

Place Select Committee Task and Finish Group

Scrutiny Review of Planters in Residential Streets

**(DRAFT) Final Report
December 2020**

DRAFT

Place Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

Contents	Page
Select Committee membership and acknowledgements	4
Original Brief	6
Executive Summary	9
1.0 Introduction	13
2.0 Evidence	14
3.0 Findings and Conclusions	21
4.0 Recommendations	23
Appendix 1: Planter Mapping	
Appendix 2: Planter Photographs	

DRAFT

Task and Finish Group – Membership

Councillor Louise Baldock (Chair)
Councillor Pauline Beall
Councillor Luke Frost
Councillor Maurice Perry
Councillor Hilary Vickers

Acknowledgments

Councillor Mike Smith
Councillor Chris Barlow
Jamie McCann, Director of Community Services and Transport, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Craig Willows, Community Services Manager, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
John Angus, Projects Officer, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Stephen Bowerbank, CFYA Asset Manager, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Judy Trainer, Scrutiny Team Leader
Neil Mitchell, Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure Manager, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Margie Stewart-Piercy, Consultation and Corporate Affairs Manager, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Judy Trainer, Scrutiny Team Leader, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Rebecca Saunders-Thompson, Scrutiny Officer, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Nigel Loughton, Parkfield Residents Association
Andy Robinson, Cultivate Tees Valley
Karen Grundy, Catalyst

Contact Officer

Rebecca Saunders-Thompson, Scrutiny Officer
Tel: 01642 528957
Email: rebecca.saunders-thompson@stockton.gov.uk

Foreword

On behalf of the Place Select Committee, the Task and Finish Group are pleased to present the final report of its scrutiny review of Planters in Residential Streets.

This review was undertaken to assess the options for retaining, removing, or maintaining planters in residential settings across the Borough. One of the key findings to emerge from this review was that community planter projects positively impact areas by improving both the visual appearance of residential streets and improving the social and mental wellbeing of residents. It was also recognised that the sustainability of previous community projects depended on effective planning and coordination.

The review's recommendations reflect these key findings and the need to informally consult residents on proposed options for planters in their areas. The recommendations invite residents, community groups, tenants and resident associations, housing associations, town and parish councils, and local businesses to take on the role of adopting or sponsoring a planter or coordinating a community planting project.

The Task and Finish Group would like to extend our thanks to all of those involved during the scrutiny review. This includes Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Officers, Parkfield Residents Association, Cultivate Tees Valley, and Catalyst.



Councillor Louise Baldock
Chair

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will support the delivery of the Council Plan 2019-2022 in the following areas:

Environment and Housing

- Our vision is to make the Borough a better place to live and a more attractive place to do business with clean streets, carefully tended parks and open spaces, affordable and desirable housing.
- Key objective: Deliver effective environmental services.

Community Safety

- Our vision is to make the Borough a place where levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime are low and people feel safe and secure.

Health and Wellbeing

- Key objective: All people in the Borough live in healthy places and utilise assets within their communities.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

For the purpose of this review, planters are defined as fixed brick and concrete, (usually) rectangular structures in residential streets. This review will not focus on other forms of planters, such as flower tubs/buckets or baskets attached to railings.

There is currently no dedicated funding set aside in Care for your Area's (CFYA) budget for the maintenance of street planters. Some residents have complained that the planters make their street untidy, due to the lack of maintenance. When they were regularly maintained with flowering plants they presented a very attractive feature. However, in many cases now, they present the opposite effect. Some of the planters are very overgrown with weeds, some with nettles and thorny plants, which could create a risk of injury to children playing nearby. Many attract antisocial behaviour such as rubbish dumping and vandalism. Dog faeces and more sinister items, such as needles, have also been dumped in the planters. On a few isolated occasions, bricks have been removed from the planters and thrown at properties and vehicles in the street.

Some ward councillors have used the Community Participation Budget (CPB) to fund the removal of these planters at the request of residents. However, many are finding that there are higher priority needs that take up the CPB. Also, the cost of removing these planters can represent a significant proportion of the annual budget.

CFYA are required to intervene to carry out some maintenance on these planters if they become damaged, particularly where they become unsafe. They would also have to deal with any resulting anti-social behaviour. For example, an increase in litter on the public highway and the possibility of vermin being attracted to overgrown planters, requiring funding from their already restricted maintenance budget.

This review will investigate the options for retaining, maintaining or removing planters in residential streets.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- Mapping the location of planters across the Borough and identifying who has maintenance responsibility (SBC or Thirteen or any other third party)
- Are any planters being maintained by residents and/or community groups?
- What condition are planters in, regardless of who maintains them?
- What is the current maintenance regime for planters which are the responsibility of SBC?
- What might be the economic or social impact of any anti-social behaviour associated with planters?
- How many requests have been received via the Community Participation Budget (CPB) (actioned or not) to remove planters?
- How many requests have been received to improve or maintain planters, through CPB or Care for your Area (CFYA)?
- What costs might be involved in removing planters?
- What are the potential impacts of removal?
- Is there an economic and social benefit in removing some of these planters?
- What costs might be involved in repairing and replanting planters?
- What are the economic and social benefits in keeping some of these planters?
- What do local residents think should happen with the planters in their streets?
- How much interest and appetite is there within the community to take responsibility for some?
- What lessons can the community offer in terms of past success and failure in maintaining planters?
- What scope is there for other third parties to take over responsibility? (For example RSLs, local businesses, brownies, guides, scouts or cubs, youth clubs etc.)

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, Council.

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

Six months:

Scope and Project Plan agreed – February 2020

Evidence gathering – September - November 2020

Draft Recommendations – November 2020

Final Report – December 2020

Submission to Cabinet – January 2021

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

Stockton-on-Tees Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2018-21, Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan 2019.

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

SBC Officers

- Background information.
- Maintenance and repair costs.
- Evidence of previous planter removals and costs.
- Role of street cleansing in maintaining planters.
- Evidence from Community Safety on anti-social behaviour around planters.
- Evidence of previous community planter projects.

Councillors

- Success/failure of planters in their area.
- Examples of any community-maintained schemes.
- Impact/examples of vandalism to planters and related anti-social behaviour.

Parkfield Residents Association

- Lessons learned from previous community planter projects.

Community Gardening Groups

- Evidence of community gardening projects.

Catalyst

- Grantfinder Database search.
- Evidence of potential funding opportunities for future community projects.

Executive Summary

The aim of the review was to investigate the options for retaining, maintaining or removing planters in residential streets. The review examined if anti-social behaviour would be reduced and savings would be made if planters were removed or whether planters could be given a new lease of life by seeking third party or community involvement.

The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- Community planter projects can have a positive impact on areas by improving them visually as well as improving the mental and social wellbeing of residents.
- There are 94 brick planters in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees. Of these, 86 are owned by Stockton Borough Council, 7 are owned by Thirteen Housing Group, and 1 is owned by a Town Council.
- Some wards have a larger number of brick planters than other wards.
- There are variations in planter size and location. Some planters are relatively small and are located on terraced streets. Larger planters are also present in some residential streets as well as on public highways and at shopping parades.
- The condition of planters also varies across the Borough. There is evidence of some community maintenance of certain planters. Other planters are overgrown and contain thorny bushes which are unattractive and have attracted anti-social behaviour.
- The maintenance regime for planters, carried out by SBC, includes an assessment of the condition of planters and annual pruning. Additional pruning in the summer has been carried out upon request and to prevent obstruction or overhanging on the highway. Street cleansing teams also collect litter found in planters as part of their regular regime.
- Several complaints about planters, and requests by residents to remove planters, have been received by SBC in recent years.
- A number of brick planters have been previously removed. External funding was secured to assist with financing the cost of these removals.
- The cost to remove planters varies depending on the size of planter, the location, paving type, and replacement options.
- There can be negative environmental and social impacts of removing planters.
- A Borough-wide community/residents project, or several smaller projects, were considered as a means of maintaining planters in the future.
- Previous community projects to improve residential areas had been successful in engaging residents in taking ownership over transforming their area. Most notably, the SBC led *Alleyways Project*.
- Lessons learned from previous community projects included the importance of co-ordination and planning for the sustainability of projects.

- Areas with a higher turnover of residents might struggle to sustain maintenance projects in the long term.
- The option of a small, pilot project, in a few locations across the Borough was considered. Lessons learned from the pilot project would influence and shape longer-term projects.
- Sustainable partnerships could be built with local businesses and charitable trust. In particular, the ethos of Cultivate Tees Valley is aligned with a community planter project.
- Catalyst's *Grantfinder Database* could be used in the future to source funding for community projects. Catalyst could also aid with writing funding bid applications and potentially provide volunteers for a future community project.
- Potential volunteers could also be drawn from *Bright Minds Big Futures*.
- Using existing partnerships with external organisations, it would be achievable to engage with residents about future community projects. Social Media platforms and the Catalyst bulletin are two examples of publicity methods.
- Support for community projects may be received from Town Councils and Housing Groups.
- It would be more advantageous to gather residents' views on planter projects through informal methods rather than by conducting a formal public consultation.

