



Biodiversity Action Plan

Habitats

Grasslands

Amenity grassland

**Amenity grassland** in many of our parks, playing fields, and urban green spaces is frequently mown for sports and play activities and for a 'clean' look. It may be neat and tidy but it could be so much more.

By varying the ways in which grassland areas are managed, public parks and green spaces can support more biodiversity and provide for more public interest and enjoyment.



### Amenity Grassland

Although amenity grassland is not a priority habitat in the usual sense, it can be managed to benefit biodiversity. Amenity grassland is therefore included in this Biodiversity Action Plan.

Phase 1 habitat surveys record amenity grassland as 'amenity grassland' under a broader heading of cultivated ground.

Amenity grassland 'improved' by the use of fertilisers and possible reseeding is likely to include copious perennial rye-grass and little of botanical interest.

However this does not need to be the case.

**Grass found in urban green sites is often heavily managed and regularly mown, but areas of longer grass are a very valuable habitat.**

**Reducing the number of cuts per year of areas of amenity grassland will benefit wildlife.**

Grass provides somewhere for wildlife to forage, feed, and thrive.

Many species of invertebrates over-winter on grass as eggs, pupae or larvae before completing their life cycles. Grass is also food for the larvae of some invertebrates including types of butterflies and moths.

Keeping grass a little longer helps retain moisture which benefits many invertebrates such as worms, beetles, grasshoppers and spiders, living at or just below the soil surface.

Longer grass also allows plants to grow and flower and this provides nectar for insects such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies, and seeds for mammals and birds.

Some birds such as starlings and thrushes that feed on soil invertebrates, prefer shorter grass so they can easily find food and detect approaching predators. Hedgehogs also forage on shorter grass for their prey.

House sparrows and finches however prefer areas with longer grass where there are more invertebrates and seeds.

Small mammals such as voles forage in longer grass for seeds and use it as shelter and cover. In turn these attract birds of prey and owls.

Much of the content of this section of the Biodiversity Plan has been derived from work undertaken in the Dearne Valley NIA programme and the advice given by John Day, RSPB Land Management Adviser.

Links to advice sheets published by the RSPB are given later.

Our thanks are due to the RSPB for their contribution.

Managing grassland for wildlife

Managing grassland for wild flowers

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Managing for wildlife

## Management of amenity grassland for wildlife.

There are many opportunities in parks and green spaces to create more varied grassland, for reducing the total area of closely mown grass, and, for areas not required for sports and recreation, making more meadow-like areas with longer grass. Mowing can be done on a rotation, creating areas with grass of different lengths.



Regular mowing to keep the grass short does not necessarily banish wildlife and plants of interest completely. However to keep some biodiversity interest, the use of fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides should be reduced to a minimum or indeed stopped.

Grass cuttings from longer grass should be removed to prevent underlying plants being smothered, with soils becoming too nutrient-rich.

If areas of nutrient rich grass are left unmanaged they will rapidly become overgrown with a few dominant species of tall grasses, docks, brambles, thistles etc which will need to be controlled.



When cutting, it is important to allow wildlife to escape and to keep some cover nearby to provide protection from predators. Grass cuttings can be heaped to allow invertebrates and other wildlife a refuge.

Good nectar sources can be provided in adjacent flower and shrub beds and wildflowers can be encouraged to grow and seed within the grass by mowing less often.

Areas of undisturbed grassland with long grass maintained over the winter, are really beneficial for wildlife. Some such areas may be mown in rotation only every two to three years. Areas where this can be done are more likely to be on the edges of sites, next to informal shrubberies or hedges, or in places where people do not normally go.

In these wilder areas of long grass it is best to maintain a 'managed' look by mowing a 1-2 m strip of short grass between any paths and the longer grass. People can also be kept 'on-side' by telling them of the benefits of longer grass for wildlife through informative signs.

### In summary:

- Avoid the use of fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides.
- Apart from specific sports areas that require very short grass, cut less frequently allowing slightly longer grass (3 to 5 cm) to develop.
- Where possible, create a range of short and longer grass across a site.
- In less intensively used areas have grass of 5-15 cm.
- Areas of long grass (15-45 cm) can be created in areas not usually accessed.
- Where possible, create some areas of undisturbed grassland, with long grass maintained over the winter.
- Keep under control any areas with encroaching tall docks, thistles, nettles, etc.
- Maintain a managed look by mowing strips by paths or as paths through the grassland.

**RSPB's 'Ark in the Park' research project found that long grass had a lot more seeds and invertebrates than short grass, benefiting birds and mammals.**

An advice note on Managing Amenity Grassland can be found via a link on this [RSPB page](#).

