asked to agree to focusing growing efforts at the Old Ski Centre site. Establishing a new community Growing Hub and horticultural programme, alongside a Biodiversity Net Gain offer for the site.
- 3) Members are asked to agree the proposed roles for the new Open Spaces and In Bloom teams

Main Report

Programme run by Somerset Council (previously South Somerset District Council)

A 2017 Service Level Agreement sets out the original agreement that was established between South Somerset District Council and Yeovil Town Council. In 2024/25 Yeovil Town Council is committed to paying a total of £41,240 towards the costs of the scheme. The original scheme set out in the 2017 agreement covers a range of beds and roundabouts, further KPIs sought community participation and a medal result in the South West competition.

In 2024, due to the financial emergency at Somerset Council Yeovil Town Council have agreed through the programme of devolution to take on full management and costs of the Yeovil In Bloom programme.

The delivery of the scheme needs to change for the future for a number of reasons;

- There is no in-house supply of plants. The Lufton nursery site has closed and staff redeployed or left Somerset Council – a new growing site / nursey needs to be established. The Lufton nursery invested 40K in plants, a scale of investment that is not available to this Council.
- Confirmation is awaited as to whether any staff from Somerset Council remain to be TUPE'd under the scheme. A draft structure for Yeovil Town Council Open Spaces and In Bloom programme is suggested in this report as it is unlikely that any staff will TUPE from Somerset Council. The delivery of the Open Spaces function and In Bloom function are intrinsically linked and staff will be shared across the sites and programmes.

- The scheme needs to fit with sustainability criteria and be climate resilient – removing all use of peat compost, reduced watering requirements, using climate resilient species and species that support native biodiversity in the wider food chain.
- As recommend by the RHS there needs to be a shift towards bottom-up schemes-community driven and supporting community growing and nature’s recovery.
- Yeovil Town Council have proposed a 2025/26 operating budget for the whole scheme of £71,240 (an additional £30k), specialists at Somerset Council have agreed that the scheme in its current form (2024 delivery) costs substantially more to run per annum as costs and activities are provided by other wider team members or charged to other budgets e.g. the nursery budget (this was not reported at the time of the Council’s decision to deliver Yeovil in Bloom).

Future Proposals

The Council needs to agree a newly shaped In Bloom programme that takes into account budgetary limitations and the adopted climate emergency.

After the RHS Pride in Parks judging at Yeovil Country Park in October 2024 SW In Bloom and RHS Vice President Jon Wheatley has offered a working partnership with the town of Yeovil to support the journey to a community led and self sustaining programme. This means that extra RHS expertise is available to the Council to support our management and leadership of the In Bloom programme. Feedback from the 2024 main In Bloom judging (received November 1st) also supports this approach.

It is proposed that the “It’s Your Neighbourhood” awards and approach become the driver for the In Bloom programme, with plants grown in the town and expertise shared from a Growing Hub. Climate resilience is designed into all schemes and growing food becomes a key pillar of the scheme.

A new central growing hub (and nursery site) would need to be established; Council owned but with significant community involvement. This would provide plants for all civic schemes, plus sharing across wider community schemes. Plant swaps, growing education and formal training programmes would run through education partners at the site. After a review of Town Council owned potential sites the old ski centre does offer the best opportunity for success of such a proposal. The size of the ski centre site would also allow for a small tree nursery. The site is 1.25 Ha of land surrounded by Country Park pasture land at Summerhouse Hill, plus native woodlands and private pasture farmland. The ski carpark remains in place on the slope, but since closure in 2007 nature has taken its course and both scrub and grassland have naturally developed on the site. Neighbouring Summerhouse Hill includes nationally important lowland dry acid grassland priority habitat, this assemblage has started to naturally extend into the ski slope footprint, particularly at the top end of the site.