Conclusion

Brick planters have been installed in residential settings across the Borough over the last fifty years for several reasons. The size and condition of brick planters varies from ward to ward. Planters are maintained by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. Community maintenance projects have also taken place in the past in some wards.

The task and finish group have assessed the current condition of planters to determine whether they should be removed or maintained. The group's considered view was that there was benefit in retaining planters, provided these could be maintained appropriately and that volunteers should be encouraged to help with planting and maintenance. It was also agreed that local communities may prefer that some planters are removed. However, funding would need to be secured to achieve this. Residents would need to be consulted informally to gather their views on proposed options for planters in their area.

Assistance and support from Catalyst and community gardening groups, such as Cultivate Tees Valley, could facilitate the recruitment of volunteers for community planter projects and the submission of funding bid applications. It was also recognised that tenants and residents' associations, housing associations, town and parish councils, and local businesses might be willing to adopt or sponsor planters in their areas.

Recommendations

1. That, in line with usual practice, SBC continue to maintain the structure of planters, where repairs are needed, and any proposals to remove planters, following consultation with local residents, be considered on a case by case basis together with funding options.
2. That residents and community groups be invited to take on the role of coordinating and/or pilot planting through approaches to organisations such as:
 - o Cultivate Tees Valley, Shaw Trust, Billingham Environmental Link Programme (BELP), and other community gardening groups
 - o Tenants and Residents Associations
 - o Residents who are allotment holders or are on allotment waiting lists
 - o Councillors and Residents
 - o Community Partnerships
 - o BMBF, schools, and youth organisations
3. That Town and Parish Councils are asked whether they would be interested in taking on responsibility for any planters in their areas.
4. That Housing Associations are asked whether they would be interested in taking on responsibility for planters in areas where they have stock.
5. That local businesses are encouraged to sponsor planters or provide materials or funding.
6. That interested residents and groups be encouraged to:
 - a. Consider the longer-term maintenance and funding strategies and low maintenance planting schemes, such as wildflowers;
 - b. Consider the repurposing of planters, for example, as benches/seating
 - c. Work with local ward Councillors to consult the local community and encourage their involvement
7. That, following Cabinet approval, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group present the final report to the new Community Partnerships to seek interest from residents and groups.
8. That interested parties be signposted to Catalyst's Grantfinder Database.
9. That Community Services provide advice, guidance and appropriate support to interested individuals as part of approving planting schemes.
10. That opportunities are publicised with a view to seeking interest from individuals and groups and that successful pilot initiatives be publicised to encourage more interest.

11. That the inclusion of planters in residential settings should not be supported in future developments unless long term funding for their upkeep is identified and secured.

DRAFT

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report presents the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of Planters in Residential Streets (Task and Finish).

1.2 The aim of the review was to investigate the options for retaining, maintaining or removing planters in residential streets.

1.3 The review examined if anti-social behaviour would be reduced and savings would be made if planters were removed or whether planters could be given a new lease of life by seeking third party or community involvement.

1.4 The Committee examined the following key lines of enquiry:

- Mapping the location of planters across the Borough and identifying who has maintenance responsibility (SBC or Thirteen or any other third party)
- Are any planters being maintained by residents and/or community groups?
- What condition are planters in, regardless of who maintains them?
- What is the current maintenance regime for planters which are the responsibility of SBC?
- What might be the economic or social impact of any anti-social behaviour associated with planters?
- How many requests have been received via the Community Participation Budget (CPB) (actioned or not) to remove planters?
- How many requests have been received to improve or maintain planters, through CPB or Care for your Area (CFYA)?
- What costs might be involved in removing planters?
- What are the potential impacts of removal?
- Is there an economic and social benefit in removing some of these planters?
- What costs might be involved in repairing and replanting planters?
- What are the economic and social benefits in keeping some of these planters?
- What do local residents think should happen with the planters in their streets?
- How much interest and appetite is there within the community to take responsibility for some?
- What lessons can the community offer in terms of past success and failure in maintaining planters?
- What scope is there for other third parties to take over responsibility? (For example, RSLs, local businesses, brownies, guides, scouts or cubs, youth clubs etc.)

1.2 The Committee has taken evidence from Council Officers, Parkfield Residents Association, Cultivate Tees Valley, and Catalyst.

2.0 Evidence

Background: Brick Planters Report

2.1 During the 1970's/80's the majority of the raised brick planters that are found across the Borough, were installed as part of road safety project's to traffic calm various streets, particularly those found in the old terraced street in the following Wards; Newtown, Mandale & Victoria, Parkfield & Oxbridge and Stockton Town Centre. These were either installed instead of bollards at a road point closure, within a pedestrianised paved area when a road was closed to through traffic or as part of a build out to create a traffic calming chicane in a street.

2.2 The installation of a raised brick planter allowed for the introduction of 'greenery' into the street scene, which was previously devoid of vegetation, without the need to excavate large areas of the original road surface and to avoid any diversions to the underground utility apparatus.

2.3 There are other raised brick planters across the borough which were installed during the creation of new housing developments built at a similar time, when it is believed that the installation of this feature was fashionable with architects and designers. Some of these were positioned within the curtilage of the property as part of their garden, while others were located in the public space.

Planter locations

2.4

Ward	Total	SBC	Thirteen Group	Town Council
Billingham North	1	1	0	0
Billingham South	6	6	0	0
Fairfield	1	1	0	0
Grangefield	3	3	0	0
Hartburn	1	1	0	0
Ingleby Barwick East	2	2	0	0
Mandale & Victoria	15	14	1	0
Newtown	1	1	0	0
Parkfield & Oxbridge	40	40	0	0
Stainsby Hill	12	6	6	0
Stockton Town Centre	5	5	0	0
Village	3	3	0	0
Yarm	4	3	0	1
Total	94	86	7	1

2.5 The table above highlights the number of brick planters across the Borough, in which Ward they are located and whether they are in the ownership of Stockton Borough Council (SBC), the housing provider, Thirteen Group, who are now the owners of the former Council housing stock or a Town Council. The brick planters in the ownership of individual properties have not been recorded.

Maintenance

2.6 The condition of the brickwork of the planters is included in the cyclic highway inspections of the whole street and in addition their condition would be assessed following

any complaints or reports of damage/vandalism. Any vegetation within the planters would be pruned once a year during the autumn/winter with additional summer pruning carried out where this causes an obstruction, overhanging the highway. The collection of any litter found in the planters would be carried out as part of the regular street cleansing regime for the area.

Resident complaints

2.7 In recent years a number of complaints have been received by the Council from local residents, requesting that the brick planters be removed. These complaints varied from them being damaged, unsightly, unkempt, a litter trap or an attraction for children to play on/in.

2.8 Recorded complaints are as follows:

Ward	Location	Date	Comment
Bishopsgarth & Elm Tree	Linton Close	2016/17	owned by residents
Grangefield	Oxbridge Court	2016/17 2018/19 2019/20	Ward Councillors considered a project to remove through Community Participation Budget (CPB)
Mandale & Victoria	Mansfield Avenue	2014/15 2018/19	Removed in 2018/19 through CPB
Mandale & Victoria	102/116 Gilmour Street	2014/15 2019/20	
Mandale & Victoria	60/80 Gilmour Street	2019/20	
Mandale & Victoria	Hartington Close	2019/20	
Mandale & Victoria	Roseberry View	2007/08	
Newtown	Durham Road	2011/12	Removed in 2011/12 through CPB
Parkfield & Oxbridge	Poplar Grove	2009/10	
Parkfield & Oxbridge	St Peters Road	2009/10	
Parkfield & Oxbridge	Wren Street	2013/14 2018/19	
Stainsby Hill	Vulcan Way	2019/20	Owned by Thirteen Group
Stockton Town Centre	Bickersteth Walk area	2018/19	Thirteen Group undertook a project in 2019/20 to remove/improve
Stockton Town Centre	Ewbank Drive	2015/16	
Stockton Town Centre	Melville Walk	2010/11	
Stockton Town Centre	Russell Street	2015/16 2019/20	Removed in 2019/20 through CPB
Yarm	Valley Drive	2017/18	Replanted in 2017/18 through CPB

Anti-social Behaviour

2.9 Some of the requests received for the brick planters to be removed stated the reason to be these features were attracting incidents of anti-social behaviour. However, analysis of the reports of incidents of anti-social behaviour in the areas where the brick planters are located does not support this.

While on some occasions the reports indicated that the planters were being climbed on or vandalised, it was found that offenders either lived in the particular street or it was used as part of their route. There was a high likelihood that the reported incidents of anti-social behaviour would have occurred if there weren't a brick planter at that location.

Previous projects

2.10 During a period from 2003 to 2008 projects were undertaken to remove several brick planters across Parkfield & Oxbridge and Stockton Town Centre Wards to improve the local street scene. These projects were funded with budgets secured through external sources, with grants from the Lottery and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund totalling approximately £120,000.

