

APSE Parks Innovation Award Winner 2019



Brent's Bee Corridor



From a concept.....



..... to a reality



We created meadows...



....that brought visitors!



What did we do differently?

- In the first year we created meadows by transitioning from mown amenity grass to long grass
- In the second year, we recognised the need to make changes
- Something different was needed, so wildflowers were introduced
- We used a mix of 70% perennials and 30% annuals
- Seeds were selected based on the specific clay soil found in London
- We were adamant that no glyphosate would be used
- We wanted to make the sowing look naturalised



How did we communicate our project to councillors and residents?

MEMBERS' INFORMATION PAMPHLET MEADOWS AND VERGE MANAGEMENT IN BRENT



DIRECTION

Every service or facility that Brent Council provides has been in some way affected by budget cuts imposed on us by eight years of government austerity. Fortunately, in many cases, creative solutions have helped reduce the impact funding cuts might otherwise have had. One such innovation in the management of our parks – the introduction of meadow areas – had the additional but intended consequence of enhancing the biodiversity of our open and green spaces, and will remain an integral part of our environmental strategy for the foreseeable future.

Biodiversity
Meadows used to be an integral part of the landscape of the UK. However, only 2% of meadows have survived, impacting upon the habitats of many insects and birds. Brent's meadow areas are now bringing back biodiversity into the borough and providing new and thriving eco-systems. We cannot continue to provide large areas of short mown



grass which lead to a death of insect and animal life, particularly bees.

Equally we recognise that parks are areas which all residents want to use, whether for walking, recreation, walking the dog, playing with children, picnicking or playing sports. Therefore, 24 out of the 16 parks and open spaces across Brent now have integrated and developing meadow areas. Maps of each meadow area can be found as attachments to this document.



VERGES AND MEADOWS



The meadow areas are then allowed to develop through the year and are cut from the beginning of September onwards. After cutting grass in each meadow area will be removed.

We aim to ensure a balance in the provision of general amenity areas with meadow areas in our parks and open spaces, allowing for everyone to enjoy our spaces, whatever their reason for their visit. There will always be a mowed border area and the edge of every meadow as well, which allows people to walk around each meadow area and provides a contrast between the short and larger grass.

When will the verges be cut?
Verges will typically be cut up to six times a year (Jan to December), but they may receive more cuts at the beginning of a year than at the end. Verges grow in weather dependent and rain and some warmth offers the perfect growing conditions for grass and wildflowers.

Our main concern is that the overall height of grass in our verges does not exceed 30cm and that there are no safety issues at road junctions caused by long grass. We will communicate our cutting schedule at the beginning of the year to all members, so you can share this with residents. We will need to be astute and aware of weather conditions throughout the year.

As soon as the grass starts to grow we will look to start our cutting schedule. It takes eight weeks for one team to cut all the verges in Brent. Therefore at the start of the year, by the time we complete one cutting schedule it may be necessary to start again at night away.

Wildflower areas in more detail
Meadow management requires that the selected areas are not mowed from March onwards to allow all grass and wildflowers present to grow. Each year the process takes place, the meadow areas will become more defined and allow for a more intense habitat.



Whilst the maps that we have provided confirm the meadow area locations for 2018, we are always assessing the strengths of each area and there may be small changes from year to year as we develop this system.

2018 proved to be an exceptionally hot summer, which led to the fire brigade issuing a ban on barbecues in parks to reduce the risk of grass fires. Brent has a permanent ban on barbecues which will help reduce any risk in future years, should there be similar long, dry periods of weather again. We also liaise closely with the fire brigade for our risk management policy in our parks and open spaces.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT AS A COUNCILLOR

Verges
An updated cutting schedule will be posted regularly on the following webpage www.brent.gov.uk/american-ferns-wildlife-environment/areas-hedges-and-grass-main-tenance so you can always see when our verges are due to be cut. Verges will be allowed to grow longer in between cuts, and certain wildflowers which include plants such as dandelions and cow parsley will grow faster and be higher than the grass. Wildflowers are now an acceptable part of our verges.

Wildflowers
In selected parks, wildflowers will be sown in small areas from April onwards to allow them to look naturalised amongst our grassed meadow areas. Not every meadow area will have a sown wildflower area in the first year, but we aim to have a wildflower section in each park within two years, providing not only colour for residents and visitors but just as importantly, food for insects, birds and bees.

Publicity
Maps of each meadow area are attached to this document and will be available to you online as well. Areas of our parks that have been converted into a meadow will continue to be litter picked at the same frequency as the rest of the park. We also continue to advise residents that they should take their litter home with them or place it in a bin whilst using our open spaces. The same principle goes for dog walkers. Meadow grass is not secure to drop litter or not pick up dog mess.

