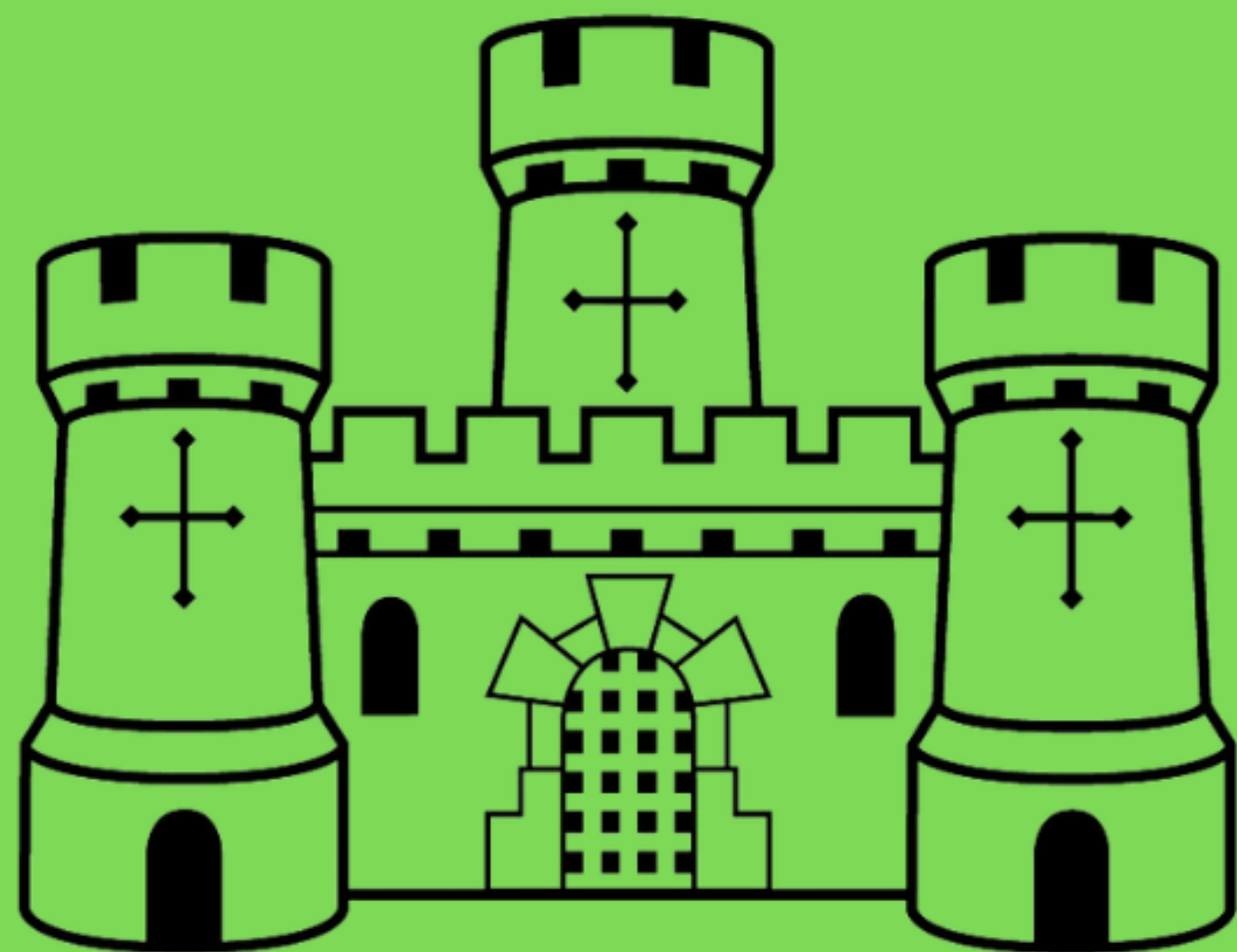




**NEWCASTLE
UNDER LYME
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Grassland Management Strategy & Plan

Sustainable Environment

February 2024



Introduction to Grassland Management

The Council have engaged with sustainable grassland management before with small scale wildflower and long meadow creation around the Borough. Multiple other local authorities have taken a step further and adopted best practice strategies to more sustainably manage their grasslands. Through larger scale reduced seasonal mowing regimes the Council can greatly improve the biodiversity and natural connectivity in the Borough. Currently the Council frequently mow grasslands around the Borough which decreases the opportunity for biodiversity to flourish, such as invertebrates and wildflowers to increase in many of our green spaces. Whilst undertaking this new strategy the Council may include initiatives such as No Mow May where appropriate.



