

Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland



Description

Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland typically occurs on nutrient-poor, generally free-draining soils with pH ranging from 4 to 5.5 and overlying acid rock or superficial deposits such as sands and gravels. The general definition of this type of grassland is that it occurs below 300m and can be enclosed or unenclosed managed land, including Parkland, and fringing on early-stage Heathland. The habitat is characterised by a range of plants such as Heath Bedstraw, Sheep's Sorrel, Tormentil, Harebell, Sheep's Fescue and Common Bent. Many invertebrates that occur in Acid Grasslands are specialist species and are not found in other types of grassland. The habitat is important for Bumble Bee and Brown Hare.

National Status

As with other lowland semi-natural grassland types, Acid Grassland has undergone substantial decline in the 20th century, due mainly to agricultural intensification.

It is because of the associated plants and invertebrates that this habitat is nationally important in the modern landscape.

Local Status

Data exists from the original 1980 Barnsley MBC Phase I Habitat Survey, which included 27 named sites, and from this baseline information, another survey was conducted in 1992. This highlighted four main sites – Mag Wood Meadow, Hood Green Pastures, Wilthorpe Marsh and Carlton Marsh, which were then awarded the local Natural Heritage Site (NHS) classification.

Many small sites such as field corners and banking occur throughout the borough as remnants of this habitat.

Legal Status

Sites included in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as NHS sites have a presumption against development, but have no protection against operations which do not require planning consent.

Several plant and invertebrate species of lowland grassland are protected under the Schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

The DEFRA Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) Regulations may apply.

Links with other Action Plans

SAP1	Hedgehog
SAP2	Bats
SAP5	Grey Partridge
SAP7	Kestrel
SAP10	Barn Owl
SAP11	Skylark

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Agricultural intensification by re-seeding, ploughing for arable crops, use of fertilisers and herbicides.
- General land management neglect allowing rank overgrowth, bracken and scrub encroachment.
- Over-grazing in some local areas.
- Afforestation with mainly conifer causing further habitat loss.

Current Local Action

- Barnsley MBC Phase I Habitat Survey in 1980 and the 1992 survey, resulting in the NHS designation of the four named sites. There will be other small remnants of this habitat classification that local people are aware of but have not been recorded. These small remnants, although isolated, are still important in the wildlife they retain.
- Three of the four main sites are not managed effectively.

Proposed Local Action

- Create new areas of Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland on suitable sites in partnership with various landowners.
- Encourage participation among farmers in Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship Schemes.
- Continue to monitor the population of Brown Hare and encourage appropriate management.
- Encourage the management of Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland to benefit Bumble Bees.
- Extract past records and survey for Wall Butterfly.

BMBC Planning Policy Actions

- Designate Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) and declare Local Nature Reserves (LNR) on appropriate areas of Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland habitat, or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.
- Include habitat and species protection policies in development plans and/or supplementary guidance.

- Encourage the creation of new habitat through the requirement made under Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9, to incorporate biodiversity enhancements into development wherever possible.

BMBC Development Control Actions

- Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.

BMBC Land Ownership and Management Actions

- Maintain Elsecar Reservoir Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland zones to prevent encroachment of scrub.