

Cherwell District Council

Executive

6 July 2020

Peat Free Compost

Report of the Assistant Director: Environmental Services

This report is public

Purpose of report

To set out the use of compost in the Landscape Maintenance Contract and how the amount of peat present in the growing medium for the urban centre floral units is being reduced. Peat is a non-renewal resource and using up large amounts of peat can be damaging to the environment in releasing stored carbon and damage finite areas of peat bog land

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note that the Landscape Maintenance Contractor uses no peat based products in any of the Grounds Maintenance activities.
- 1.2 To note that in 2020 the floral & bedding plants are grown in 50% peat free compost
- 1.3 To note that the percentage of peat free compost used by the floral unit & bedding plant supplier will increase beyond 50 % over the next few years and be fully peat free as soon as practicable & well before 2030;

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Officers at Cherwell District Council have been asked to report on the compost used in the delivery of the Landscape Service following a motion at the Council meeting on 24 February 2020 (See Appendix 1).
- 2.2 This Council manages a Landscape Maintenance contract providing services for this Council, Bicester Town Council, Brackley Town Council , Kidlington Parish Council, Oxfordshire County Council and South Northamptonshire Council. This contract was awarded for an initial period of 6 years in 2018 years with an option to extend for a further 3 years in 2024.
- 2.3 The contractor, Continental Landscapes Ltd is required to recycle 100% of all green waste produced through grounds maintenance activities, this is then used as a soil improver and as a mulch for shrub/woodland areas.

- 2.4 Floral units and bedding plants are produced under a contract with Baginton Nurseries. This is a contract was awarded in 2020 for an initial period of 2 years with an option to extend for a further two years in 2022.
- 2.5 Baginton Nurseries are committed to reducing the use of peat in the production of the Councils Floral Units. In 2020 the supply of the floral units and bedding plants will be grown in a 50% peat free compost mix.
- 2.6 The Government has set two targets
 - a) Retail use of peat to cease by 2020, for the domestic market.
 - b) Commercial use of peat to cease by 2030, recognising that the further development of alternative products to fully replace peat is required to deliver the same plant quality.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 The Landscape Maintenance Contract with Continental Landscape Ltd covers a range of green open space activities including grass cutting, tree maintenance, shrub maintenance and maintenance of floral displays and hanging baskets.
- 3.2 During the summer months a range of floral displays and hanging baskets are installed in three urban centres. These displays are important to enhance the appearance of the urban centres and to help instil pride of place in the local areas. Once installed these displays are fed & watered on a weekly basis.
- 3.3 The bedding plants for these arrangements are supplied via a contract by Baginton Nurseries. In 2020 the growing medium used will be a 50% peat free compost.
- 3.4 The Horticultural Industry have an agreement with government to move to peat free compost. The aim is for retail to move to peat free in 2020 and commercial growers to 2030 to allow the industry to replace peat based composts
- 3.5 Peat free products, currently available, are physically different to peat and react differently with regards to growing, irrigation and feeding. The net effect has been that most growers of short-term seasonal bedding plant crops have incrementally moved towards peat free use by reducing the peat content by up to 25%.
- 3.6 Our supplier Baginton Nurseries have increased the peat free element in the compost from 40% in 2019 to 50% for 2020, demonstrating environmental awareness and commitment to achieving the Government's target to cease the use of peat by 2030.
- 3.7 At this time, without a suitable replacement on the market, any further reduction beyond 50% will cause major problems with plant quality, the need for increased irrigation and fertiliser application, risk to the sustainability of plants throughout the growing season.
- 3.8 There would be financial implications if the decision is made to move away from the Government target to cease the use of peat before 2030. Contract costs for both the production of floral displays and their maintenance will increase due to the requirement to increase watering and feeding. Although formal contract negotiations

to vary the contract with our two suppliers has not been undertaken, from informal discussions Officers anticipate there would be a potential for a £10k increase in nursery production costs and up to £90k increase in maintenance costs.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The Council is minimising the use of peat based composts with the only area peat is present is in the growing of plants for floral displays & hanging baskets.
- 4.2 Commercial nurseries are moving towards becoming peat free by 2030. Moving too early to peat free is likely to result in a significant risk of additional costs.

5.0 Consultation

At this stage consultation has been limited to informal discussions with both contract suppliers.

If a change is recommended there would be need to consult with urban centre stakeholders, Town and Parish Councils, businesses and potentially the Councils sponsors.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified

Option 1: To reduce the amount of peat in the floral displays and bedding plant production so that they are peat free before 2030.

Option 2: To move to peat free compost early and have additional annual contract costs, a potential reduction in income with the risk of lowering the standard of appearance of the Urban Centres.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 There are potential implications for up to £100k increase in expenditure and a reduction in commercial sponsorship income, resulting in a significant increase against the revenue budget

Comments checked by:
Karen Dickson Strategic Business Partner
01295 221900 karen.dickson@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 There are no legal implications to this report unless a preference for other Options dictates significant change to the contract for the growing of floral and bedding

plants, in which event the legal services team will assist client officers by documenting any variations agreed in an auditable change process.

Comments checked by:

Richard Hawtin, Team Leader: Non-contentious, Email: richard.hawtin@cherwell-dc.gov.uk, Telephone: 01295 221695

Risk Implications

- 7.3 There is risk to the Council's reputation through the poor appearance of floral displays in the urban centres of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington as the plants are not properly maintained. This risk is managed as part of the operational risk register and as part of the contract.

Comments checked by:

Louise Tustian Head of Insight & Corporate Programme Email: Louise.Tustian@cherwell-dc.gov.uk, Telephone :01295 221786

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met	No
Community Impact Threshold Met	No

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Cherwell: Safe, Clean and Green

Lead Councillor

Councillor Dan Sames, Lead Member for Clean and Green

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Motion submitted to the 24 February 2020 Council meeting
Background Papers	
None	
Report Author	Ed Potter, Assistant Director: Environmental Services
Contact Information	0300 003 0105 ed.potter@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk