

Wildflower strategies

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Key Points

An APSE Network Query was submitted by an APSE member authority to ask if others had a Wildflower Strategy or were in the process of developing one.

This briefing covers the common themes amongst Wildflower Strategies for authorities who do not yet have one, or are considering updating an existing strategy.

1.0 Introduction

There has been a reduction in wildflower meadows by over 97% since the 1930s of roughly 3 million hectares. It has been reported that there could be as little as 10,500 hectares of lowland wildflower meadow and 900 hectares of upland hay meadow left in the UK. Their existence is important, as meadows can contain up to 40 species per square metre as well as supporting pollinating insects, mitigating flooding and can capture large amounts of carbon.

With a growing focus on climate emergency declarations, establishment of Council carbon management programmes, the widespread decline in pollinating insects in the UK, and growing public acceptance for alternatives to traditional Council green space management, the arguments for establishing more wildflower meadows have rarely been more prevalent in discussions.

With many Council services being suspended to mitigate the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, grassland across the country has been allowed to grow wild to an extent that has not been seen in years. This has given the public a sample of what living in the vicinity of wild, natural grassland would be like. While many Councils have received complaints about the length of grass, many have also received complimentary letters and requests to continue to let areas of grassland to grow wild. After receiving many of these requests, Councils such as [Fife Council](#) announced plans to consult with residents on proposals to manage some areas of green space differently across their seven local areas “with more emphasis on rewilding and leaving more areas to grow naturally”.

This briefing covers some of the different approaches that are being taken with establishing and managing wildflower meadows across the UK.

2.0 Common themes

No singular wildflower strategy

Many councils don't have a separate Wildflower Strategy, but instead wildflower meadows are included as part of an overall strategy.

Other types of policies mentioned that feature sections on wildflowers include:

- Pollinator strategy
- Herbicide reduction policy
- Local biodiversity action plan
- Green futures approach

Volunteer and community group involvement

Many of the Wildflower planting and management processes, as well as the sourcing of funding has a lot of involvement in different UK councils from volunteers.

Connection to the achievement of Council targets or goals

Many wildflower programmes are connected to the achievement of overall Council targets on biodiversity, climate emergencies, budget savings programmes and parks maintenance strategies. Wildflower meadows are often one of the solutions to one or several of the Council's issues.

3.0 Examples of Wildflower Schemes

Plymouth City Council ([link](#))

Plymouth City Council have created 120 wildflower meadow sites in the area since 2012 with help through funding from organisations such as The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Peoples Postcode Lottery and Biffa. Their meadows are managed with a single annual cut between late summer and the beginning of autumn, with many volunteers involved in the planting wildflower plug plants and flowering bulbs. Their website also features a map of site locations, and over 30 description pages that highlight



the location of the wildflower meadow, a photo of the area and some of the most common species and invertebrate species that can be found there (e.g. [Aylesbury playing fields](#) wildflower meadows has knapweed, ragwort, yellow rattle, eyebright and white clover, as well as gatekeeper butterflies and bees). The full list of sites can be found [here](#). The council also encourages residents to send in pictures via the social media hashtag #plymouthwildflowers and share photos and videos through their Twitter account [@NaturePlymouth](#).

The Council's Green Estates Manager was part of a [recent interview](#) on the Council website where he stated that "before the coronavirus pandemic, we were planning to trial leaving a few verges and boundaries in certain areas of the city to grow wilder...we expected petrol savings, more insects, more wildflowers and staff able to prioritise work in parks...but then along came COVID-19 and with it a number of factors which mean we've decided to roll the scheme out a little further". They intend to have more wildflowers growing on verges and banks alongside roads.

Glasgow City Council

Glasgow City Council has been developing wildflower meadows since 2001. Their current focus for wildflower meadows in their [Glasgow Pollinator Plan 2017-2027](#) is to "enhance existing key grasslands and create new wildflower meadows as part of an integrated habitat network". Wildflower meadows are now incorporated into their park management plans. Over 22 hectares of parks grasslands are now managed as meadows.

The Council have had several successful projects in this area including:

- 'Glasgow's Buzzing' a 3 year project that involved creating and enhancing wildflower meadows with 139 invertebrate species recorded, 17 that were new to Glasgow.
- Community groups are involved in wildflower meadow creation, sourcing funding for their enhancement and planting wildflowers.
- The Trust for Conservation Volunteers (TCV), Grow Wild and the Council have worked together on several projects to improve Glasgow's biodiversity habitats, and have established a wildflower nursery in Pollok Country Park.
- Some meadows with more non-native species (such as ornamental daffodils) have been created to provide nectar sources for longer in the year and give their meadows more attractive colour arrangements.
- The Council have also engaged in several other projects to benefit bees such as - relaxing grass cutting regimes to provide nesting/hibernation areas and the creation of Bee Banks.
- 80 hectares of 'species rich' wildflower meadows have also been enhanced and managed on Glasgow's farms.



In October 2019, the Council unveiled plans to plant 250,000 bulbs and wildflower seeds in parks, road verges and steep slopes as part of their biodiversity plan.

Swansea Council

[Swansea](#) began with a trial scheme in 2012 and now has over 180 wildflower sites across the city including roundabouts, roadside verges, parks and prominent landmarks, with more than 41,000 square metres of wildflowers. After many years of the initiatives, their parks and cleansing service uses their experience to determine which types of wildflowers work best in different areas. The program is funded by the Council, community councils and local ward members.



The popularity of the scheme with local residents means that the Council regularly get enquiries from the public about how they can buy the seed mixtures for their own gardens. The Council now works in partnership with Friends of the Botanical Gardens who sell the seed mixtures at their plant sale events in Swansea.

Other case studies (Hartlepool Borough Council, Coventry City Council and South Tyneside Council)

Pictorial Meadows published case studies on their website of the results of their work with [Hartlepool Borough Council](#), [Coventry City Council](#) and [South Tyneside Council](#). The photos displayed in each of the case studies give a good example of how attractive wildflowers can look when done well.

3.0 APSE Comment

APSE appreciates our members responding to APSE Network Queries to assist others with their service issues. APSE is a supporter of the establishment of wildflower meadows, and a great deal of best practice on this has been shared through our advisory groups (such as [this presentation by Stirling Council](#) or this presentation by [Bristol City Council](#)) and seminar programme. APSE Direct also recently featured an article on [Brent Council's Bee Corridor](#) that would make useful further reading. In addition, APSE have two upcoming seminars which you may also find of interest, firstly our [Allotments seminar: 'Lockdowns and Leeks' – the growing importance of allotments](#) and then our [Trees and Woodlands seminar](#). Both are taking place online and have a number of excellent speakers including DEFRA and the Woodland Trust.

APSE understands the pressure that Neighbourhood Services are under, with [previous APSE research](#) showing that resources devoted to neighbourhood services across England, Wales and Scotland fell 27% over the nine years from 2009/10 to 2017/18, compared to a real fall in total UK local government spending over the same period of 19%. With reduced funding, neighbourhood services need to be

creative in their use of their remaining budgets, and the establishment of wildflower meadows has the potential to offer monetary and staff savings while providing a great deal of value for the local community and for the environmental goals of Councils.

Reminder: APSE has set up a COVID-19 Information Hub to deal with frontline service issues as they arise, ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time. You can access this hub by [clicking here](#) and you can also join our WhatsApp Support Network by [clicking here](#).

Garry Lee
Research and Coordination Officer

Louise Melville
Principal Advisor

Wayne Priestley
Principal Advisor