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## Environment and Biodiversity Committee meeting 25th November 2026

## Item 9c – To consider the provision of a Sand Garden – Cllr Millest.

## Sand Gardens

A sand garden is a sustainable landscaping technique that involves growing drought-tolerant plants directly in a thick layer of coarse sand or gravel laid over soil. These are usually contained within low retaining walls in areas where other planting exists or may even be dug in by removing existing poor quality top soil or grass.

Providing several of these around the village would offer a greater variety of planting and year round interest that survives the hot summers and maintains a cared for appearance around the village. It also provides an educational opportunity for residents who may be struggling to understand what plants survive both with the local soil and the changing climate.

## How It Works

- **Low fertility:** The sand layer provides virtually no nutrients or organic matter, which forces plants to work harder and grow slower.
- **Deep root growth:** Deprived of surface food and water, plant roots dive deep into the subsoil below, creating strong and self-sufficient root systems.
- **Exceptional drainage:** Water drains away instantly, protecting sensitive plant crowns and roots from rotting during wet winters.
- **Natural insulation:** The dry surface layer caps moisture underneath and insulates roots against extreme summer heat and winter cold.

## Key Benefits

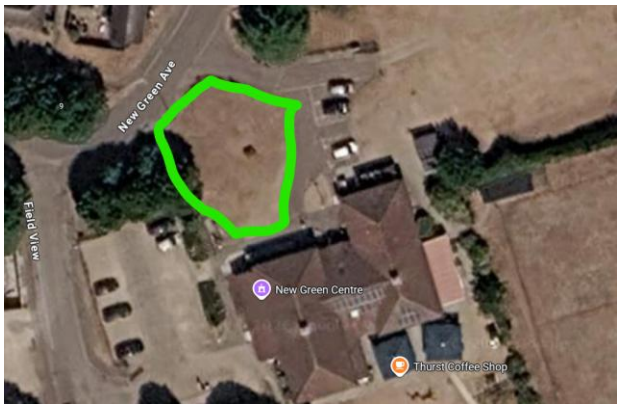
- **No irrigation:** Once established, these gardens require little to no supplementary watering, even during severe heatwaves.
- **No fertilizer:** Adding nutrients promotes weak, tall foliage rather than flowers; sand eliminates the need for feeding entirely.
- **Low maintenance:** Slow-growing plants stay compact and sturdy, removing the need for staking, frequent pruning, or heavy weeding.
- **Climate resilience:** Designed to withstand volatile weather patterns, including scorching dry summers and wet winters

### Planting Options and Example species – see Appendix A

Drought-tolerant plants with deep taproots, fine silvery leaves, or succulent structures thrive best in a sand garden. Species originating from the Mediterranean, coastal sand dunes, or dry prairies are perfect because they are naturally adapted to zero nutrients and sharp drainage. When selecting plants, it helps to group them by their visual form and structural role in your garden layout:

## Potential Locations:

**New Green Centre – The "Not Thursty" Bed**

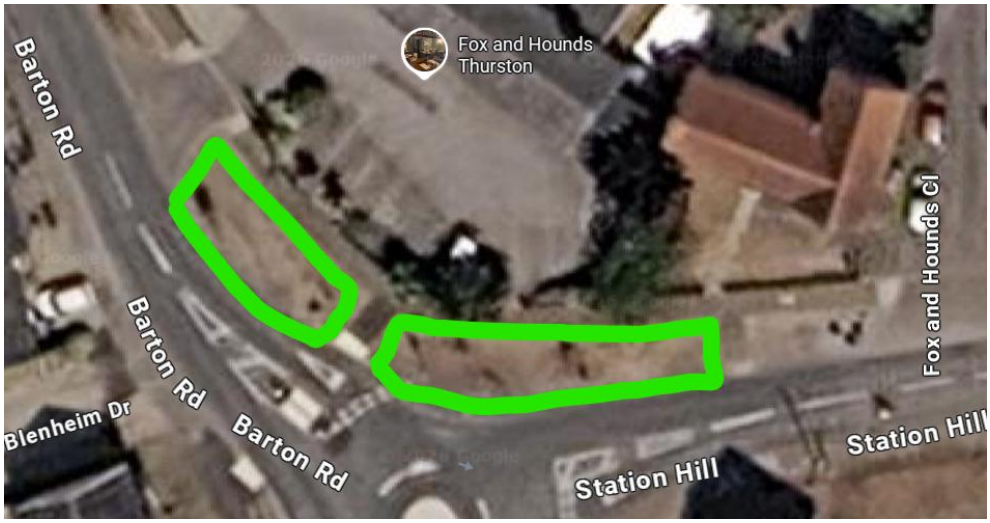



A large space that could be one or more beds, using this as an education point with additional signage could be useful. Some of these beds could be managed by different groups within the village to provide them an opportunity to plant their own style garden.

By splitting it in to three or four bed could be beneficial to allow gravel paths between the bed that allows for some large signs showing the purpose of the garden but also smaller signs by plants to show what they are and best places for them to grow.

Additionally by being a "sand" garden it would mean that the solitary bees local to the site will still be able to utilise the area.

**Fox and Hounds – The Desert Fox bed**




This large area would be idea as a welcome to the village, presenting a neat and well maintained area as you enter under the railway bridge. Signage added to show the aim and suggest that for

more information look at either the council website or look at the “educational” bed at New Green.