Aims & Objectives



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What is the aim of this plan?

This 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 and resources for different sites.

What are the objectives of this plan?

1. To increase biodiversity and nature recovery networks in the Borough, more particularly more invertebrates, wildflowers and small fauna.
2. To increase efficiency in Council resource use by enabling resources for priority jobs and works in the Borough which uses less resources on grasslands that don't need to be managed.
3. 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.
4. To inform residents, businesses and visitors about the change in grassland management and why biodiversity is important for the Borough.



Why is Biodiversity a necessity in the Borough?

Biodiversity is a necessity in the Borough and it encompasses the variety and quantity of flora and fauna in the area. The more biodiverse an area is, the more healthy, resilient and the 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 UN SDGs*.

Grassland Developments

Grassland developments aid in increasing biodiversity in the Borough. They directly provide habitats for wildlife, create seed banks, provide a buffer for noise, air and water pollution, boost property values, improve health, sequester carbon, reduce flooding risk, create resilient environments, increase area attractiveness, and reduce maintenance requirements. This is why it's necessary for the Council to continue and expand it's work to increase biodiversity. New grassland developments can promote up to 30 different species of wildflower and many species of invertebrates and small animals. They are a key feature of the UK environment and most importantly with the extinction of many different plant and animal species, promote pollinators such as bees and butterflies.



How does Sustainable Grassland Management make an impact?

The Sustainable Development Goals were established in 2015 by the international community as part of the United Nations 2030 sustainability agenda. Sustainable Grassland Management can positively impact many of the different goals, these impacts are listed below:



Good Health and Wellbeing as people in Newcastle will have access to vibrant green spaces they can use to increase their mental and physical health.



Sustainable Cities and Communities with more natural green spaces will decrease pollution and keep cities clean and sustainable.



Clean Water and Sanitation as more natural environments keep water sources clean.



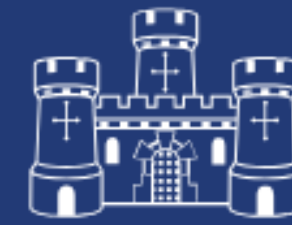
Climate Action as more biodiversity will aid in sequestering more carbon from the atmosphere.



Life on Land as the creation of more biodiverse environments will encourage more healthy habitats and more species.



Grassland Management Plan



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To adopt a grassland management strategy and plan that underpins the work the Council undertakes and specifies the actions needed for every type of grassland the Council manages.

To hold the default position that the Council's approach to land management is to not maintain different land holdings through frequent mowing unless justified, in this case leaving grasslands as fertility-depleted.

To ensure the Council follows the 3 phases of this strategy, detailed in the next slide to ensure a thorough process is followed with proper investigation into public perceptions and environmental impact.

To action the specific policy allocated for each type of grassland such as informal sport grasslands or verges.

To ensure that where appropriate the Council will aim to develop more wildflower meadows.

To ensure that the changes to land management in the Borough are adequately communicated to residents, businesses and visitors through physical signage, social media and the Council webpages.

To ensure the Council seeks to apply for accreditation and funding opportunities related to biodiversity net gain (BNG) and nature recovery to support these developments.

