

GREENING WALLINGFORD TOWN CENTRE

Recommendation:

To locate moveable planters in the town centre containing small trees or large shrubs – first in pilot locations and if successful to consider location three in the Market Place.

1. Executive summary

There is a pressing need to increase biodiversity in Wallingford to reduce future climate change, reduce air pollution and improve the quality of our lives. Locating trees or large shrubs in the town centre would help deliver all these aims. These would be installed in planters so that they could be moved if required. We recommend that two planters in pilot areas in the town centre and if supported, add three to the Market Place.

2. Background

Wallingford Town Council is committed to enhancing our quality of life, requiring responses to climate change, pollution, mental and physical health issues and making the town more attractive to residents and visitors.

- In 2019 the UK Parliament declared a Climate Emergency and committed to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 to avoid the worst effects of climate change. In response, in May 2020, Wallingford Town Council declared a climate emergency
- In May 2024 Full Council resolved that the strategy for nature be approved. This includes a Biodiversity Action Plan, as required under the 2021 Environment Act, one action is to plant trees or large shrubs in the Market Place.
- In July 2024 Full Council resolved to sign up to the 'Heritage Declares' initiative that integrates environmental conservation and the conservation of historic assets.
- Our 'Vision for Wallingford' requires us "To enhance and protect our outdoor spaces through sustainable practices and environment-led strategies"
- Our 2024 Neighbourhood Plan has an action to enable and encourage new appropriate tree and hedgerow planting.
- At two successive Town meetings and several Committee meetings, residents have explicitly recommended planting trees in the Market Place to enhance its appeal and boost local business.
- South Oxfordshire District Council recognised the poor air quality in parts of Wallingford and installed an air quality monitoring system in the High Street in 2012.

3. Issue

Tree and large shrubs sequester carbon, buffer noise, improve air quality, cool the air, (if large) provide shade on sunny days, increase biodiversity. They create an environment that reduces mental health issues and enhance the beauty of urban areas attracting more visitors and boosting business. Locating trees or large shrubs in the town centre would help deliver all of the above mentioned aims.

The sub-surface of the town centre is full of pipes and cables and would not be suitable for direct planting. The Market Place is used for many events, such as the Friday Charter Market. Placing trees/shrubs in planters would mean

- they would not disturb sub-surface infrastructure
- they can be located where they do not inconvenience the Charter Market
- they could be moved using a fork-lift truck in required
- they can be replaced if they die or grow too large.
- they can be fitted with pipework to facilitate watering

Bunkfest has offered to provide funding for trees to off-set carbon emissions at the festival. Town Council would provide limited help, such as watering in the summer.

4. Options

Option 1 (preferred) locate 2 planters, around 1m x 1m, containing small trees in a pilot location. This would be an agreement between Wild about Wallingford and the land managers (agreement is being finalised). Species would be recommended by the Council's Tree Working Group. This would be for a trial period to gauge public opinion. If successful, add three planters containing small trees to the Market Place.

Option 2 do nothing and fail to take this opportunity to address a wide range of climate, pollution and health issues and make the town more attractive, boosting business.

5. Proposal

Councillors follow Option 1.

6. Supporting evidence

- Climate Central 2023 *The Power of Urban Trees*
<https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/the-power-of-urban-trees-2023>
- The Nature Conservancy 2020 *6 Ways Trees Benefit All of Us*
<https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/build-healthy-cities/cities-stories/benefits-of-trees-forests/>
- Woodland Trust 2021 *Urban trees and woodlands*
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/habitats/urban-trees-and-woodland/>

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Reviewed and approved by Town Clerk