There is no clear link between anti-social behaviour and meadow areas. However, Public Space Protection Orders are seen to be in effect in our parks which will offer power to prevent people drinking large amounts, dropping litter and acting in an anti-social manner. We are confident that the introduction of meadows is a positive step forward for residents, visitors and wildlife alike.

Communications to residents
We will be ensuring that information about our meadows management process and verge cutting schedule is communicated to residents using the most relevant communications methods.

Parks Notice boards will show images of the meadow area for ease of reference for residents. We are also looking to install new information boards, telling residents what they can expect to see and find at each location.

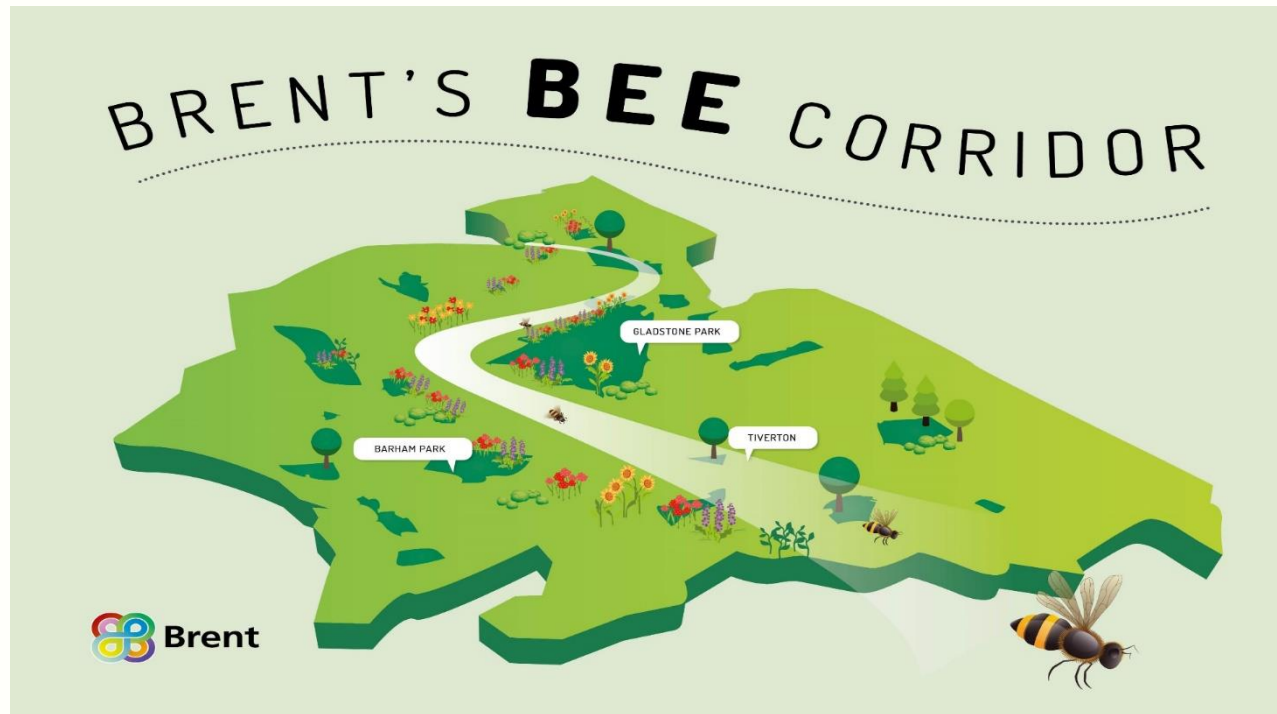
A newly created Biodiversity Portal will provide an online source of information of all things related to biodiversity including links to friends groups, photos and links to initiatives such as the RSPB's annual bird count, butterfly watch and New Gardens Wildflower project.

Who do I contact for more information?
Any queries on verges and meadows can be raised with your local Neighbourhood Manager or our Parks and Horticulture Officers at [nighbourhood.manager@brent.gov.uk](mailto:ngh@brent.gov.uk)

Appendices in your area Meadow area map

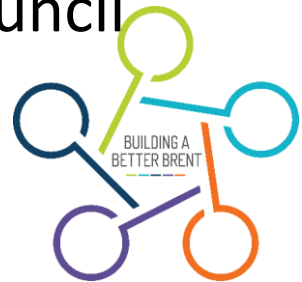


The Bee Corridor

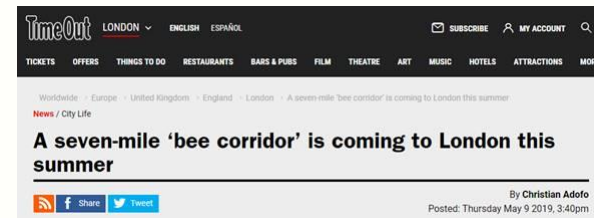


How our project went global

- **Step 1** Evening Standard runs an article – coinciding with the release of the UN report on biodiversity
- **Step 2** The Independent, BBC London, Slovakian TV, Jeremy Corbyn, the RHS magazine 'The Garden' and Buenos Aires University, amongst others, all promote and support our bee corridor initiative
- **Step 3** Residents from other national authorities contact us to ask how they can persuade their council to also plant wildflowers



Some of our media coverage



Just some of the social media responses to our corridor

Jeremy Corbyn @jeremycorbyn

Bees are vital to the environment and are important pollinators - a third of the human diet is from plants that are pollinated by insects.