Strategy & Plan Phases



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Phase 1: Pocket Ward Grasslands

Phase 1 will incorporate new grassland management regimes at different pocket sites in different wards. These are listed below:

- Bradwell – Arnold Grove
- Clayton – Kingsbridge medical centre
- Brampton Vale (Donkey Field)
- Bradwell - Chatterley Close (already meadow location)
- Crackley – Crackley Field
- Chesterton – Douglas Road
- Westlands – Guernsey Drive
- Keele – Keele Cemetery (already meadow location)
- Westlands – 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
- Westbury – Westbury Park
- Clayton – Wye Road

Phase 2: Review & Consult

After Phase 1 (which may be conducted over 2 years), the Council will conduct a review and consultation 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 & Grassland Space

Once Phase 2 is completed then the Council may move to Phase 3. The Council will begin to roll out the new management regimes throughout the parks listed below and other grassland spaces such as road verges and low amenity spaces.

- Bathpool Park
- Lyme Valley parkway
- Brampton Museum & Park
- Wolstanton Marsh & Park

What will the new Grassland Regime look like?

Current regimes include mowing and strimming grassland such as verges, 8 times a year and amenity grass 10 times a year from March till October. In a sustainable case fertility-depleted would be the ideal for grasslands owned by the Council, where grass is not cut unless absolutely needed or justified. This grassland regime would instead only need one cut a year, reducing time and money needed for these works. Justification for maintenance should be for access to amenities, accessibility, health and safety, designated paths and amenities such as pitches. All designated paths and amenities should be 'wavy' to aid the increase of biodiversity in the area. The different aspects of a regime like this are discussed throughout the next couple slides and throughout their specific policy documents.



P1. Public Open Spaces & Informal Pitches



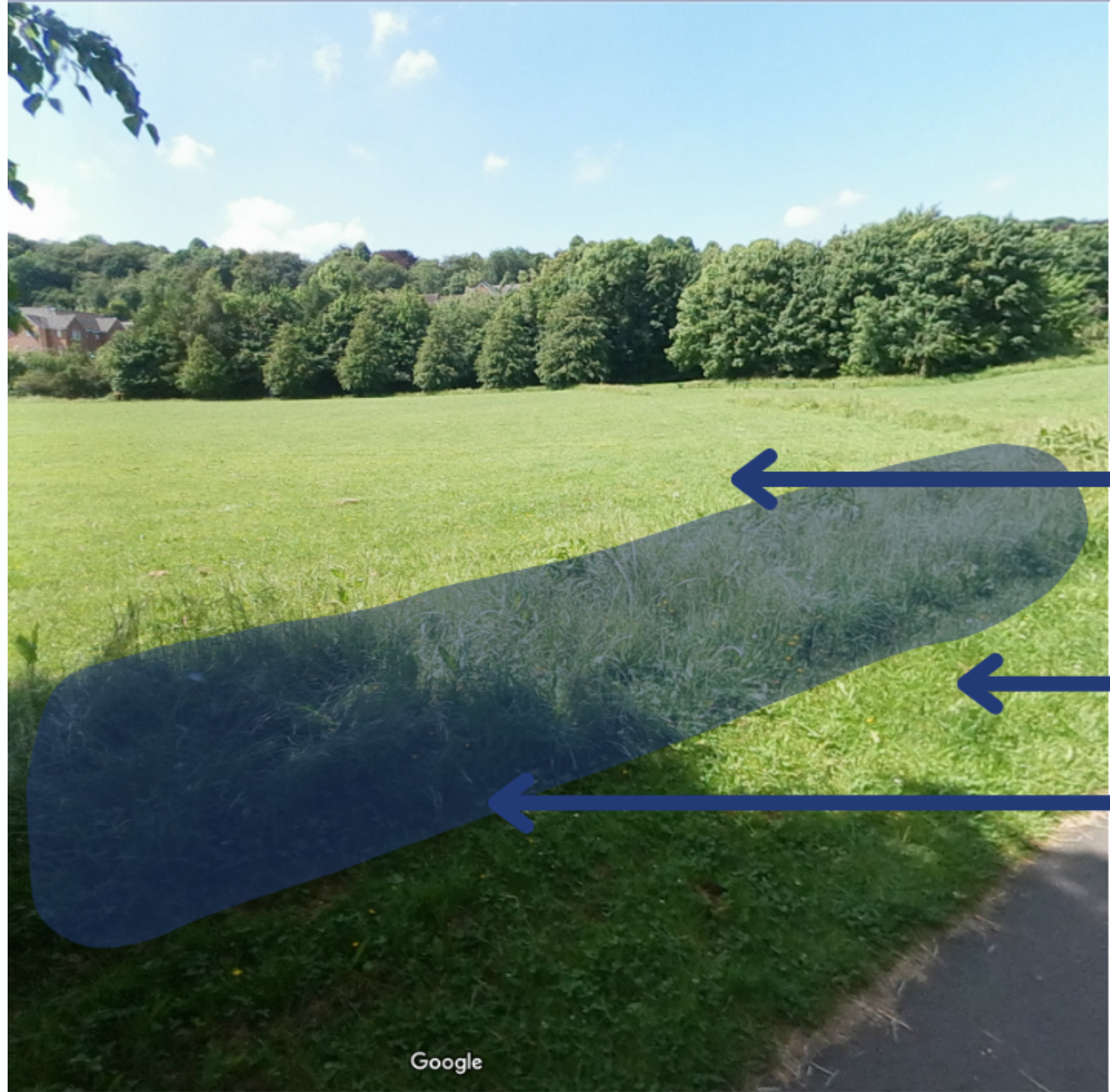
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Policy 1 Summary