Any development of the site that impacted this priority habitat would now be financially unviable since the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The best outcome for

the site is considered to be a combination of community growing / nursery site at the bottom of the slope, a tree nursery plus wildflower and seed plots centrally, allowing further development of the priority acid grassland and native woodlands on the top slopes and edges. By progressing a BNG survey and proposal for site it can be offered to developers for their local BNG offsetting requirements, securing new improved habitat and income for the Council.

To coalesce successes in horticulture and growing as part of a future programme it would be beneficial to organise new events to showcase the skills and produce generated by the community. A Yeovil plant & flower show is proposed to take place at the Ninesprings site.

As a partner of the RHS South West the Council would work to showcase community led initiatives – documenting and sharing its horticultural journey as a demonstrator model for others.

Staffing

The following roles are proposed across Open Spaces and the In Bloom programme, based on the assumption that no staff will TUPE from Somerset Council. This will be have to be altered if any staff do TUPE.

Operations Manager (also covering the Grounds team at Yeovil Recreation Centre and Play function) £48K including on costs

Gardener & lead horticulturalist £42K including on costs

Engagement & Participation Officer £42K including on costs

Open Spaces team members x 2, £64K including on costs

Total cost of staffing for Open Spaces and In Bloom - £196,000

Budget available for In Bloom £71,240

Budget available for Open Spaces £232,614

Total budget available - £303,854

Remaining budget for operational delivery - £107,854

Next steps

Confirm with Somerset Council any TUPE staff implications and from there finalise the new structure and budget for delivery.

Progress any recruitment needs

Agree with the steering group the In Bloom programme for 2025 with updated Terms of Reference

Progress a costing proposal for the old Ski Centre Site. Request transfer of nursery equipment and infrastructure from the disused Lufton site as part of the programme of devolution.

Consult and partner with appropriate groups and organizations to deliver strands of the programme, widening the reach of the steering group.

Programme regular meetings with RHS mentors to track progress and receive advice

Research funding streams and sponsorship for capital elements. Partner with local business to deliver a sustainable funding strategy.

Complete a BNG baseline survey for the ski centre and offer up slope options via Somerset Council Planning for agreements with local developers.

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED**:

- 1) to consider the report and agree to progressing a new community led and sustainable approach to the In Bloom scheme;
- 2) to recommend to the Finance and Policy Executive Committee to focusing growing efforts at the Old Ski Centre site. Establishing a new community Growing Hub and horticultural programme, alongside a Biodiversity Net Gain offer for the site; and
- 3) Members are asked to agree the proposed roles for the new Open Spaces and In Bloom teams

*(Katy Menday, Director for Leisure and Environment -
katy.menday@yeovil.gov.uk)*

11/216. PROPOSED GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN FOR YEOVIL

Introduction

This report sets out proposals to create a new strategic direction for green infrastructure for Yeovil.

As the Council takes on ownership and management of most of the publicly accessible open spaces across the town there is a key opportunity to take a strategic view on the management of, and access to, these spaces. A Green Infrastructure Strategy for Yeovil would provide a coherent approach and engage all the multitude of front line teams and community groups that already play a huge part in Yeovil's green offer.

A new strategy would enable holistic consideration of the challenges currently facing Yeovil and the Council, including access to land for projects, budgets & funding.

Decisions

- 1) Members are asked to comment on the proposal for a new Green Infrastructure Strategy, a Green Print for Yeovil.
- 2) Members are asked to agree to the progression and submission of a grant application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund if the Expression of Interest is successful.

Main Report

A Green Print for Yeovil - a future vision

A new Green Infrastructure strategy would seek a number of outputs and outcomes for the town. With devolution now underway Yeovil is in a strong position to adopt this place based approach - building on existing strong community networks, partnering with businesses and working together to attract strategic grants and investment.