2.11 Between 2002 & 2009 a Neighbourhood Management pathfinder project operated across the Parkfield/Mill Lane areas, with funding as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. As part of this project support was given to local residents for hanging basket and floral displays, with the local residents planting up the brick planters within their own streets. This project had mixed success across the area and involvement waned following the exit of the pathfinder project.

2.12 More recently several projects have been undertaken through the Community Participation Budget (CPB):

- Russell Street (2019/20) – planter removed and replaced with tree in tree pit
- Mansfield Avenue (2018/19) – planter removed and area paved
- Valley Drive (2017/18) – planter replanted
- Winston Street (2013/14) – planters replanted
- St Peters Road (2009/10) – planters removed and replaced with trees in tree pits

Estimated costs

2.13 Replacement of brick planter with a tree, with a new tree in a specially constructed tree pit to contain tree roots, protecting damage to underground utility apparatus. Example below is St Peter's Road, before and after. Approximate cost - £4,000 based on the size of planter below:



2.14 Removal of brick planter, paving the area in keeping with surrounding. Example below is Mansfield Avenue, before and after. Approximate cost - £3,000 based on the size of planter below



2.15 Removal of brick planter and chicane build out, installing the area back to carriageway. Example below is Edwards Street, before shows the area after the planter

was removed when it was assessed the chicane build out was still beneficial. Approximate cost - £4,000, including the removal of a planter.



2.16 Replanting, including replacing/refreshing the topsoil. Approximate cost - £250-£1,000, depending on size of planter and if resident involvement with the planting

Impacts of removing the planters

2.17 Although there are some obvious benefits to the removal of brick planters there is also some potential negatives.

2.18 In some locations the planters are the only source of 'green' in the area with the trees providing climate control and health benefits with shading reducing the local air temperature and the tree improving air quality. In locations where there are trees within the planters it would be wanted to replace these if the planters were to be removed.

2.19 The removal of a planter with the area being only paved, for younger children this additional space may provide a beneficial play space close to the home, but there may be concerns of older children using the space; ball game complaints.

Brick Planter Report: Appendix 1 - Maps

2.20 See appendix 1 for mapping of planter locations.

Brick Planter Report: Appendix 2 - Photographs

2.21 See appendix 2 for planter photographs.

Members and Officers discussion on Brick Planter Report

2.22 The main issues were discussed as follows:

2.23 Extra pruning is carried out if complaints or comments are received from members or the public. This is also the case if complaints or comments are received about litter in planters.

2.24 The cost of removing planters can vary depending on the type of road surface surrounding the planter, for example it is more expensive to remove a planter on a cobbled street.

2.25 Members highlighted that they have experienced difficulties in the past when trying to get Thirteen Housing Group to assist or increase the maintenance of the planters they own.

2.26 It was acknowledged that there might be initial enthusiasm for a residential scheme to maintain planters, but this could change due to factors such as, residents moving away or passing away.

2.27 The issue of planters being used to facilitate illegal activity was raised.

2.28 Not all planters could, or should, be removed. It was agreed that residents should be involved in the future maintenance of planters. Members had previously discussed resident maintenance of planters in their own wards with potential volunteers.

2.29 Local or national businesses might be willing to adopt several planters. Town and Parish Councils were mentioned as potential adopters of planters. Funding for planters might be harder to attract in some wards and easier in other wards.

2.30 An SBC guidance document for individual volunteers/ groups could be produced to inform residents where and how they can dispose of waste from pruning and maintaining planters.

2.31 It would not be possible to loan tools to residents due to insurance costs and issues.

Parkfield Residents Association

2.32 The Task and Finish group received evidence from the Chair of the Parkfield Residents Association. The main issues were as follows:

2.33 Previous community gardening projects have covered residential streets across Parkfield, including, St Peter's Road, Winston Street and Camden Street. Various grants were secured to assist with funding projects. Britain in Bloom had funded projects in this past, but this funding had now ended. A partnership with *The Shaw Trust* was established. This included purchasing plants at a cheaper price and allowing young people to assist with growing plants from seed.

2.34 Young people from Parkfield and from outside of the area have participated in projects. It was recognised that young people were less likely to damage hanging baskets and planters if their siblings or friends had helped to maintain them. There were occasions where police officers assisted with planter maintenance alongside young residents and this aided with establishing positive relationships between the police and those young people.

2.35 Planters with large trees in were more difficult to maintain.

2.36 The Coronavirus pandemic during 2020 has hindered the continuation of community projects due to social distancing regulations.

2.37 It was difficult to sustain projects because of the high turnover of residents in the area.

2.38 It was suggested that the planters on Arlington Road could be removed due to the problems with trees in the planters.

Catalyst Stockton – Grantfinder Database

2.39 The Task and Finish group received evidence from the Community Project Manager at Catalyst Stockton. The main issues were as follows:

2.40 The purpose of the Grantfinder Database, as a means of providing information on possible funding opportunities, was explained. Several opportunities of potential interest to a community planter project were explored.

2.41 Catalyst offered support with writing funding bid applications in future. Catalyst also had a database of volunteers.

2.42 The amount of funding available was dependent on the size of the project. If several small planter projects were conducted, separate sources of funding could be combined. New funding opportunities for funding emerge regularly. A new search would need to be conducted, once a project/projects had been decided on, to produce an up-to-date report.

Cultivate Tees Valley

2.43 The Task and Finish group received evidence from a representative from Cultivate Tees Valley. The main issues were as follows:

2.44 The origins and aims of Cultivate Tees Valley were explained. Cultivate have worked with a variety of groups within the Borough. This included Primary school children and allotment holders in Thornaby.

2.45 Cultivate have worked in partnership, and continue to, with other organisations, such as Little Sprouts.

2.46 Plans to create an edible street were mentioned as an example of future projects. Cultivate have also received funding for projects and would be able to apply for grants in the future.

2.47 The increase in unemployment and problems with mental health has resulted in more people engaging with Cultivate as service users.

2.48 It was suggested that Cultivate could support a pilot project focussed on maintaining a small number of planters. All residents would be invited to get involved in the project and service users would be able to maintain planters as part of their weekly duties.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council – Alleyways Project

2.49 The Task and Finish group received evidence from an officer from Stockton Council's Environment, Culture, Leisure and Events directorate. The main issues were as follows:

2.50 The Committee were shown a video on the alleyways project. This covered the objectives of the project, how it was conducted, and the results.

2.51 Before the project, the alleyway contained unsuitable, and potentially dangerous, items. The transformation of the alleyway meant that children can now play safely. The project had changed the lives of the residents for the better, as well as improving the appearance of the alleyway. It was suggested that members of the public are more likely to get involved in a project where they have a greater awareness of the result. The residents have continued to maintain the alleyway. This has reduced the levels of maintenance required by Stockton Council's Care for Your Area team.

2.52 Methods of promotions included asking residents to place an alleyways project postcard in a front window to show their support.

2.53 The project received donations of materials, including paint, from local businesses and charitable trusts. Following the success of the first project, businesses approached SBC to offer support for future alleyway projects. Again, this included generous donations of materials.

2.54 Projects have also provided opportunities for apprentices to learn manual skills.

2.55 Efficient and effective co-ordination of projects is the key to sustainability.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council – Communications

2.56 The Task and Finish group received evidence from an officer from Stockton Council's HR, Legal and Communications directorate. The main issues were as follows:

2.57 Potential volunteers could also be drawn from *Bright Minds Big Futures*. Using existing partnerships with external organisations, it would be achievable to engage with residents about future community projects. Social Media platforms and the Catalyst bulletin are two examples of publicity methods.

3.0 Key Findings

- Community planter projects can have a positive impact on areas by improving them visually as well as improving the mental and social wellbeing of residents.
- There are 94 brick planters in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees. Of these, 86 are owned by Stockton Borough Council, 7 are owned by Thirteen Housing Group, and 1 is owned by a Town Council.
- Some wards have a larger number of brick planters than other wards.
- There are variations in planter size and location. Some planters are relatively small and are located on terraced streets. Larger planters are also present in some residential streets as well as on public highways and at shopping parades.
- The condition of planters also varies across the Borough. There is evidence of some community maintenance of certain planters. Other planters are overgrown and contain thorny bushes which are unattractive and have attracted anti-social behaviour.
- The maintenance regime for planters, carried out by SBC, includes an assessment of the condition of planters and annual pruning. Additional pruning in the summer has been carried out upon request and to prevent obstruction or overhanging on the highway. Street cleansing teams also collect litter found in planters as part of their regular regime.
- Several complaints about planters, and requests by residents to remove planters, have been received by SBC in recent years.
- A number of brick planters have been previously removed. External funding was secured to assist with financing the cost of these removals.
- The cost to remove planters varies depending on the size of planter, the location, paving type, and replacement options.
- There can be negative environmental and social impacts of removing planters.
- A Borough-wide community/residents project, or several smaller projects, were considered as a means of maintaining planters in the future.
- Previous community projects to improve residential areas had been successful in engaging residents in taking ownership over transforming their area. Most notably, the SBC led *Alleyways Project*.
- Lessons learned from previous community projects included the importance of co-ordination and planning for the sustainability of projects.
- Areas with a higher turnover of residents might struggle to sustain maintenance projects in the long term.
- The option of a small, pilot project, in a few locations across the Borough was considered. Lessons learned from the pilot project would influence and shape longer-term projects.