### More amenity grassland links

**CABE:** [Making \[amenity space\] contracts work for wildlife](#)

**Floralocale:** [grassland management and restoration](#)

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Overview



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Managing for flowers

**Creating and maintaining flower-rich grasslands** is of increased value for wildlife. Grasslands that include wild flowers have more insects using the grasses and plants as somewhere to breed and shelter. They attract an increased variety of insects such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies by providing pollen and nectar.



Enhancing parklands by seeding or planting plugs of suitable grassland flowers will in most cases be beneficial to biodiversity. As well as increased numbers and types of invertebrates, compared to simply long grass, flower-rich grasslands provide more abundant insect and seed food for birds and other wildlife during summer and winter.

They also tend to be appreciated more by visitors to the parks.

However some sites may have remnant areas of semi-natural flower-rich grassland. It is important that these are managed well and are not swamped by seeding or planting with plants that are not indigenous to that site and that might out-compete the original plant community.

Because of the ways amenity grasslands have been managed over the years they tend to be lacking a rich and diverse flora.

Although some floral improvement can be brought about by scarifying the turf and thinly seeding with flower seeds and planting with plugs, for the best results turf and some top-soil need to be removed.

A 'meadow' seed-mix of flowers and appropriate grasses can then be sown, and plugs planted, on the reduced nutrient sub-soils.

Thin sowing gives vegetation of an open nature, giving flowering plants a chance and making it easier for birds and mammals to forage.

Such wildflower meadows take time to become established. They need annual maintenance with appropriate mowing and control of rampant species, allowing a range of flowering plants to flourish.



**RSPB's research into the seeds and invertebrates produced in long grass and in wild flower meadow plots, found that although long grass had a lot more seeds and invertebrates than short grass, wild flower meadow plots had even more.**

Three advice notes on Managing Amenity Grassland can be found via a link on this [RSPB page](#).

- Managing grassland
- Flower-rich grassland
- Wildlife seed mixes

The notes can also be found in the RSPB's [Urban Advice Pack](#)

#### Wildflower meadow links

**RHS:** [wildflower meadow establishment](#)

**RHS:** [wildflower meadow maintenance](#)

**Buglife:** [How to make a community meadow](#)

**TCV:** [wildflower meadow](#)

**Floralocale:** [grassland creation and floral enhancement](#)

**Newcastle council:** [Creating and managing urban meadows](#)

#### In summary:

- Ground preparation by turf stripping, soil inversion, rotovating, or harrowing
- Sowing and then rolling or planting plugs in Autumn
- Regular early mowing in first year to allow flowering plants to establish not just grasses
- Timing of haycut each year to allow flowering plant seeds to fall and set
- Allowing later cutting times in some places to benefit invertebrates and birds



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### Key objectives for amenity grassland

- Raise awareness of the importance of managing amenity grasslands to benefit biodiversity in Barnsley.
- Review extent of amenity grassland managed for biodiversity.
- Promote amenity grassland management for biodiversity and increase the number of sites managed in this way.
- Use amenity grassland managed appropriately to create links and corridors between priority habitats.
- Collect and analyse records of populations and assemblages of wildlife species in amenity grasslands that have undergone positive changes in management.



### Roles.

#### Barnsley Council, parish councils, other public bodies and schools:

- manage grounds and amenity grasslands to benefit biodiversity through reduced use of fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides, and appropriate mowing regimes.

#### Barnsley council as planning authority:

- assess the need for open green space and opportunities for new provision in its plans and consideration of applications for development.
- ensure that developers in relevant cases commit to enhance biodiversity through appropriate management of open grassland spaces.

**Farmers:** help with management of amenity grassland by agreeing to take hay crop.

#### Voluntary groups and volunteers:

- help with improvements to amenity grasslands including meadow creation
- help provide information about the condition of amenity grasslands and collect records of the wildlife there.

### Marking Progress

- amenity grassland sites managed to benefit biodiversity.
- amenity grassland managed to benefit biodiversity.
- amenity grassland sites surveyed for biodiversity improvements

#### Actions taken

- ? ha amenity grassland taken into less frequent mowing regime with late hay crop eg Inkerman's field Darfield and Barnburgh. BMBC NIA 2013-14
- ? ha flower-rich meadows created by seeding and plug planting BMBC NIA 2014
- ? ha wildflower grassland created on TPTcv volunteers.

#### Proposed actions

- To be added

Several of the images in this section have been produced during the DVGH NIA programme in 2013 and 2014. Our thanks are due to the RSPB for much information provided in this section of the BAP.

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