For areas close to residents with little outdoor space and for informal sports fields, grass should be kept short for the community to enjoy the space for recreation and sport.

The main aspects of Policy 1 include mowing the identified spaces every 4 weeks to 50mm during the growing period from mid-March till mid-October. This includes all informal sports pitches and public open spaces. It would mean long meadow introduction strips could be left around these areas with desirelines, viewing areas and edges mowed to provide a smart and neat appearance.

Public Open Space & Informal Sports Amenity Example



Cut every four weeks or when appropriate to a target height of 50mm



Mid March to Mid October

Highlighted areas indicate the potential for long meadows.

From mid-March to mid-October public and informal sports spaces will be cut to a target height of 50mm every four weeks. Cuttings will be chopped and left on fresh cut areas.

Areas near informal sports areas and path/road verges will be left for viewing and sightliness.

Areas surrounding these amenities such as verges and banks may be left uncut to promote long meadows. They will have desire lines, cut edges and viewing areas as seen by the highlighted areas.

Google

P2. Designated Pathways & Additional Amenities



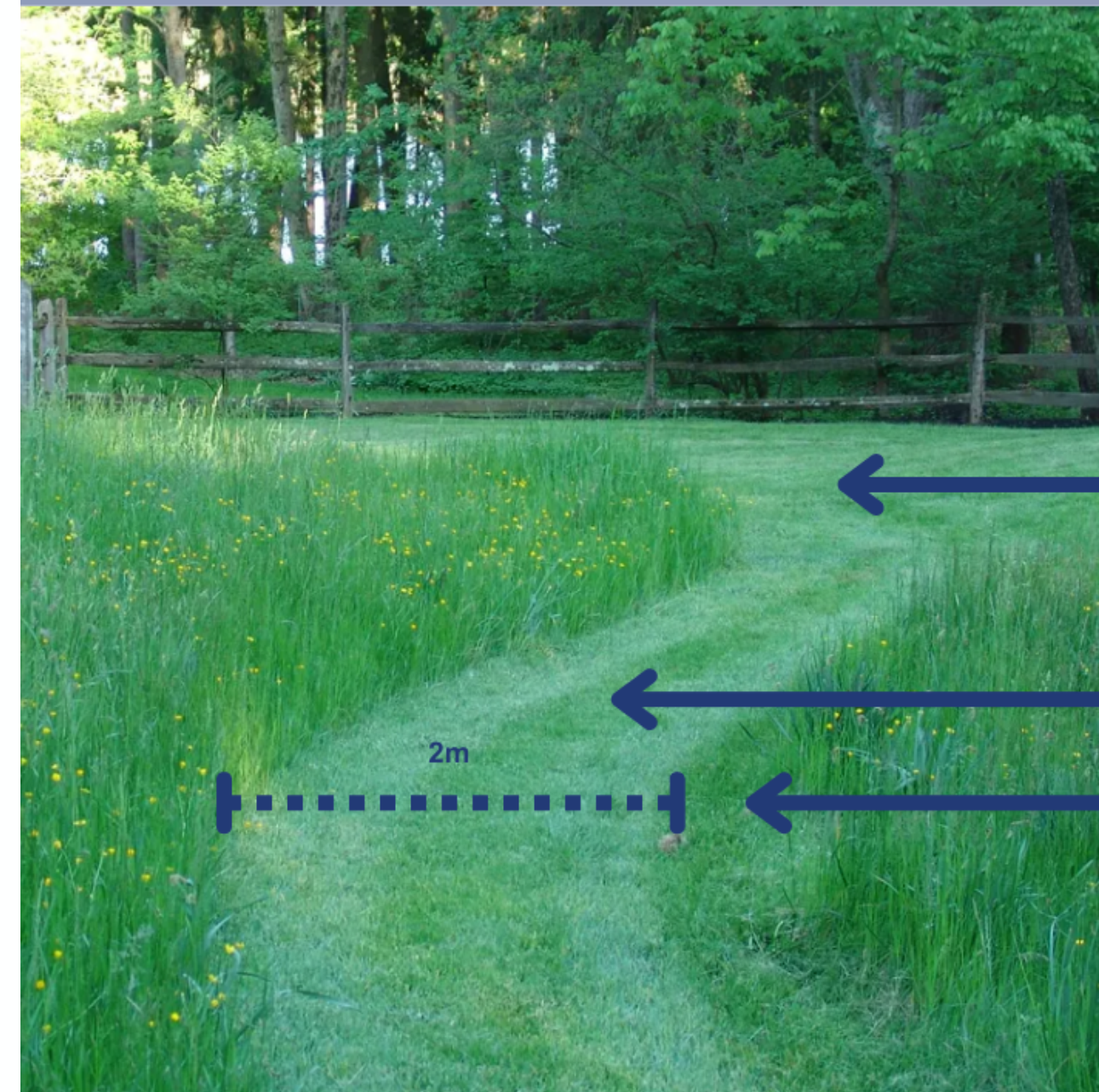
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Policy 2 Summary

Designated pathways and desirelines (an unplanned and preferred pedestrian path) will be cut frequently into long meadow areas to ensure there are routes for people walking, running or commuting. These will also allow accessibility to different amenity spaces such as sport pitches and public open spaces. Additional mowed amenities such as viewing areas, seating areas and sightlines are included in the mowing regime.

The main aspects of Policy 2 include mowing pathways and additional amenities every 4 weeks to 50mm during the growing period from mid-March till mid-October through long meadows. This ensures access to all public spaces whilst also providing natural corridors.

Designated Pathways & Additional Amenities Example



Cut every four weeks or when appropriate to a target height of 50mm



Mid March to Mid October

Highlighted areas indicate the potential for long meadows.

From mid-March to mid-October designated paths and additional amenities will be cut to a target height of 50mm every four weeks.

Cuttings will be chopped and left on fresh cut areas.

Desire lines and paths cut through long meadows will be cut 2m wide or variable for popular paths. Additional Amenities will be cut based on the attached public open space or sports pitch.

