



association for public service excellence

Grassroots Messaging

Visual communication for biodiversity areas



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Grassroots Messaging: Visual communication for biodiversity areas

This report was authored by Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor. For any enquires, Matt may be contacted on:

Tel: 0161 772 1810

Email: mellis@apse.org.uk

Background

Local authorities are at the forefront of efforts to address biodiversity decline and mitigate the impacts of climate change. As part of this response, many councils have fundamentally rethought how they manage grassed areas across parks, verges, housing land and other public spaces. Differential mowing regimes – cutting grass less frequently, allowing areas to naturalise, and creating wildflower habitats – are now widely recognised as cost-effective and environmentally beneficial interventions.

Interest in this approach has grown rapidly across the sector. APSE has hosted a number of well-attended events on grassland management in recent years, including the “[Best in Grass](#)” online seminar in 2024¹ and the “[Class on Grass](#)” webinar in 2025². These sessions generated significant engagement from member authorities and highlighted the extent to which councils are actively exploring alternative mowing regimes as part of their wider climate and ecological strategies.

Alongside this formal programme of events, APSE has also received an increasing number of network queries from member councils seeking advice and examples of good practice in relation to differential mowing. While many of these queries focus on operational matters, a consistent theme has been the challenge of public perception and communication – particularly how to explain visible changes to grass cutting in a way that is clear, positive and credible to residents.

While the technical and ecological case for differential mowing is now well established, public understanding has not always kept pace. For some residents, longer grass continues to be associated with neglect or declining service standards. Without clear explanation, even well-designed biodiversity initiatives can attract misunderstanding or opposition.

Communication is therefore a critical component of successful grassland management. Signage placed directly within biodiversity areas plays a particularly important role, providing immediate, place-based explanation, reinforcing that sites are being actively managed and helping to reframe expectations of what well-maintained greenspace looks like in the context of climate and ecological emergency.

¹ <https://www.apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/events/previous-seminars/2024-seminars/best-in-grass-grassland-management-online-seminar/>

² <https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/events/previous-seminars/2025-seminars/class-on-grass-grassland-management-webinar-free-for-members/>

APSE's report *Grassland Management* ([APSE Briefing 25-02](#))³ sets out the strategic case for adopting differential mowing regimes, drawing together evidence on biodiversity benefits and practical delivery considerations for local authorities.

Grassroots Messaging: Visual communication for biodiversity areas has been developed as a direct accompaniment to that work. Rather than restating the operational case for change, it focuses specifically on how those changes are explained and made visible to the public. Drawing on real-world examples from councils across the UK, it explores how signage and visual messaging can support the implementation of biodiversity-led mowing regimes.

Used together, the two reports offer a complementary toolkit for councils: *Grassland Management* provides the "why" and the "how" of differential mowing, while *Grassroots Messaging* supports the "how it is seen and understood" on the ground. In doing so, they aim to help authorities embed biodiversity-led grassland management as a credible and publicly supported element of modern local authority service delivery.

³ <https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2025/25-02-grassland-management/>

Signage

Aberdeenshire Council




**We are
improving this site
for wildlife and
people**

greenspace@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

   [@GreenspaceAberdeenshire](https://twitter.com/GreenspaceAberdeenshire)



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL 

 This lawn will be **cut in autumn** to **support wildlife** through the summer



Leaving this grassy area to grow longer this summer allows native flowers and grasses to bloom for bees and butterflies and provides shelter for small mammals. This area will be cut by the end of autumn.
Greenspace@aberdeenshire.gov.uk [#NoMowMeadows](https://twitter.com/NoMowMeadows)



Managing our greenspaces for people and wildlife

Across Aberdeenshire you may notice changes in the way that some Council-owned grass areas are being managed.

It could be the creation of wildflower areas with reduced frequency of cutting or that some areas are not being cut at all and left to grow longer.

You can find out more about management of local greenspaces and the positive benefits for people and wildlife at:

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/greenspace/>



NORTH
EAST
SCOTLAND
Biodiversity
Partnership



Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils





Dôl Blodau Gwyllt

Mae hon yn ardal sy'n cael ei rheoli fel dolydd blodau gwyllt, i helpu i wrthdroi gostyngiad y cynefin pwysig hwn, a darparu cartref hanfodol i beillwyr fel gloÿnnod byw a gwenyn.

Ni fyddwn yn torri gwair yn yr ardal hon yn ystod misoedd y gwanwyn a'r haf. Bydd hyn yn darparu bwyd a lloches i fywyd gwyllt ac yn caniatáu i'r blodau gwyllt brodorol i gynhyrchu hadau, gan sicrhau bod y ddôl yn parhau i ffynnu yn y blynyddoedd i ddod.

Os hoffech ddysgu mwy am Brosiect Blodau Gwyllt Cyngor Sir Ddinbych, ein gwaith fel sefydliad "Cyfeillgar i Wenyn", neu i wybod sut y gallwch gyfrannu, yna cysylltwch â ni drwy anfon e-bost at biodiversity@denbighshire.gov.uk

Wildflower Meadow

This area is being managed as a wildflower meadow, to help reverse the decline in this important habitat, and provide a vital home for pollinators such as butterflies and bees.

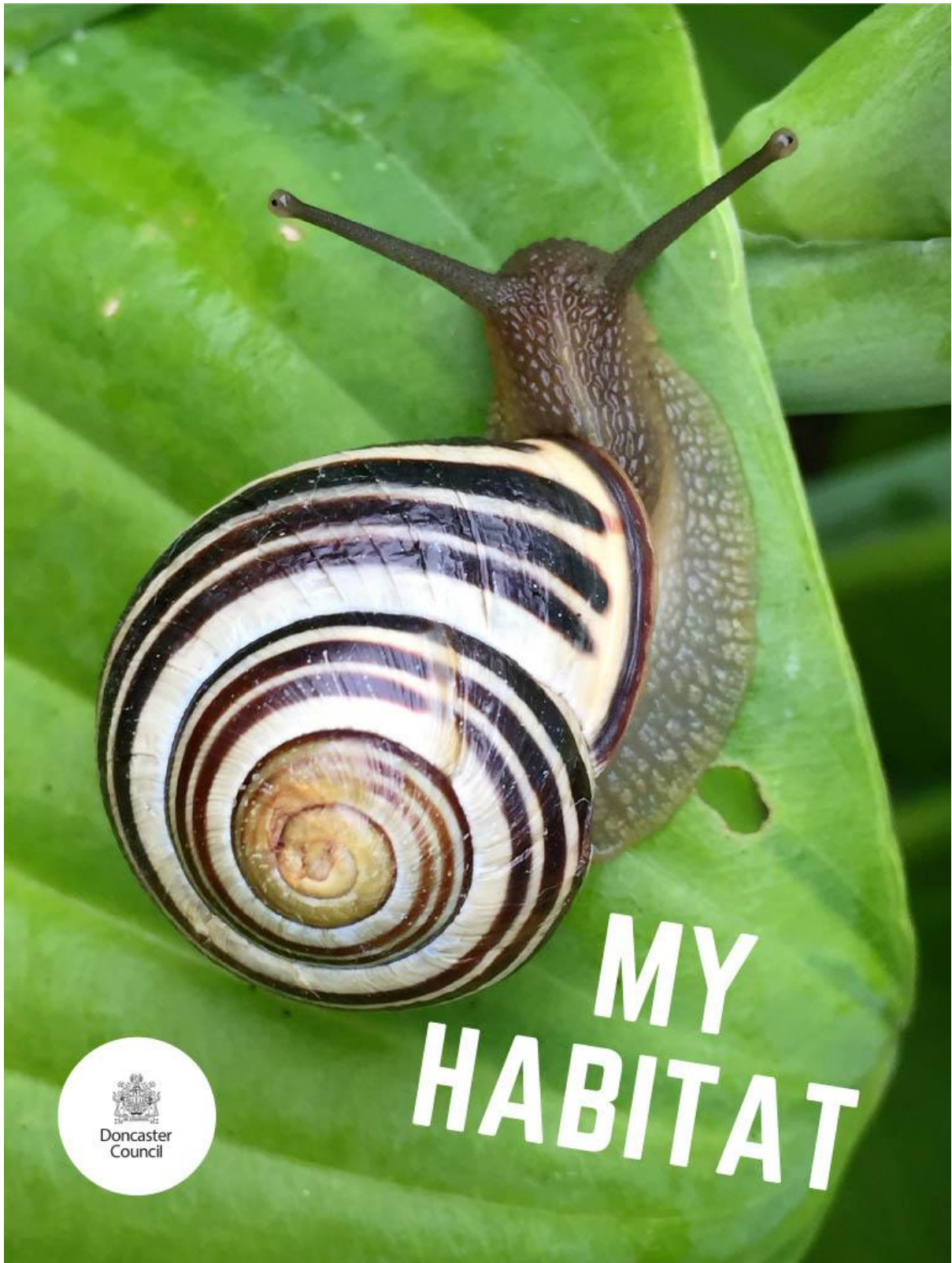
This area will not be cut over the spring and summer months. This will provide food and shelter for wildlife, and allow the native wildflowers to produce seeds, ensuring that the meadow continues to flourish for years to come.

To learn more about Denbighshire County Council's Wildflower Project, our work as a "Bee Friendly" organisation, or discover how you can get involved, please contact us at biodiversity@denbighshire.gov.uk



www.sirdinbych.gov.uk
www.denbighshire.gov.uk





MY HABITAT

THIS SPACE IS DEDICATED TO ENHANCING DONCASTER'S BIODIVERSITY

**By allowing the grass
to grow we are:**

- Increasing pollinators which are vital in supporting our ecosystem.
- Improving Doncaster's biodiversity.
- Helping reverse a national decline in native species.
- Increasing the chance for native species to regenerate and thrive.
- Reducing our carbon footprint.



Scene.Street@doncaster.gov.uk

**Doncaster
Council**

Naturalisation and Pollination

Naturalising this space

To increase biodiversity, we have changed the way we maintain this area of grass. This area will be mown less often to encourage the growth of wild flowers and grasses. This process is called rewilding or naturalisation.

Naturalisation is crucial in the fight against climate change. Naturalisation restores ecosystems and natural processes, these processes help to offset greenhouse gas emissions and repair the damage made by humans.

By encouraging an area to naturalise, we are supporting the growth of many varieties of wild flowers, which in turn support many other types of wildlife. Our aim with this naturalised area is to encourage the return of nature to our park.

The wild flowers in our naturalised areas have an important role in pollination. Pollination is the process which allows flowering plants to reproduce. This process wouldn't be possible without pollinators which are the insects or animals that move the pollen from one flower to another.



Did you know?

On a single summer's day, one acre of wild flower meadow can contain 3 million flowers. This would produce 1kg of nectar sugar, that's enough to support nearly 96,000 honey bees per day.

One out of every three mouthfuls of our food depends on pollinators.

Without pollinators we would struggle to get fruit, vegetables or even chocolate!



How many different pollinators can you find in the park today?

Bees are the most common pollinator, but they aren't the only ones. Wasps, flies, butterflies, and many other insects as well as birds and bats are pollinators too!





Two signs are used in areas transitioning from regular mowing to what is described as *meadow management*. Under this approach, mowing is restricted to twice a year: once in spring, followed by a cut and clear in early autumn.

Areas are typically left unmown for at least one full season before any enrichment takes place. This allows existing plant communities to establish and ensures that introducing seed does not adversely affect species already present. Enrichment is generally targeted at locations where support for meadow management is more fragile, often due to perceptions that sites contain “nothing but long grass and weeds”. In these cases, the subsequent increase in flowering plants has frequently helped to shift public opinion.

Both signs are now due to be revised following concerns about accessibility. Feedback has highlighted that not all residents use or understand QR codes, and the council is therefore exploring alternative ways for people to engage, including providing a dedicated webpage, email address and telephone contact to broaden access and improve communication.



The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Stiùirichte 'son Fiadh-bheatha Managed for Wildlife

Àrainn nàdarra do phoileanadairean
is fiadh-bheatha eile.
Natural habitat for pollinators and
other wildlife.

Grass, butterflies and bees designed by Freepik.
Sign designed by The Highland Council CC2122-75

www.highland.gov.uk



Lambeth Council have many areas of conservation grassland, but only really sign their wildflower verges, as they rarely get complaints about long grass in parks and try to avoid clutter.



Wildflower verge in progress

Find out more and get involved parks@lambeth.gov.uk

SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON









**Take
a walk
on the
wild side**

We're letting parts of our parks grow longer to create vital habitats for wildlife and boost biodiversity.



Find out more at manchester.gov.uk/differential-mowing



Your green space is just round the corner



Rochdale Borough Council's differential mowing, meadow grassland and wildflower sites use a distinctive "happy bee" cut-out as a quick visual reference to indicate that an area is being actively managed for wildlife. This simple visual cue helps residents recognise biodiversity sites at a glance and understand that changes to grass cutting are intentional and environmentally driven.

