

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S  
REPORT TO CABINET**

**23 April 2024**

**Report Title:** Grassland Management Strategy and Plan

**Submitted by:** Service Director – Sustainable Environment

**Portfolios:** Sustainable Environment

**Ward(s) affected:** All

<b><u>Purpose of the Report</u></b>	<b><u>Key Decision</u></b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
To seek approval for the Grassland Management Strategy and Plan			
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>			
<p><b>That Cabinet:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Approves the Grassland Management Strategy and Plan</b></li> <li><b>2. Approves the selected sites for the national ‘No Mow May’ campaign in consultation with local Borough Council Members.</b></li> </ol>			
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>			
<p>Creation of a Grassland Management Strategy and Plan aims to deliver a sustainable grassland management policy that empowers Council services to increase local biodiversity and societal mental health and wellbeing through the recovery of natural habitats, whilst also reducing the need for extensive resources for different sites.</p> <p>To outline the Councils approach to the national ‘No Mow May’ campaign on a selection of sites where some set aside areas can be achieved.</p>			

**1. Background**

**1.1** The Council adopted its Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES) in December 2020. The Strategy is a landmark document that sets out the Council's commitment to the sustainable environmental future of the Borough and is an over-arching strategy, under which a range of other linked and related plans and initiatives sit.

**1.2** There are 4 Priority Outcomes associated with the Strategy as follows:

- Reduce the reliance on the use of fossil fuels.
- Reduce carbon and other damaging emissions.
- Minimise waste and increase recycling.
- Offset residual carbon emissions.

**1.3** The Council has now developed a Grassland Management Strategy and Plan to further aid increasing biodiversity within the borough. Development of effective grassland management provides habitats for wildlife, increases seedbanks, and can provide buffers to noise air and water pollution.

**1.4** Biodiversity is a necessity in the Borough as it encompasses the variety and quantity of flora and fauna in the area and the more biodiverse an area is, the more healthy, resilient and more fertile the environment is. A biodiverse Borough therefore increases food security, climate change resilience, clean water, sanitation and many more other societal and environmental needs that are described by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. (UN SDG's)

## **2. Issues.**

**2.1** The Council currently has a vast amount of open space grassland that has the opportunity to benefit the Borough socially and environmentally. Grasslands are incredibly important and will help the Council achieve its goals towards net zero and nature recovery. Through relaxed management on grasslands, the Council can encourage the increase in biodiversity, societal health and wellbeing, sequester carbon, inform residents and use Council resources more efficiently.

**2.2** Leaving areas uncut and campaigns such as 'No Mow May' (see appendix 3) can be viewed negatively by residents and businesses, as merely a cost saving operation, which makes an area look untidy and unkempt. It is important, therefore to have a balance in creating areas where grass can be allowed to grow, and therefore helping increase biodiversity, and maintaining high quality public realm, which demonstrates care and investment in ensuring the borough is a visually pleasing and well-maintained place to live and do business.

## **3. Proposal**

**3.1** A Grassland Management Strategy and Plan will be the beginning towards a new outlook on how the Council manages its land and perceives the natural environment in the Borough. Experts within the Council and others such as The Staffordshire Wildlife Trust have informed the development of the strategy. This Strategy will make the Council a leader in the sector.

**3.2** The Grassland Management Strategy aims to deliver a sustainable grassland management policy that empowers Council services to increase local biodiversity and societal mental health and wellbeing through the recovery of

natural habitats, whilst also reducing the need for extensive resource use and resources for different sites.

### 3.3 The Strategy seeks to –

- To increase biodiversity and nature recovery networks in the Borough, more particularly more invertebrates, wildflowers and small fauna.
- To increase efficiency in Council resource use by enabling resources for priority jobs and works in the Borough, which uses fewer resources on grasslands that don't, need to be managed.
- To contribute towards the Councils Net Zero goals by 2030 and 2050 by reducing the amount of fuel the Council uses and sequestering and storing more carbon with increased grasslands.
- To educate residents, businesses and visitors about the change in grassland management and why biodiversity is important for the Borough.