P3. Meadow Edges & Verges

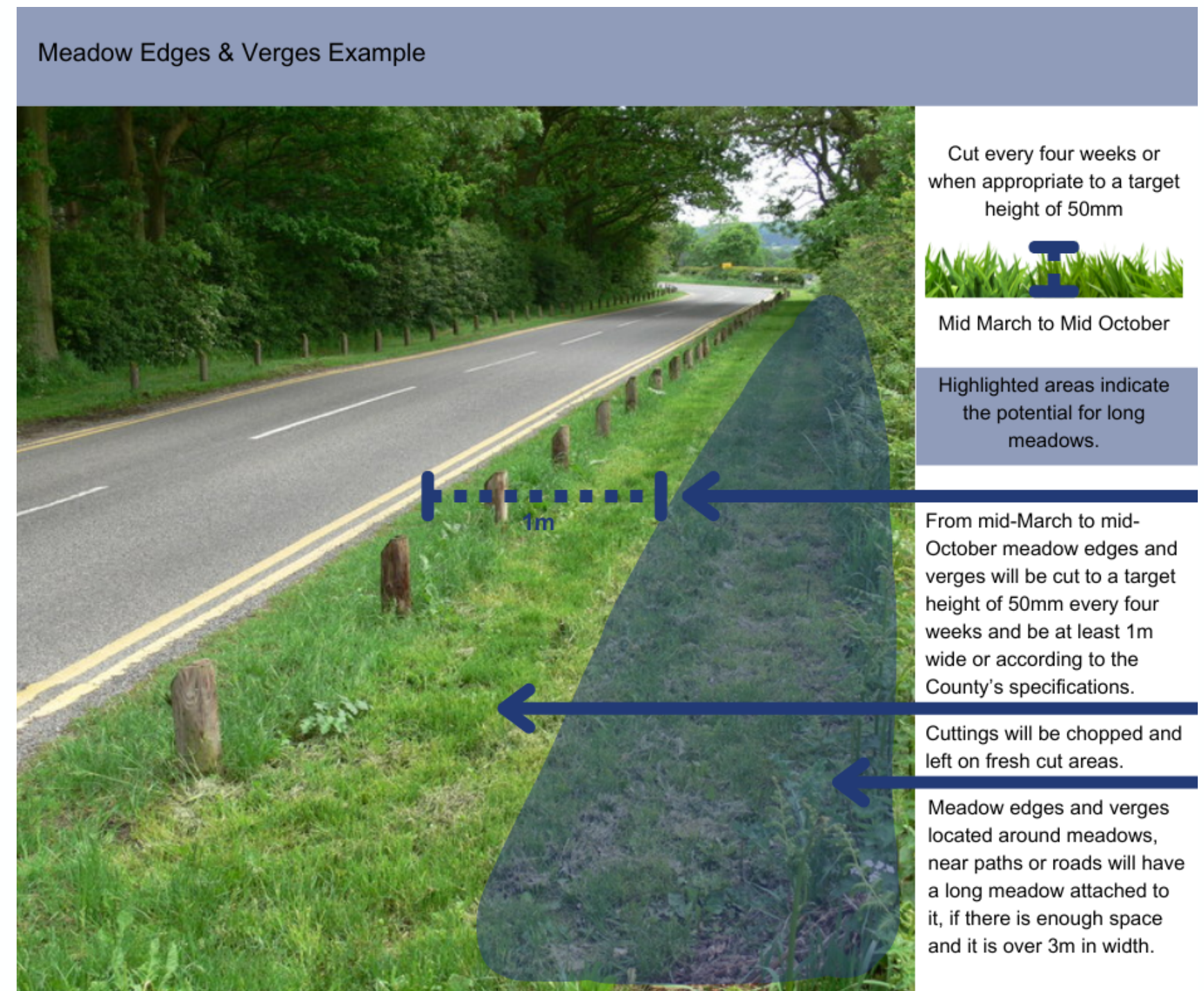


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Policy 3 Summary

Meadow Edges and verges will be cut frequently along long meadow areas to ensure long meadows look sightly and so the public are seperated by a safe distance from roads or pathways. This will allow for better looking and safer long meadows and will help ensure that public perceptions of unsightly long meadows instead percieves them as a benefit.

The main aspects of Policy 3 include mowing meadow edges and verges every 4 weeks to 50mm during the growing period from mid-March till mid-October through long meadows. This ensures sightly/clean looking and safe meadows in open spaces and near roads and pathways.



P4. Amenity Prestige



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Policy 4 Summary

Areas that must be cut due to their location or prestige will be regularly cut as now and cuttings collected. These are identified as grassland lawns and are located at sites such as the Brompton. This includes areas such as roundabouts for the civic pride and enhanced standard. Additionally this includes formal sports pitches used by sports clubs.

The main aspects of Policy 4 include mowing prestige grasslands every 2 weeks to 50mm during the growing period from mid-March till mid-October through long meadows. This ensures a formal presentation in prestige amenity areas.