Further information on the council's approach to grass cutting and verge management is available on the Rochdale Borough Council [website](#). The initiative is currently being delivered as a year-one pilot project, focused on converting selected areas from close-mown grass to meadow grassland and wildflower meadow. Subject to evaluation, the Council intends to roll the approach out more widely across the borough over the next five years.





Wildlife-rich area

This site is being managed as wildflower grassland and it must not be cut until the plants have flowered and seeded at the end of summer.

All cuttings will be removed to ensure wildflowers can grow and flourish.

Sites managed this way provide valuable pollen and nectar sources for bees and other pollinators.



Conclusion

Differential mowing regimes are now firmly established as a key tool available to local authorities in responding to the climate and biodiversity emergencies. Across the UK, councils are changing how grassed areas are managed to create space for wildflowers, pollinators and wider ecological networks, while also delivering more sustainable and cost-effective greenspace management. However, as this report has demonstrated, the success of these approaches depends not only on how land is managed, but on how those changes are communicated.

Well-designed and thoughtfully located signage plays a crucial role in helping residents understand why grass is being left to grow and what benefits this brings. Without effective visual communication, differential mowing can be misunderstood as neglect or service withdrawal. With it, the same spaces can be reframed as purposeful, cared-for and environmentally valuable parts of the local landscape.

The examples showcased in *Grassroots Messaging: Visual communication for biodiversity areas* illustrate the variety of ways councils are rising to this challenge. From straightforward explanatory boards to more interactive approaches using QR codes, the signage featured demonstrates how visual messaging can reduce complaints, build trust and encourage public support for biodiversity initiatives.

This practical communication must be underpinned by robust technical knowledge, which is precisely the focus of APSE's specialised training course, "[Wildflower Meadows and Grasslands Management for Local Authorities](#)." The course directly addresses the climate and biodiversity crises by equipping officers and elected members with actionable strategies for implementing species-rich grasslands. Attendees learn not only the ecological benefits and maintenance techniques of these habitats but also the critical importance of gaining community support.

As interest in differential mowing continues to grow – reflected in the strong engagement with APSE's online meetings, training course, and network queries service – so too does the need for councils to share learning and good practice in this area. By highlighting effective approaches already in use across the sector, this report aims to support APSE members in strengthening their own communications and embedding differential mowing as a visible, credible and widely understood element of modern greenspace management.

Ultimately, changing how landscapes look requires changing how they are perceived. Through clear and consistent visual communication, local authorities can help residents see longer grass not as a problem to be fixed, but as a positive and purposeful sign of action for nature, climate as well as community wellbeing.

How can APSE help?

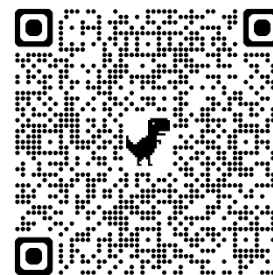
All APSE members can sign up to APSE's Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network, which is an online network providing at least four learning events across the year, with expert speakers from across local government and the wider parks and greenspace sector. You can sign up to the network using [this link](#).

APSE regularly receives queries on grassland management methods from our member councils. We source responses to these queries by circulating them to our extensive UK-wide network of greenspace professionals. If you are an APSE member council and have grassland management queries – or any queries relating to grounds maintenance – the APSE network may have the answers. Connect with the APSE network and get involved with our Network Queries service [here](#).

1.1 Training

APSE Training has also designed a special interactive online course for those interested in grassland management and wildflower planting.

- **Wildflower Meadows and Grasslands Management for Local Authorities** - This training course equips local councils with practical strategies to combat climate change and biodiversity loss through grassland management and wildflower planting. It presents a faster alternative to tree planting, detailing how to establish, maintain, and gain community support for these carbon-sequestering, habitat-rich green spaces. Book your place on the course [here](#) or use the QR code.



1.2 Benchmarking for your parks service

APSE Performance Networks is the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking organisation in the UK. With over 200 authorities in membership, Performance Networks assists local councils by:

- Demonstrating progression on carbon reduction/ecological actions
- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.

- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identifying inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.
- Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking.

For more information about how your greenspace service can benefit from Performance Networks membership, click [here](#).

Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national networks include:-

- FM and Building Cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.



Association for Public Service Excellence
3rd floor,
Trafford House,
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.
email: enquiries@apse.org.uk
telephone: 0161 772 1810
web: www.apse.org.uk

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Delivering for local people and local economies