

Report title	No Mow May
Report author	Helen Wilson, Deputy Green Spaces Manager
Department	Environmental Services
Exempt?	No
Exemption type	N/A
Reasons for exemption	N/A

Purpose of report:

- To resolve

Synopsis of report:

Information in regard to the adoption of 'No Mow May' as a new grassland management method for the benefit of biodiversity in and around the Parks and Open Spaces managed by Runnymede Borough Council.

Recommendation(s):

- To continue with current mowing schedules rather than implement No Mow May
- To focus on the management of the existing wildflower meadows to more effectively increase biodiversity in the borough.

1. Context and background

1.1 The question of whether Runnymede Borough Council should introduce 'No Mow May' was raised in July 2023 to Helen Clark, Head of Environmental Services, and a report on the subject requested for this Committee by Cllr. D Coen.

2. 'No Mow May'

2.1 'No Mow May' is a grassroots environmental movement that encourages people to leave their lawns and green spaces uncut during the month of May.

2.2 The goal of this movement is to support biodiversity and benefit pollinators, particularly bees and other insects, by allowing wildflowers to bloom and provide food and habitat for a multitude of species

2.3 The movement has gained popularity in the UK and has inspired many people to let their lawns go wild for the month of May, or longer, in an effort to create a more environmentally friendly and wildlife-friendly landscapes.

2.4 Other Councils across the UK have taken part such as Monmouthshire and Warwick. Feedback has been widely positive.

- 2.5 The introduction of 'No Mow May' to Borough-managed land as a blanket policy to *all* grassed areas in the borough is likely to result in numerous complaints from residents on the assumption of neglect and the potential for obstructed sight lines in certain areas.
- 2.6 From an ecological perspective; cutting at the end of May kills all the invertebrate eggs and larvae laid on the plants and the more favourable time to cut would be mid-late July.
- 2.7 To increase the number of wildflowers available for pollinators one must reduce the strength of the grass sward to reduce competition. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is to reduce the fertility of the grass by collecting arisings following the cut that would otherwise fall to the ground and feed the soil if left in situ.
- 2.8 At present, the capacity within the Grounds' Maintenance team to cut, collect and dispose of large areas of grass clippings is limited due to the cost of disposing of arisings. The existing areas we currently maintain as wildflower meadows are maintained by a contractor.
- 2.9 One alternative to No Mow May would be carefully selected locations with low impact to residents for more carefully managed wildflower meadows. These would be chosen based on the maximum potential for successful wildflower establishment and likelihood of improving the appearance and amenity of that location.
- 2.10 There are, however, no immediate plans to establish these *additional* wildflower meadows while the newly established, in-house grounds maintenance and Green Spaces teams focus on successfully delivering our current grounds maintenance schedules for 2024 and as we put in place specialist hay cut contractors for our current meadows for future seasons.
- 2.11 As Officers review the management of our sites across the borough, we will be looking for opportunities to trial new wildflower meadows based on our ability to properly manage their required mowing regimes with the machinery we have.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The addition of wildflower meadows would contribute to the goals outlined within our Climate Change Policy. Wildflower meadows support Runnymede's aspiration for increasing Biodiversity and Nature recovery in the borough.
- 3.2 The work around these priorities also aligns with the Corporate Business Plan, particularly around the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the role this will play in providing residents with leisure and recreational spaces.
- 3.3 By utilising open spaces residents, in particular young people, will benefit from being able to lead an active lifestyle, which in turn is anticipated to result in positive health outcomes for those residents; individuals who have an active lifestyle have, on average, been shown to require fewer medical interventions throughout their lifetime than those who have not.
- 3.4 The Health and Wellbeing Strategy Objective 2 - Healthy Communities has the action "for all residents to be able to engage and participate in their community, access services, facilities, amenities, leisure, and recreational opportunities locally".

4 Resource implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 There are no additional costs to implement No Mow May as the grass is simply left uncut for May although its benefits are minimal to wildlife.
- 4.2 The alternative, additional meadows, would require analysis into the reduction of regular cuts throughout the year by in house staff verses an annual cut, collect and dispose operation with hire of a specialist contractor or the purchase of the appropriate machinery to bring the operation in-house.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 In addition to legal implications mentioned elsewhere in this report, claims under health and safety in the event of grass not being cut, contract and procurement, in the event of hiring an external contractor and employment law considering possible effects on internal staff may be involved and would need to be considered on a case by case basis.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 Includes new and reviewed policies/strategies and anything affecting people with protected characteristics in accordance with the Council's public sector equality duty to produce an Equality Impact Screening or full impact assessment.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 There are several implications linked to the environment and biodiversity and these are intrinsically linked to the implementation of wildflower meadows.
- 7.2 The proposals related to this report relate strongly to the objectives for local authorities within the Environment Act (2021) that places obligations on local authorities to enhance areas for wildlife and conservation.
- 7.3 In implementing this policy, such areas of work are also intended to support the Councils priorities in relation to Climate Change, for example the removal of the need to run machines that use fossil fuels for a period of time. Additionally, there is the positive carbon sink effect that meadows have in contrast to amenity grass.

8. Risk Implications

- 8.1 Sight lines / risk to habitat

9. Other implications (where applicable)

- 9.1 Not applicable

10. Timetable for Implementation

- 10.1 Any new wildflower meadows would only be introduced following a successful meadow maintenance season in 2024 and following careful site and resource assessments.

11. Conclusions

11.1 Officers would not recommend No Mow May due to its minimal benefits to biodiversity.

12. Background papers

12.1 None

13. Appendices

13.1 None