Amenity Prestige Example



Cut every two weeks or when appropriate to a target height of 50mm



Mid March to Mid October

Highlighted areas indicate the potential for long meadows.

Amenity prestige areas like the Brompton Museum and Park will have well cut lawns due to the prestige of the site. This means no long meadows will be created unless justified like under tree canopy.

From mid-March to mid-October amenity prestige areas will be cut to a target height of 50mm every two weeks and be at least 1m wide or according to the County's standards. Cuttings will be collected after each cut.

P5. Low Activity and Tree Canopy Amenity



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Policy 5 Summary

Areas with tree canopy cover or a lower amenity value will be allowed to grow taller to encourage biodiversity. These can be used to introduce perennial wildflower meadows. These areas may frequently be hard to mow, embankments, canopy areas and other areas that have low amenity value. Current mowing and strimming regimes can damage tree roots.

The main aspects of Policy 5 are to cut the grass length to 50mm whenever the height of the meadow reaches up to 200mm. Cuttings must be left for nutrient generation and seed bank creation. 1 cut a year is advised for healthy long meadow generation. Areas that may be hard to mow and with heavy tree canopy will be left with no regime per year to ensure meadows can grow and restrict the public from entering areas that may be unsafe.



P6. Wildflower Meadows

Policy 6 Summary

Wherever possible the Council will identify areas of long meadows that can be sown to create perennial wildflower sites for the benefit of the environment and people. They will be managed similarly to P5 however will need specialised care to secure the welfare of the wildflowers.

The Council have already introduced multiple wildflower sites around the Borough, which the Council will aim to increase.



How will people in the Borough react?

One of the main issues that may come from this policy is the public view on 'unsightly' areas. It has been shown that many do find 'outgrown' grassland to be beautiful however there are perceptions that this is unsightly and untidy. These perceptions the Council will seek to address through a comprehensive communications strategy.



Communications Strategy

To ensure this issue does not impact the work the Council undertakes and negative public views, the Council will facilitate an online and physical campaign alongside the new policy to inform people in the Borough and increase positive perceptions of the changes that will occur. This will underpin the change in regimes and will encompass information published on the webpages, through posters and on social media. If appropriate the Council may also look into running events to spread awareness about the changes and collect resident opinions and visit resident groups. The Council will work with charities like Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to facilitate school visits to learn about biodiversity. Negativity will however reduce over time as the public get used to the changes in land management methods. The informational campaign the Council will run alongside these changes to explain the social, economic and environmental benefits these changes will create positivity.

Accreditation Schemes

Green Flag

Multiple sites in the Borough are Green Flag accredited, such as Lyme Valley Parkway. As part of the accreditation scheme Green Flag evaluates based on horticultural maintenance, managing environmental impact, climate change adaptation strategies, management of natural features, wild fauna and flora and marketing and promotion. This policy will address all factors within their criteria.



Britain in Bloom

Britain in Bloom, also an important accreditation that the Council has an outstanding participation record for has published new, more sustainable criteria. The new criteria includes the prioritisation of perennial and pollinator friendly plants, considering the needs of wildlife, minimising water use and tackling local environmental issues. These can all be promoted through the grassland strategy.



Biodiversity Net-Gain

In England, Biodiversity Net-Gain (BNG) is becoming mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). Developers must deliver a BNG of 10%. This means a development will result in more or better quality natural habitat than there was before development. If not appropriate on site this gain may be on Council land.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a new mandatory system of spatial strategies for nature established by the Environment Act 2021. They are designed as tools to encourage more coordinated practical and focused action and investment in nature. The NRN will be created by 2042. Nature Recovery Network - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Invasive Non-Native Species

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) are not required by law to be regulated however there is a list of 30 INNS that are a concern due to their invasiveness and ability to establish in several nations across Europe and that are banned to be released into the wild by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Invasive non-native (alien) animal species: rules in England and Wales - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Grassland Management Strategy Conclusion

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.

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. However must be informed by experts within the Council and others such as The Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. This Strategy will make the Council a leader in the sector.