- Sustainable partnerships could be built with local businesses and charitable trust. In particular, the ethos of Cultivate Tees Valley is aligned with a community planter project.
- Catalyst's *Grantfinder Database* could be used in the future to source funding for community projects. Catalyst could also aid with writing funding bid applications and potentially provide volunteers for a future community project.
- Potential volunteers could also be drawn from *Bright Minds Big Futures*.
- Using existing partnerships with external organisations, it would be achievable to engage with residents about future community projects. Social Media platforms and the Catalyst bulletin are two examples of publicity methods.
- Support for community projects may be received from Town Councils and Housing Groups.
- It would be more advantageous to gather residents' views on planter projects through informal methods rather than by conducting a formal public consultation.

Conclusion

3.1 Brick planters have been installed in residential settings across the Borough over the last fifty years for several reasons. The size and condition of brick planters varies from ward to ward. Planters are maintained by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. Community maintenance projects have also taken place in the past in some wards.

3.2 The task and finish group have assessed the current condition of planters to determine whether they should be removed or maintained. The group's considered view was that there was benefit in retaining planters, provided these could be maintained appropriately and that volunteers should be encouraged to help with planting and maintenance. It was also agreed that local communities may prefer that some planters are removed. However, funding would need to be secured to achieve this. Residents would need to be consulted informally to gather their views on proposed options for planters in their area.

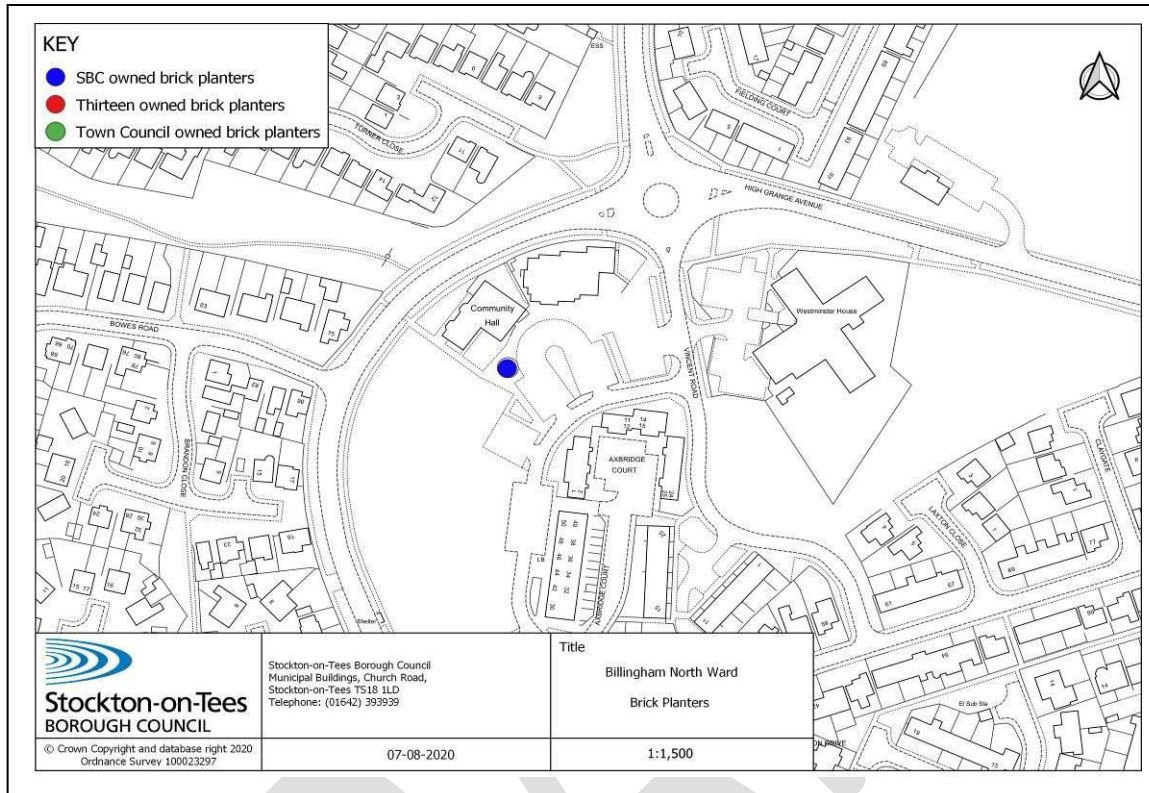
3.3 Assistance and support from Catalyst and community gardening groups, such as Cultivate Tees Valley, could facilitate the recruitment of volunteers for community planter projects and the submission of funding bid applications. It was also recognised that tenants and residents' associations, housing associations, town and parish councils, and local businesses might be willing to adopt or sponsor planters in their areas.

Recommendations

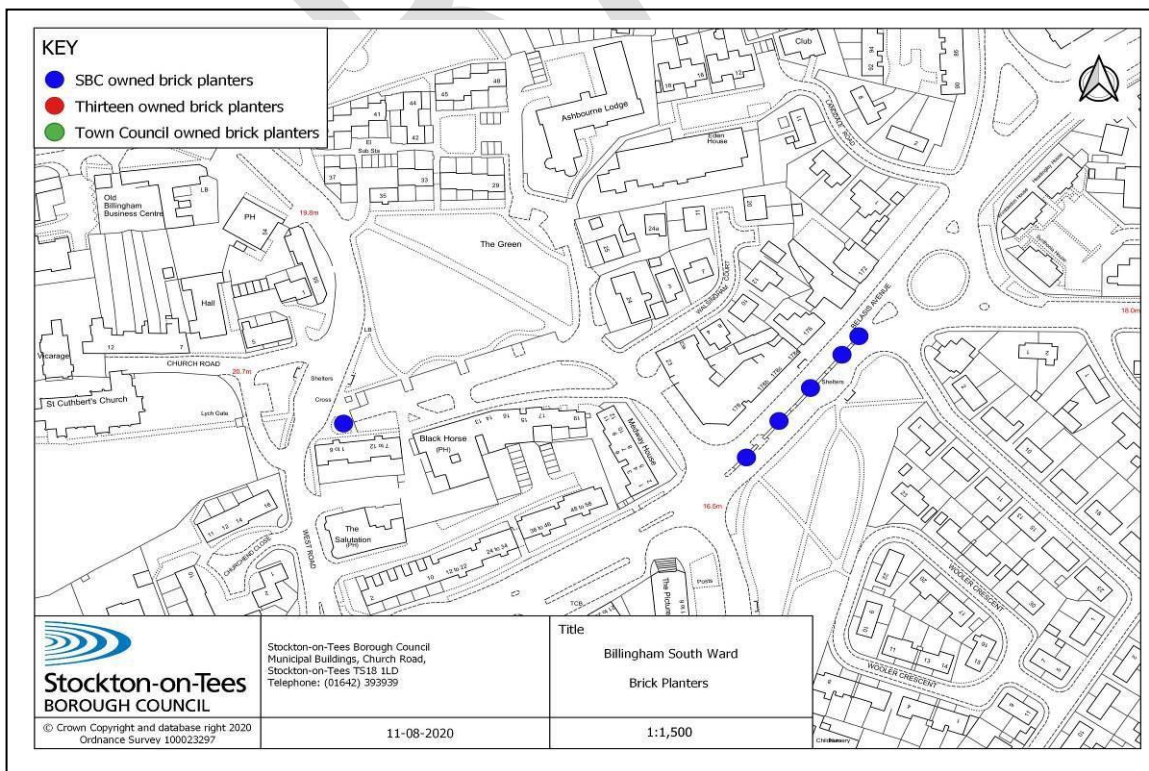
1. That, in line with usual practice, SBC continue to maintain the structure of planters, where repairs are needed, and any proposals to remove planters, following consultation with local residents, be considered on a case by case basis together with funding options.
2. That residents and community groups be invited to take on the role of coordinating and/or pilot planting through approaches to organisations such as:
 - Cultivate Tees Valley, Shaw Trust, Billingham Environmental Link Programme (BELP), and other community gardening groups
 - Tenants and Residents Associations
 - Residents who are allotment holders or are on allotment waiting lists
 - Councillors and Residents
 - Community Partnerships
 - BMBF, schools, and youth organisations
3. That Town and Parish Councils are asked whether they would be interested in taking on responsibility for any planters in their areas.
4. That Housing Associations are asked whether they would be interested in taking on responsibility for planters in areas where they have stock.
5. That local businesses are encouraged to sponsor planters or provide materials or funding.
6. That interested residents and groups be encouraged to:
 - a. Consider the longer-term maintenance and funding strategies and low maintenance planting schemes, such as wildflowers;
 - b. Consider the repurposing of planters, for example, as benches/seating
 - c. Work with local ward Councillors to consult the local community and encourage their involvement
7. That, following Cabinet approval, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group present the final report to the new Community Partnerships to seek interest from residents and groups.
8. That interested parties be signposted to Catalyst's Grantfinder Database.
9. That Community Services provide advice, guidance and appropriate support to interested individuals as part of approving planting schemes.
10. That opportunities are publicised with a view to seeking interest from individuals and groups and that successful pilot initiatives be publicised to encourage more interest.
11. That the inclusion of planters in residential settings should not be supported in future developments unless long term funding for their upkeep is identified and secured.