Natural England is the national lead for Green Infrastructure and their guidance provides five key Principles of Green Infrastructure - these would underpin any strategy

- Nature rich and beautiful places
- Active and healthy
- Thriving and prosperous
- Improved water management
- Resilient and climate positive

By mapping the assets of the town, engaging with community and business partners and matching proposed projects to available land communities would be enabled to grow grass roots projects that benefit health and wellbeing. Through the central provision of biodiversity advice, all spaces would deliver more towards nature's recovery. Linkages between projects and core areas would encourage the movement of people and wildlife, supporting active travel and building more resilient habitats.

The Council should be developing and enabling networks of people and nature – through well planned open spaces, greened routes, new growing spaces all embedded in a volunteering and a community led approach. New pride in the town would come from a mosaic of community led projects that enhance the town’s environment.

By working with Somerset Council’s Town Centre team, Active Travel team and the Rights of Way team the Council would seek to influence active travel and develop promotion of the Rights of Way network.

The 2023 guidance about managing parks and open spaces for Women and Girls could be implemented across a range of the town’s open spaces as management plans and statements are written for all spaces. Avon and Somerset’s Designing out crime officer has confirmed their support and time to advise on and plans for open spaces and travel routes.

All Yeovil residents should be able to access a green space within 15 minutes’ walk from home and use of greenspaces by groups and clubs should be enabled and not bureaucracy heavy. All these spaces, both private and publicly owned, make space for nature and locally led recognition schemes exist to celebrate great examples.

A key part of a new strategy would be the re-shape of the current In Bloom program. A new approach would ensure that it is financially viable and that the It’s Your Neighbourhood schemes are the driver for the whole program. Feedback from the RHS judging team for the 2024 scheme confirmed this approach as key to future success. A separate report sets out the challenges to the In Bloom program, including the loss of nursery growing space. This challenge presents an opportunity to focus hyper locally and aim to ensure all plants are grown in the town and expertise shared from a new Growing Hub. Land needs to be found to establish the Growing Hub and business partners encouraged to contribute to its set up and management. Climate resilience would be factored into all future In Bloom schemes and Yeovil would work in partnership with RHS SW In Bloom to showcase community led initiatives – documenting and sharing its green journey. After the recent RHS Pride in Parks judging visit to Yeovil Country Park in September the RHS have offered partnering and support, building on the success of the country park, as devolution of services progresses.

Education would be at the heart of a new Growing Hub, with trainees from partner organisations supporting the In Bloom program. Links to secondary schools and Yeovil College help with both core and alternative curriculum provision. Ambitions should include having one Yeovil secondary school offering the new Natural History GCSE from September 2025. Land focused and growing apprenticeships and graduate schemes are supported in the open spaces and country park teams, and across the wider project partners.

Physical activity and wellbeing would be considered and built into all the open spaces, and green prescribing routes would be developed to ensure prevention and early interventions are available for residents across the town. The pillars of the “Somerset

Moves” strategy from the Somerset Activity Sports Partnership (SASP) are considered and “developing active environments” is key in decision making about parks and open spaces.

A new Nature Hub should be developed to act as a front of house for the green efforts of Yeovil. An audit of locations refines where this should be located, but could include an appropriate extension to the existing Ninesprings building.

Watercourses and blue infrastructure is better valued and cared for. Education is provided to community projects about natural flood management. Expert partners like the Yeovil Community Rivers Trust are supported in their ambitions for Yeovil’s waterways.

The Yeovil treescape is valued and tree planting implemented where there is established need, building on the existing tree canopy cover report. Funding is secured to enhance tree planting. A small tree nursery is established on land within the town.

Carbon reduction and climate implications are factored into and assessed for each project element.

How do we achieve this?