### 3.4 The Strategy itself is set out into three phases as set out in the Grassland Management Strategy and Plan Policy Document (Appendix 2)

- **Phase 1.** – Pocket Ward Grasslands – this will incorporate new grassland management regimes at different pocket sites in different wards.
- **Phase 2.** – Review and Consult – Following phase 1 a review will be undertaken including a consultation exercise to identify and report on the social and environmental impacts of pockets ward grasslands programme. If proved to benefit biodiversity and improve resident views on wildlife in public spaces then Phase 3 in parks and Grassland Spaces may begin.
- **Phase 3.** – Parks and Grassland Space – Following completion of phase 2, phase 3 will see the Council will begin to roll out the new management regimes throughout the its parks and other grassland spaces such as road verges and low amenity spaces.

### 3.5 The strategy has six distinct policy areas, which are detailed in the Policy Document, appendix 2, as follows –

- **Policy 1.** – public open spaces and informal sport amenity
- **Policy 2.** – designated pathways and additional amenities
- **Policy 3.** – meadow edges and verges
- **Policy 4.** – Grassland Management
- **Policy 5.** – Low activity and tree canopy amenity
- **Policy 6.** – Wildflower meadows

### 3.6 As part of the national 'No Mow May' campaign the following sites have been identified as part of Phase 1 (Pocket ward Grasslands) these are sites in the Borough Councils ownership, and are separate from the County highways land which the Council now manages on their behalf. Highway grass will receive eight scheduled cuts over the year.

- Bradwell – Arnold Grove
- Clayton – Kingsbridge medical centre
- Brampton Vale (Donkey Field)
- Bradwell - Chatterley Close (already a meadow location)
- Crackley – Crackley Field
- Chesterton – Douglas Road
- Westlands – Fields behind Guernsey Drive
- Keele – Keele Cemetery (already a meadow location)
- Westlands – Land behind Leys Drive
- Chesterton – Loomer Road
- Clayton – Norwich Place – Stafford Ave
- Poolfields – Rotterdam Field
- Chesterton – Sheldon Grove
- Kidsgrove – Coalpit Hill
- Cross Heath – The Wammy
- Thistleberry – Thistleberry Parkway
- Clayton – Wye Road

#### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1 That Cabinet approves the Grassland Management Strategy and Plan
- 4.2 That cabinet approves the selected sites (outlined in section 3) for the national ‘No Mow May’ campaign in consultation with local Borough Council Members.

#### **5. Reasons**

- 5.1 The Council currently has a vast amount of grassland that has the opportunity to benefit the Borough socially and environmentally. Grasslands are incredibly important and will help the Council achieve its goals towards net zero and nature recovery. Through relaxed management on grasslands, the Council can encourage the increase in biodiversity, societal health and wellbeing, sequester carbon, inform residents and use Council resources more efficiently.
- 5.2 A Grassland Management Strategy and Plan will be the beginning towards a new outlook on how the Council manages its land and perceives the natural environment in the Borough. Experts within the Council and others such as The Staffordshire Wildlife Trust have informed the strategy and plan.
- 5.3 This Strategy will make the Council a leader in the sector.

#### **6. Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 There are no legal or statutory implications arising from this report.

#### **7. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 There are no equality impact issues arising from this report.

## 8. Financial and Resource Implications

- 8.1 Management of the Councils open spaces and parks is covered as part of the Councils medium term financial system (MTFS), and is fully budgeted for.

## 9. Major Risks & Mitigation

- 9.1 Not having effective and appropriately resourced strategies and management plans for the land the Council owns and manages, could put the Council at risk from challenge, particularly in terms of how it will meet the challenge of Net zero, and the need to increase biodiversity. This Grassland management strategy and Plan, together with the previously approved Tree and Biodiversity management Pan mitigates those risks.

## 10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

- 10.1 The Grassland Management Strategy and Plan supports a number of the UNSD Goals, and supports the Councils plan in becoming net zero for its own operations by 2030, and the wider Borough by 2050.



## 11. Key Decision Information

- 11.1 The report is not a key decision.

## 12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

- 12.1 None

## 13. List of Appendices

**13.1** Appendix 1. – NBC Grassland Management Strategy and Plan (PDF)

<https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/downloads/file/2200/grassland-management-strategy-and-plan>

**13.2** Appendix 2. – Grassland Management Strategy and Plan Policy document

**13.3** Appendix 3. – Grassland – ‘No Mow May’ Statement

**14. Background Papers**

**14.1** None