Appendix 1: Planter Maps

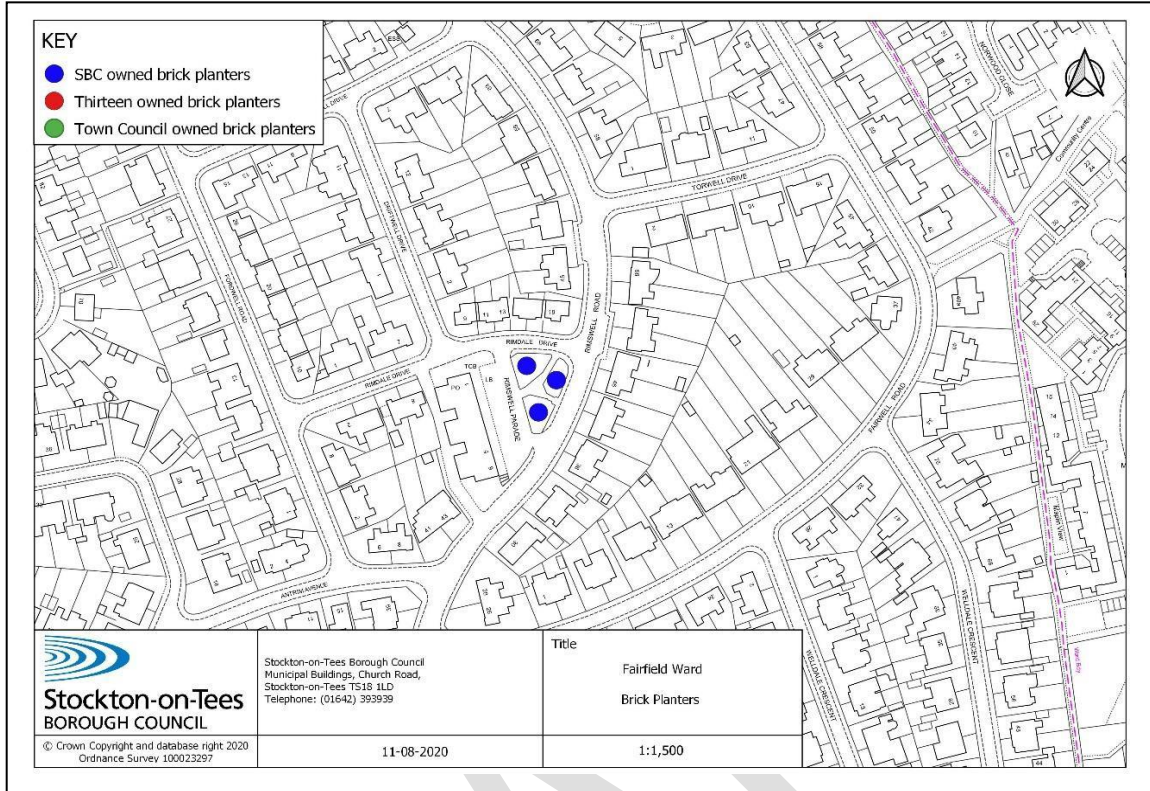
Billingham North



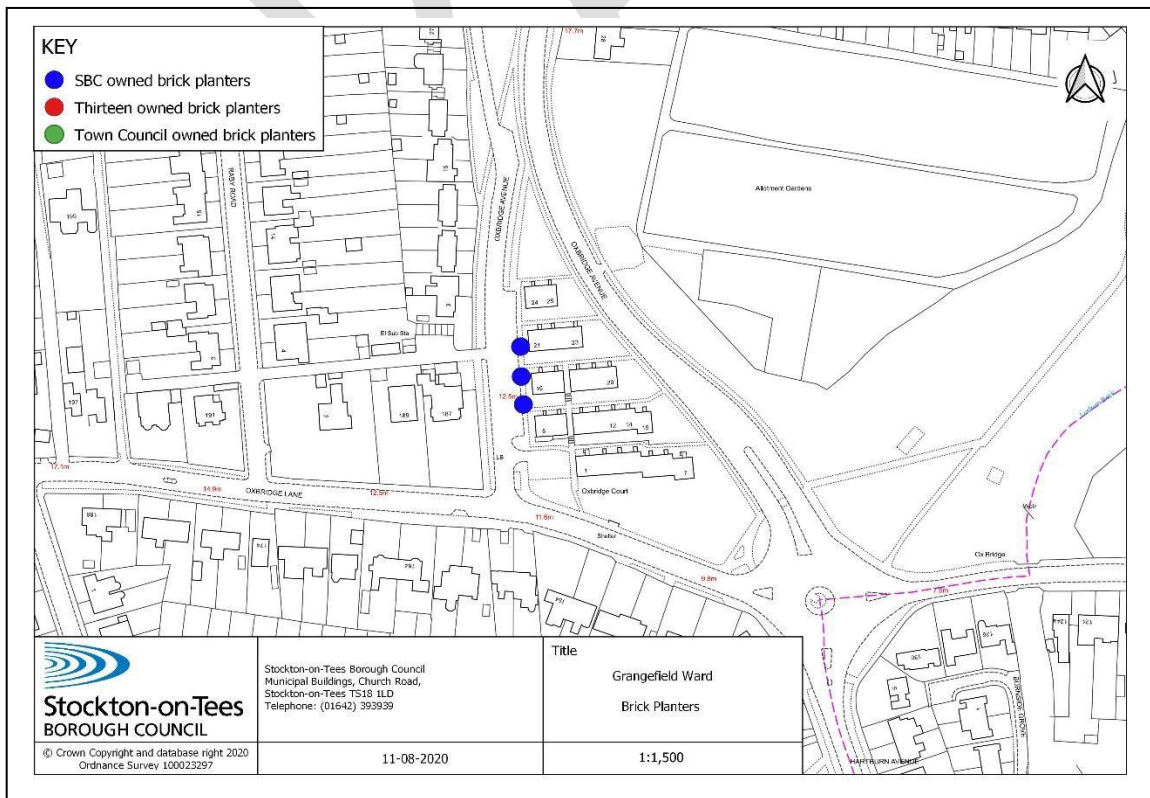
Billingham South



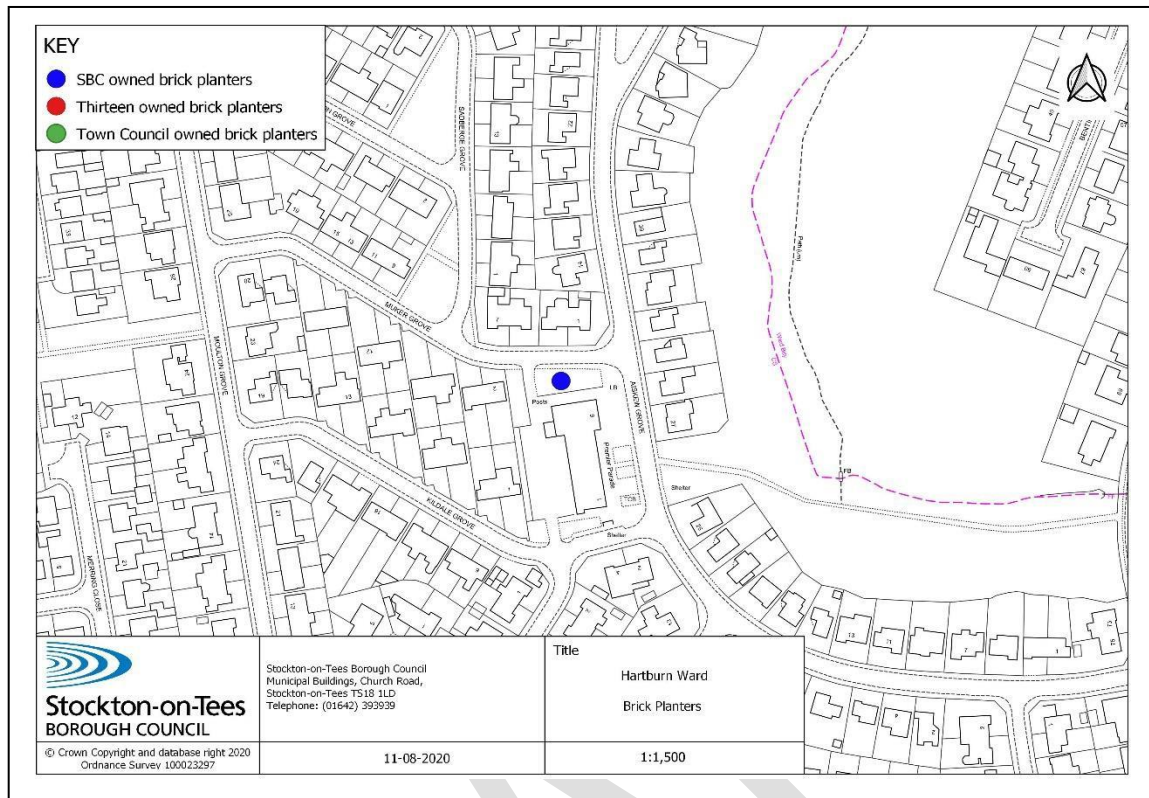
Fairfield



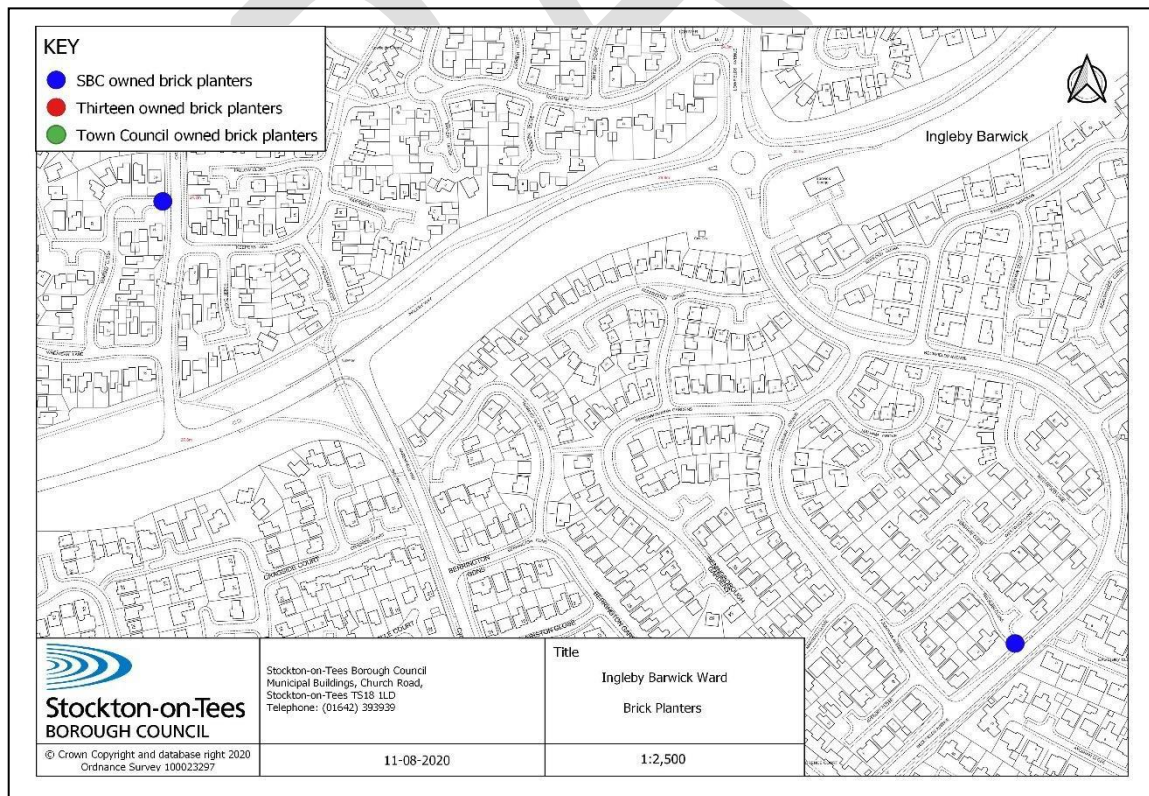
Grangefield



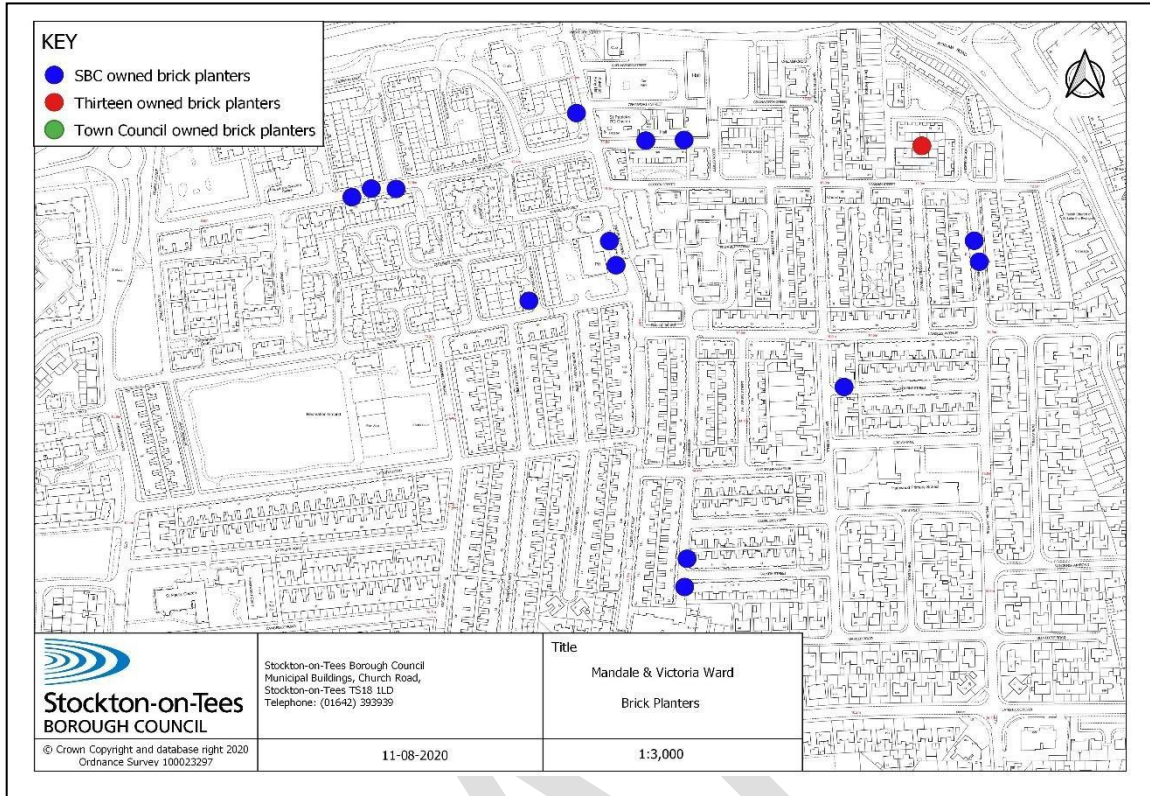
Hartburn



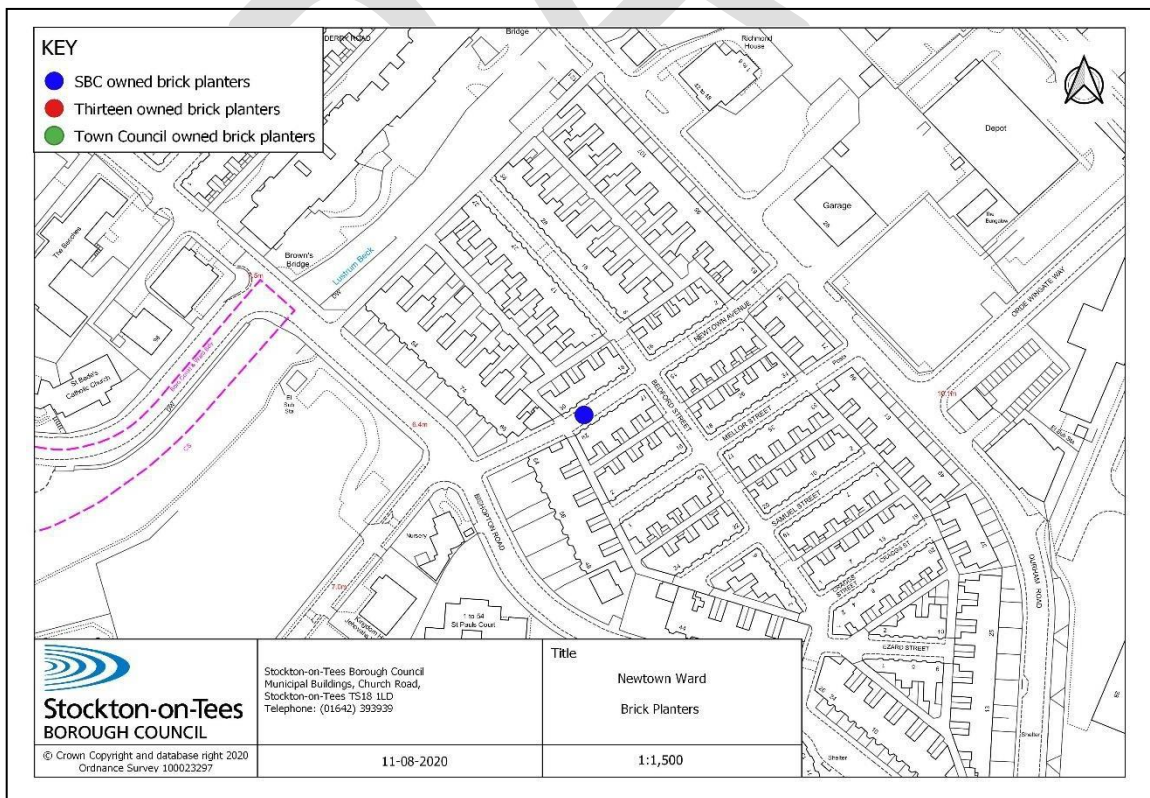
Ingleby Barwick East



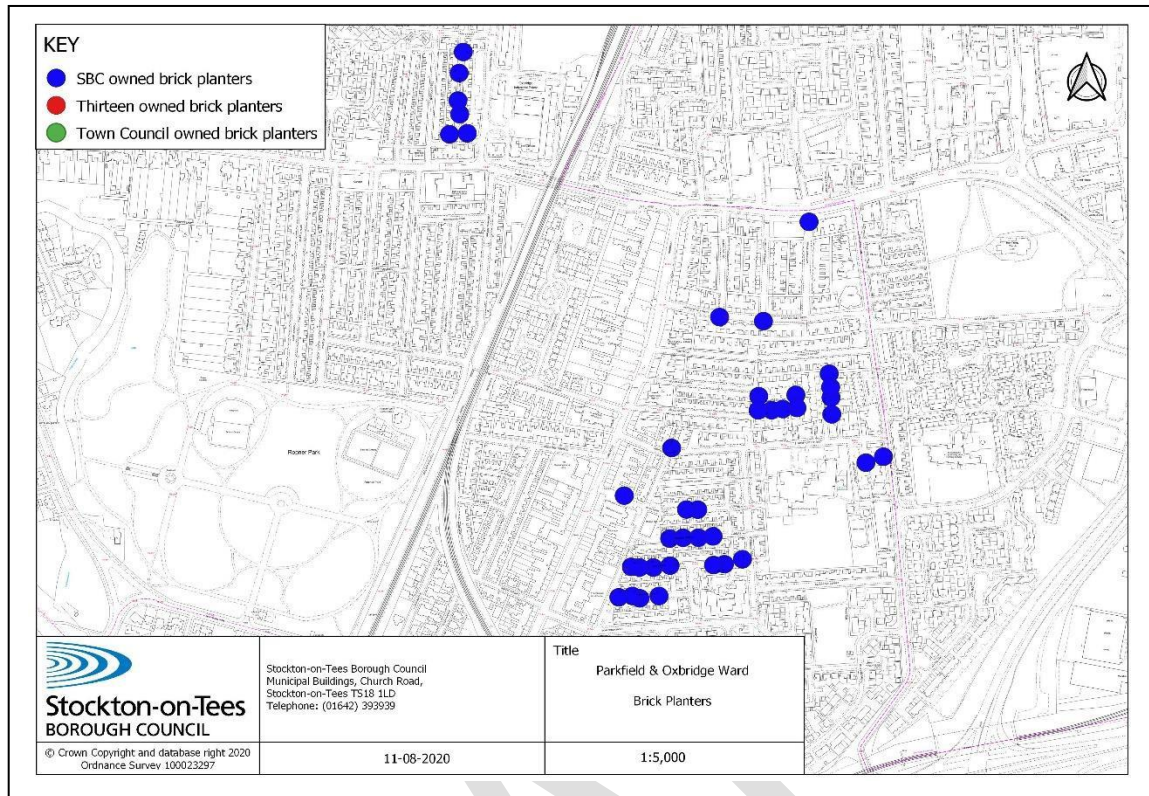
Mandale & Victoria