- By working with existing groups and building on already strong foundations. Listening to community need and aspirations. Creating and adopting a shared plan with ownership across the community and business locally
- Providing enabling grants programs for things like insurance costs and “How to” packs for constituting groups
- Surveying residents and communities to ascertain ambitions and frustrations
- Through mapping to assess existing biodiversity and core areas and ensuring they are protected and conserved.
- By enabling use of Council land for community projects that fit with the aims of the adopted strategy e.g. a Growing Hub
- Through coordinating funding bids and partnering with business to drive investment in the shared plan
- Through work with schools and colleges in Yeovil to ensure education is embedded in all plans

The Nature in Towns & Cities grant fund

Administered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund this new grant fund is open for expressions of interest until 12th November 2024. Projects apply to receive revenue funding from 250,000 up to 1 million. Projects can be up to 5 years in duration and must focus on a single urban place. Projects are expected to include a range of partners, but the lead applicant is expected to be the local authority and primary land owner (of accessible greenspace). Although securing a grant from this fund is not essential to achieving a Green Infrastructure plan for Yeovil, it would fast-track and pump prime efforts.

An EoI totaling £300,000 has been submitted for Yeovil. The bid is made up of costs including:

Habitat assessments and management planning, eDNA sampling and mapping (air, soil and water), contaminated land surveys, tree canopy & cover reports and planting opportunities plan, flood assessment and review, active travel assessment and advice, mapping software and support, evaluation consultancy, community consultation events.

New staff and consultants costs to deliver - community engagement and development, landscape architecture and QS involvement, architectural advice, trial activities and actions, training.

Plus roles to ensure Yeovil Town Council has the capacity to handle the breadth of the project including - project management and IT resources, project delivery officer time to produce the integrated green infrastructure plan, business planning and funding development support.

The scope for Yeovil as set out in the Expression of Interest includes;

- Mapping of assets and proposed allocation / access to land assets for community use and restoration of nature – creating a new Green Print for Yeovil
- Use of local and national mapping layers to inform priority areas where interventions would help combat flooding (natural flood management) and urban heat islands, whilst bringing in restoration of Local Wildlife Sites currently in poor condition, plus management attention for priority habitats and species
- Ensuring that all key open spaces have management plans and are managed appropriately – to award winning standard (Green Flag or Pride in Parks)
- Building capacity to provide expertise to help communities in their biodiversity and growing ambitions – new advisory and practical roles funded and created for the town
- Requirement for a new Growing Hub – focused on a poly tunnel and maybe small tree nursery (supplying the In Bloom program) proposed for the old ski centre site
- A new front of house Nature Hub at the Ninesprings site to provide educational and visitor information and engagement sessions.
- A re-shape of Yeovil In Bloom to a sustainable, bottom up community led programme that focuses on “It’s Your Neighbourhood”
- Work with Somerset Council and town centre managers to progress urban greening – particularly in neglected urban spaces and at the Glovers Walk site
- Mapping of green corridors across the town to ensure optimum access to nature for people, and recovery of habitats through the principle of “bigger, better and more joined up”. Ensuring new potential corridors receive active interventions and management to improve them for people and nature. Could include land owned by partners like Abri.
- Working in partnership to maximise access to land, engagement and funding. So far partners include SPARK, Able to Achieve, Yeovil College, Abri Housing, Yeovil Community Rivers Trust, Avon & Somerset Police, Somerset Activity

Sports Partnership, Friends of Sidney Gardens, RHS South West, Friends of Yeovil Country Park, business partners and Somerset Council.

We will hear the outcome of the EoI in December and if successful would have until the end of March to formulate a full application for the funds.

[UK Councils invited to join and shape new initiative to improve access to nature and green space for millions of urban residents - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-councils-invited-to-join-and-shape-new-initiative-to-improve-access-to-nature-and-green-space-for-millions-of-urban-residents)

[£15million to help put nature at the heart of our towns and cities | The National Lottery Heritage Fund](https://www.national-lottery.com/heritage-fund)

Next Steps

Continue to work with partners on the development of a Green Infrastructure plan for Yeovil.

Secure development funding (revenue and capital) for the plan and build capacity to work with businesses, communities and educational establishments.

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED**:

- 1) to comment on the proposal for a new Green Infrastructure Strategy, a Green Print for Yeovil; and
- 2) to agree to the progression and submission of a grant application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund if the Expression of Interest is successful.

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