A fantastic initiative by @Brent_Council.



Seven-mile 'bee corridor' coming to London to boost dwindling numbers
A seven-mile "bee corridor" of vibrant wildflowers is being planted to encourage the insect's population in London. The pathway for bees will be formed of 22 meadow...

standard.co.uk

2:51 am · 6 May 2019

1,074 Retweets 2,979 Likes

197 1.1K 3.0K



RT @RT_com · May 10

Brent Council in London is creating seven-mile 'bee corridor'

The pathway will be formed of 22 meadows sown through parks and green spaces in the north west of the capital. It's supposed to encourage growth in the insect's population.



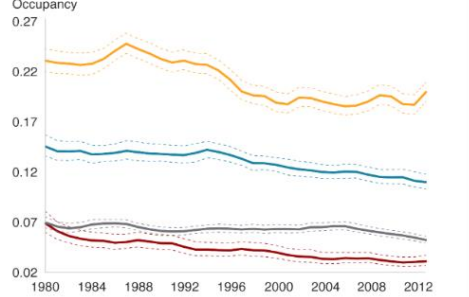
3 29 67

World Economic Forum @wef · May 16

London is planting a giant **bee corridor** wef.ch/2E9Lf8l #environment

Decline in pollinating insects in Britain

- Widespread species of wild bee and hoverflies
- Widespread southern species of wild bees and hoverflies
- Wild bees and hoverflies living in southern areas
- Wild bees and hoverflies living in upland areas



Occupancy is an estimate of the proportion of 1km grid cells where the species is present

Source: Nature Communications

1 23 44



Then we crossed everything and waited for nature to take its course

And at 6.30 pm on the 4th June....



Then we began monitoring the results

- We set a schedule to visit each of the 22 wildflower areas that made up our corridor
- On each visit we would photograph the flowers, the grasses and any insects, butterflies and bees
- This gave us the start of a record of biodiversity to allow us to track the impact our corridor was having



So what had changed?

Yorkshire Fog



Grassy Vetchling



Sheep's Sorrel



Some of our findings

- No use of chemicals in the preparation enabled grasses from buried seed to grow
- The variety of grasses in the borough has been incredible e.g. Yorkshire Fog, Cat's-tail and Meadow Foxtail
- Grasses are just as important for attracting breeding grassland butterflies, for example, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Ringlet and Marbled White
- Unusual plants such as Sheep's Sorrel and acid grassland plants, thrived
- We also discovered Bush Crickets, Ladybirds, beetles and inquisitive Dragonflies searching for prey



The first arrivals were the bees



Closely followed by the butterflies

Painted Lady



Marbled White



Small Heath



And finally came the people



54 likes
juliegoldsmith Wildflower meadow #summerevening at #barhampark #londonboroughofbrent #wildflowermeadow #londonparks #acavastudios



What are the outcomes?

- We successfully increased biodiversity *and* saved money
- Knowledge and information has been shared with many other councils
- We are still receiving enquiries from other countries; the most recent from a park manager in Milan
- The Bee Corridor provided food for thousands of bees
- As well as creating habitats for a multitude of other insects with a new ecosystem
- People are really excited about our wildflower meadows



What a successful year



What next for the London Borough of Brent?

- Expanding our corridor to include roundabouts and verges
- Further monitoring of insects and wildlife to create a biodiversity database
- Wildlife photography competition to encourage residents to get involved
- Annual monitoring and evaluation of each wildflower meadow area
- Looking to sow shade tolerant wildflowers around tree bases



But it's not just about our borough

- This initiative has high transferability with relative ease and low cost
- It has the potential to facilitate the creation of a national bee corridor
- We inspired others to see that wildflower meadows in parks can work; local press reported that neighbouring Barnet were introducing a new bee corridor a month after ours
- It has implications for the future management of parks worldwide
- It has demonstrated a clear link between improved mood and being in nature; our residents loved the corridor as much as the bees!
- We have been able to demonstrate that it's possible to increase biodiversity in times of constant efficiency savings
- It has captured the imagination of the public



We're looking forward to a longer corridor for the bees



Thank you for listening