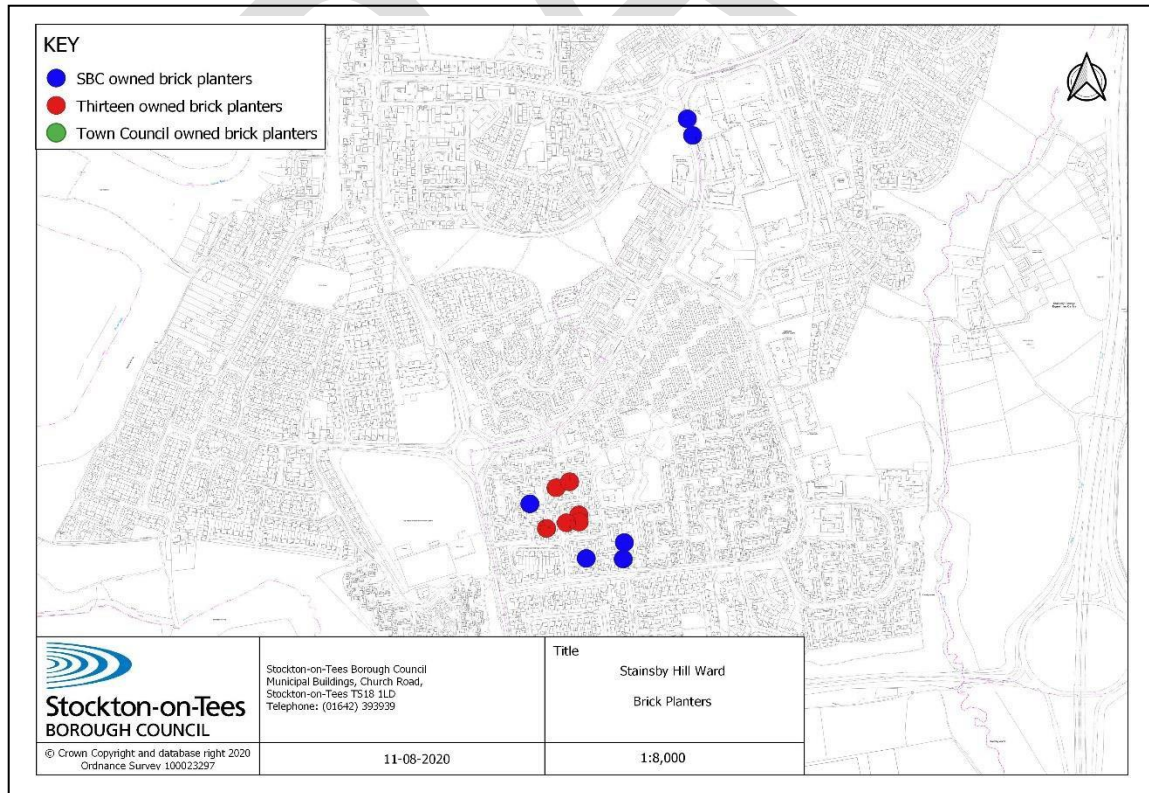
Newtown



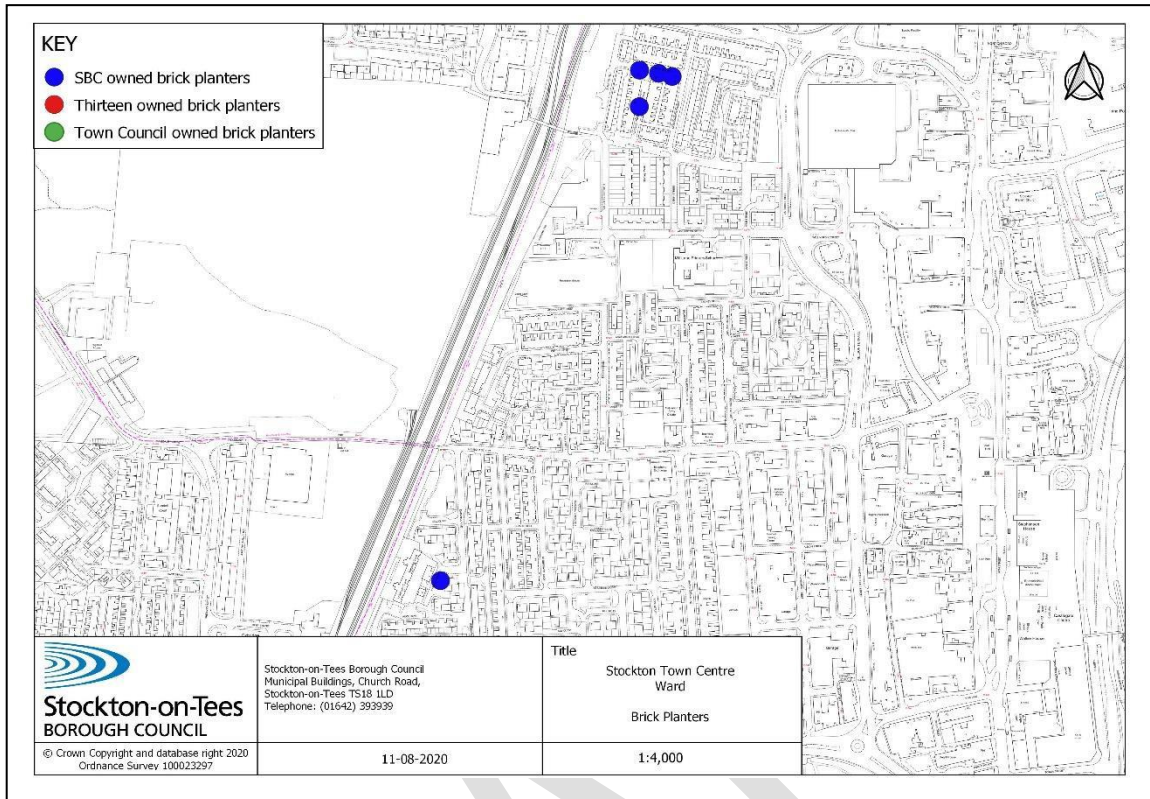
Parkfield & Oxbridge



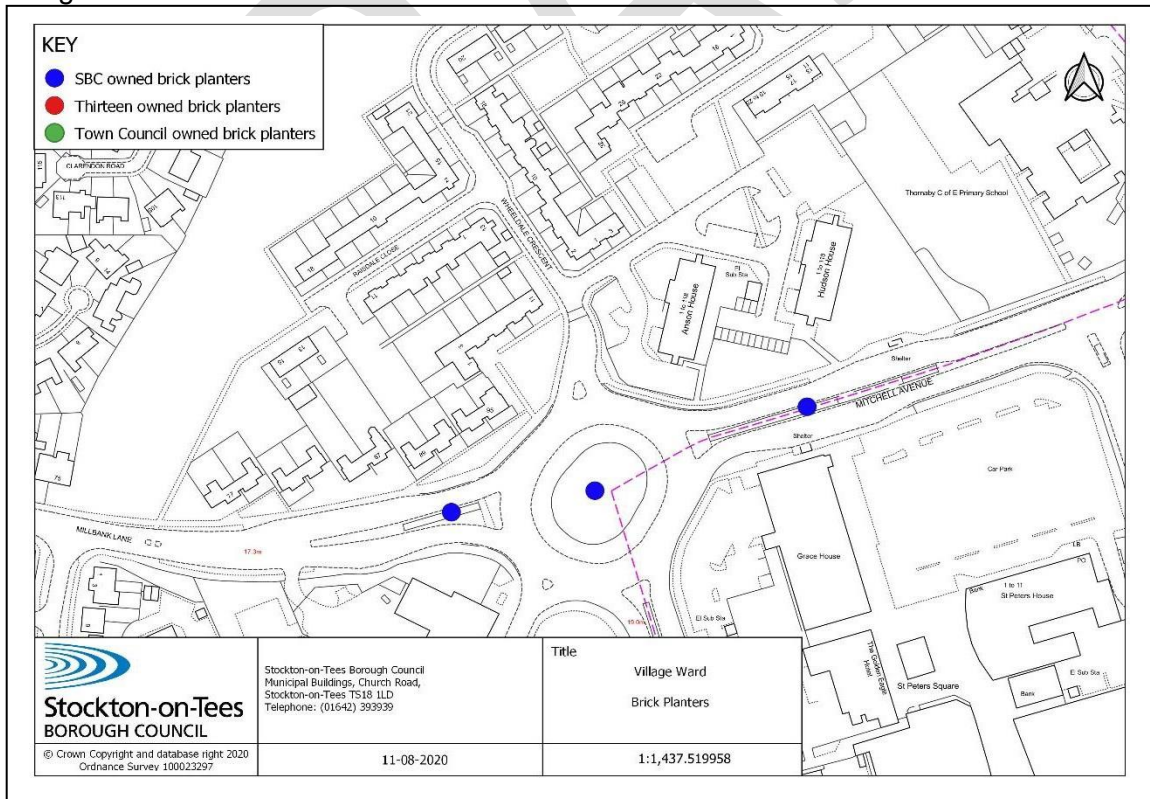
Stainsby Hill



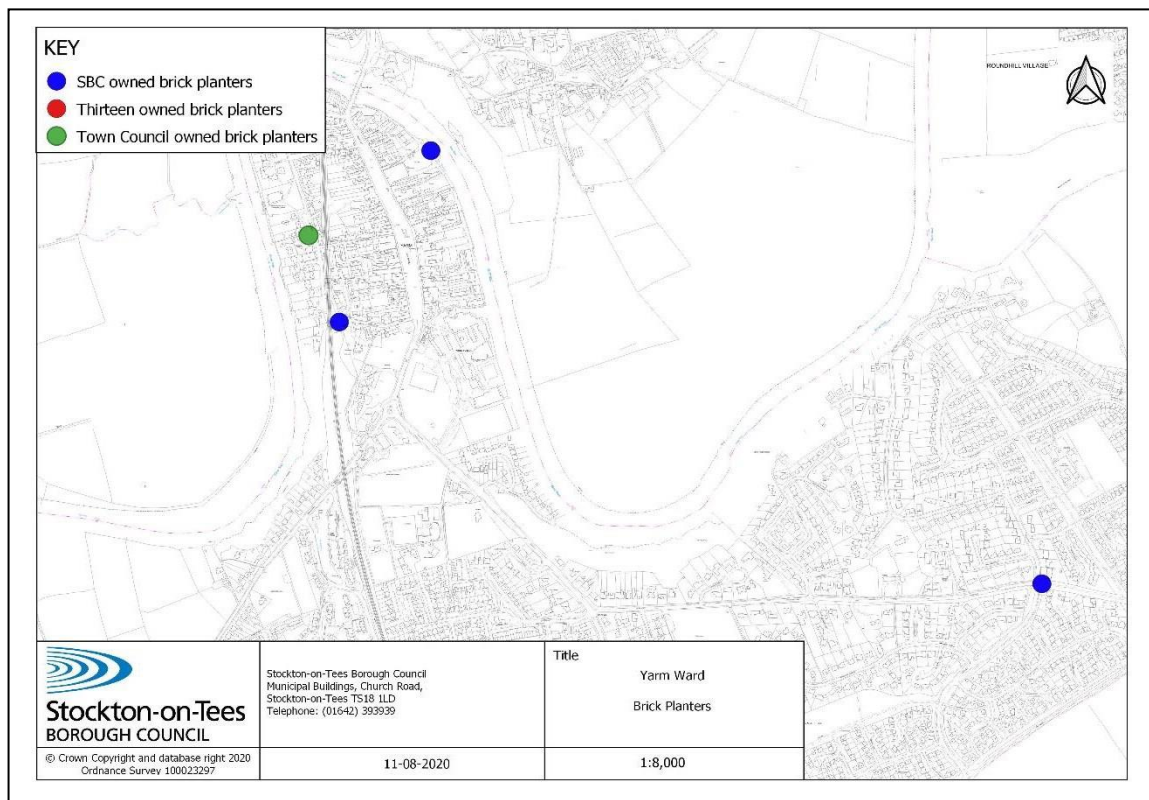
Stockton Town Centre



Village



Yarm



Appendix 2: Planter Photographs

Billingham North

Casson Way



Billingham South

Belasis Avenue



The Green



Fairfield

Rimswell Parade



Grangefield

Oxbridge Court



Hartburn

Muker Grove



Ingleby Barwick East

Bunting Close



Hayburn Close



Mandale & Victoria

Anderson Road



Ellerburne Street



Gilmour Street





Hartington Close



Heslop Street



Roseberry View



Westbury Street



Newtown

Newtown Avenue



Parkfield & Oxbridge

Adderley Street Car Park



Arlington Street



Bowesfield Lane



Camden Street



Childeray Street



Eleanor Place





Lawrence Street/Yarm Lane



Polar Grove/Northcote Street



St Peter's Road





Westbourne Street



Whitwell Close





Winton Street



Wren Street





Stainsby Hill

Trenchard Avenue



Valiant Way



Victor Way



Vulcan Way



Stockton Town Centre

Burgess Street



Durham Street



Ewbank Gardens



Village

Millbank Lane



Mitchel Avenue/Trenchard Avenue/Millbank Lane roundabout



Mitchel Avenue



Yarm

Bentley Wynd



Valley Drive



West Street



Yarm Wharf