It would also combat the parking on the grassed area that is problematic at best and destroys the verges in winter.

**Norton Road – The Shady Day Bed**




Another larger area that could be a mix of sand garden alongside larger drought resistant plants or trees, the high footfall for schools, pub and residential areas mean this area would be well visited.

Additionally this area is often in shade so allows for differing sand plants compared to those in other spots giving more variety and options that residents could consider.

**Roadside verges** are the best locations we have in the village and the two above are just the biggest and easiest two to consider. The site at New Green is more a site to let us “go wild” and show the wide variety of plants that people can use elsewhere.

In looking on line it seems verges are seen as an exceptional location for a sand garden matrix. In fact, pioneering urban designers use sand specifically for these neglected spots because it prevents lush, messy weed growth and keeps plants compact.

However, verges present two severe challenges that traditional gardens don't face: **winter road-salting (which creates highly toxic, hyper-saline runoff)** and **intense physical buffeting from pedestrians and vehicles**. To survive here, your plants must be both drought-tolerant and highly salt-resistant (halophytes). This section more covers plans for those areas rather than the flexibility we would have at sites like New Green etc.

**Top Plants for Roadside Sand Verges**

- **Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*):** An absolute superstar for this specific setup. As a native UK coastal plant, it is completely immune to winter road salt, thrives in pure sand, and its prickly leaves naturally discourage dogs and people from stepping into the bed.

- **Sea Thrift (*Armeria maritima*):** Forms incredibly tough, low-growing cushions of green foliage topped with pink globe flowers. It handles heavy road spray effortlessly and thrives in sharp-draining, nutrient-deficient sand.
- **Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*):** Extremely resilient to foot traffic and highly tolerant of poor soil and salt runoff. It keeps a low profile but spreads effectively to stabilize the sand matrix.
- **Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*):** Specifically **Bronze Fennel**. It features a deep taproot that anchors safely into the subsoil below the sand. Because its feathery foliage is airy and semi-transparent, it won't block sightlines for drivers emerging from junctions.
- **Creeping Thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*):** Ideal for the very edge bordering the footpath. If pedestrians step on it, it releases a pleasant aroma rather than snapping or dying.

**Critical Roadside Installation Rules**

1. **Check Council Regulations First:** Most UK local authorities have strict "self-assessable" highway criteria for planting on public verges. You must ensure your plants do not exceed a certain height (often **under 50cm–60cm**) to maintain clear visibility for motorists and pedestrians.
2. **Avoid Organic Mulches:** Never add bark or compost to a verge sand garden. Street sweepers, wind, and traffic fumes will naturally deposit organic debris. Keep the surface layer purely coarse sand or gravel to ensure fast drainage.
3. **Excavate for Safety:** Dig out roughly **15cm to 20cm** of the existing nutrient-heavy topsoil before laying your sand. This ensures the finished garden sits completely level with the surrounding pavement and curb, removing any tripping hazards for pedestrians. This is assuming a site where we do not want a raised bed – Norton Road for example. Where we do want a raised bed – Fox & Hounds – we would construct using the same principles but within the raised bed.

## Additional Information:

Seeing the ongoing work in Brandon and their challenges to improve their green spaces I reached out to their team to ask for any information or details they could share regarding their work on the sand gardens, but also their wider challenges in managing changing green spaces. They have responded with the below email and have provided several useful links that could be considered with our new village management company going forward.

*Hi David.*

*What a year for our poor gardens and volunteers.*

*We took over this area about a year ago. Previously we had planted thousands of daffodils and crocus here. Then last winter Cadent were doing gas works in the area and trashed the site.*

*We went through the usual process of obtaining a planting license through the Suffolk highways and ecology team.*

*As it's on a quite busy junction there are restrictions on the planting heights.*

*We had a digger on our site and we all know Breckland soil is sand, flint and chalk. But when we took the turf off this site was like compacted concrete and rubble.*

*We have since rotivated the area to about 8 inches depth so the plants can get their roots deep.*

*Our site is huge 33m x 4m*

*On Friday we have 20 tonnes of "as dug" sand being delivered. Which will give us a 10cm layer to plant into.*

*We have a local firm who have donated the sand loose tipped. Had we of purchased the sand it would of been about £400. (Obviously a lot more for ton bags)*

*Planting wise small plugs or 9cm plants are best. And spacing wise leave at least 40cm between plants. We are using 3 or 4 plants per square meter. Depending on your plant source it will be around £4 per plant. BiB are lucky because I own the local garden centre so the planting was purchased for this garden at wholesale prices directly to one of my growers.*

*I've been very lucky and Asa the head gardener at Beth Chatto has looked through my planting list. They have now made 3 sand gardens in the Colchester area. (I'll send you the links)*

*For the first few years it's going to look like a beach. I'm prepared for the negative comments that will arise. But it's a no brainer really as no watering or fertiliser makes it so much less work for volunteers. The only real task is keeping the sand clean.*

*You'd be very welcome to come and visit us and see the garden.*

*Kind Regards*

Additionally these links were provided:

Planting at Chattowood Development - Beth Chatto Gardens

Planting on the Albert roundabout

The Sand Garden - A Bold New Trend in Resilient Garden Design - The Middle-Sized Garden | Gardening Blog

The sand garden - tough, beautiful, low maintenance...

