Amenities Committee 27 August 2025 ITEM 13

Nea Meadows: Habitat and Planting Projects

1. Purpose of the Report
To update the Council on the 2025 Management Plan and the Car Park Replanting Project, and to agree on next steps, including stakeholder coordination regarding the planting of Woodland Trust saplings.

2. Recommendation

a) That the Council notes the forthcoming 2025 Management Plan by Chris Gleed-Owen and agrees to revisit this item in September upon receipt of the full report.

b) That the Council agrees to develop and approve a detailed replanting plan for the car park area by the end of this month to ensure readiness for autumn planting.

c) That the Council initiates discussions with Highcliffe & Walkford In Bloom to set out opportunities for it to support planting activities aligned with agreed site management objectives.

3. Background
Two key environmental projects are currently underway:

- The 2025 Management Plan, being prepared by environmental consultant Chris Gleed-Owen, is intended to provide an updated framework for managing local biodiversity, open spaces, and habitat quality across the parish.
- The Car Park Replanting Project aims to improve the visual appearance and environmental value of a Council-managed car park area. A draft site layout has been produced, but no confirmed planting or landscaping plan has yet been approved.

In the meantime, Highcliffe & Walkford In Bloom has independently ordered 30 native saplings from the Woodland Trust for planting at the car park site, Council has not been formally involved in this activity, and no approval has been given. This action, while well-intentioned, highlights a need for coordinated stakeholder engagement to ensure all planting aligns with Council plans, health and safety, and long-term maintenance considerations.

4. Current Projects

2025 Management Plan

Chris Gleed-Owen is currently preparing the updated plan, which is expected to include recommendations on habitat management, planting regimes, biodiversity enhancements, and species monitoring. This plan will be essential for future land management decisions and external funding applications.

- The draft has not yet been received.
- The Council is advised to return to this matter in September 2025 once the report is available for review.

Car Park Replanting Project

- A draft layout map has been developed for the car park area but lacks detailed planting schedules, species lists, and maintenance planning.
- Autumn is the most suitable time for planting, so it is important that the Council confirms a plan as soon as possible.
- A working group or lead member may need to be identified to coordinate final design and implementation.

C. Stakeholder Management

- While community involvement is welcomed, the Council must retain oversight of planting on its land to ensure compatibility with maintenance, access, biodiversity goals, and public safety.
- Officers recommend a meeting with representatives from In Bloom to:
    - Clarify planting permissions
    - Review species selection and locations
    - Integrate community contributions into the overall replanting strategy

5. Implications

Equalities
Inclusive access and visibility must be considered in any planting layout to ensure that all members of the community can safely enjoy public spaces.

Environment
Positive impact expected through increased biodiversity and improved green infrastructure, provided planting is well planned and maintained.

Crime and Disorder
Clear planting layouts can help maintain sightlines and prevent anti-social behaviour in secluded areas.

Financial
Costs for the car park planting plan and implementation will depend on final design and material choices as well as site clearance. One quote has been received so far and the Assistant Clerk is in the process of obtaining others. Council may incur costs if saplings from In Bloom are unsuitable or require replanting elsewhere.

Resources
Council contractors will be needed for planting and ongoing maintenance. Additional input may be required for coordination with stakeholders.

Legal
The Council is responsible for the safe use and condition of its land and must ensure that all planting is authorised and risk-assessed.

Risk Management
Uncoordinated planting poses risks of liability, failure of saplings, and damage to underground utilities or visibility in car park areas.

6. Conclusion
The Council awaits the 2025 Management Plan and will revisit that matter in September once the report is available.

For the Car Park Replanting Project, a finalised planting plan must be confirmed by the middle of September to meet autumn deadlines.

Stakeholder engagement is required with Highcliffe & Walkford In to ensure community efforts are harmonised with Council objectives and safety responsibilities.