

Herbicide reduction & biodiversity enhancements in Mid and East Antrim

Mid and East Antrim Borough covers 400 square miles and is home to over 135,000 people, in 58,000 households

The Parks and Open Spaces Service manage over 300 sites including premier parks, play parks, woodlands, sports pitches, cemeteries, walkways, marinas, markets, allotments and 62 miles of coastline

There are 120 Parks and Open Spaces staff.



Why reduction?

- Council is conscious of the need to reduce, replace, and where possible, eliminate the use of herbicides due to the potential risk to the environment and human health increasingly highlighted in research and media
- Chemicals can have devastating effects on the environment and biodiversity. When used on hard surfaces such as pavements and paths herbicides can run off, potentially contaminating water courses and aquatic wildlife.
- Research has shown the overuse of chemicals, in both agricultural and urban settings, is destroying many important wildlife habitats and plant species. They can be highly persistent meaning that they stay in the soil long-term and can turn parks into 'green deserts'
- A 2017 study shows a 76% decline in flying insects since 1990 and pollinators are particularly struggling. More recent studies show almost 90% of the bee population has disappeared in the last few years. With bees recently being declared the "most important living beings on the planet", many Councils are now working towards becoming chemical free.
- In December 2017 the European Commission made the decision to renew the approval for the use of glyphosate for five more years, as such, the current approval of glyphosate expires in December 2022

Previous/current use

- Council currently uses a number of glyphosate weed control products (Roundup, Gallup, Nomix Dual and Pistol)
- In 2019 Council used 650 litres of herbicide
- From 1 April 2020 Council agreed a Herbicide Reduction Policy to reduce herbicide usage by 15% each year over the next 3 years (2020 to 2023) leading to a 45% reduction by 2023
- Herbicide is still used at sites including cemeteries, sports pitches, bowling greens, and to treat invasive species, where chemical control remains the appropriate control option currently
- Mainly used on pathways due to (real or perceived) H&S risk and public perception/preparation of beds
- 2020 herbicide usage has been reduced by 50% already
- The COVID effect – staff furlough, operations effected
- 20% reduction projected
- Real figures apparent by end of March 2021, comparative to March 2020

Policy

- Developed by staff – Parks operations and development team
- Agreed at Council for implementation from 1 April 2020
- The policy aims to reduce glyphosate use 45% by April 2023 by:-
 - Designating herbicide free zones
 - Implementing alternative control methods
 - Creating 'wild' areas where appropriate
 - Developing of a communication campaign to raise awareness and encourage acceptance of alternative management techniques
 - Supporting resident/community groups carrying out clean ups in local areas through the provision of 'Green Clean Up' kits
 - Promoting of the importance of pollinator insects; developing and promoting pollinator friendly areas and maintenance techniques
- The policy will guide both internal operations and residents/community groups involved with 'in bloom' and similar community initiatives. This policy will enable Council to continue to develop sites for regional accreditations (Bloom, Green Flag) which require minimization of herbicide use
- The document will be reviewed in April 2023 and, if relevant, annually thereafter.

Herbicide Free Zones

- Three sites have been designated herbicide free
- Bashfordsland Wood, Diamond Jubilee Wood and Ecos Nature Park
- These three sites were chosen as they are relatively 'wild' sites and have active Friends Of groups
- Signage installed on extensive publicity to inform public



Alternative control methods

- SBS Street Weeder x 2
- £2150.00 plus vat
- Wire brush rotators
- Staff happy with this
- Only slightly more time consuming than spraying
- No chemicals
- Will order more



Alternative control methods



Alternative control methods

- Flame Gun - slow, uses a lot of fuel
- Nomix Enviro - Controlled spraying via heads/nozzle. Pre mixed. Staff can add dye/foam to see where has already been sprayed. Using this across sites.
- Roundup Naturals Glyphosate Free spray – active agent is pelargonic acid. Found to be ineffective in tackling weeds over large areas.
- Traditional tools, hoe etc – time consuming



Creating 'wild' areas

- Team have been moving away from formal bedding for 10+ years. Replacing beds shrubs, wildflower and self sufficient wildlife friendly planting
- Wildflower meadows in parks, towns, villages and roadside
- Cornflower mix pictured
- Positive feedback from public
- Cut and lift vs spraying off
- Sustainable bedding at Marine Gardens





Developing communication campaign

- Public expectation has demanded a 'tidy' appearance which traditionally meant the widespread application of herbicides to eliminate 'untidiness' created by 'weeds'
- Education required via:
- Ratepayers magazine
- Press releases
- Social media
- Signage
- Piece on dandelions

Parks and Open Space

Leave only footprints

As we are travelling less because of Covid-19, more of us are finding new trails and walks closer to home. While we are happy to see our beautiful borough enjoyed, we are asking you to help keep it that way. Please follow these guides to help protect the countryside:

- If you are not near a public bin, then take your litter home with you.
- Stick to paths and trails so you don't damage private property such as fences.
- Don't light fires. Warming up can wait until you are home.
- Do not camp without land owner's permission.
- Save the mountain biking for designated trails.
- Keep your dogs on leads, and always pick up their poo.





150 years of the People's Park

Reducing our use of herbicides

We have committed to reducing our use of herbicides over the next three years, and a number of our sites - including Bashfordland Wood, Diamond Jubilee Wood and Ecos Nature Park - have been officially herbicide-free since April.

This is to improve our environment for wildlife, and for human health and wellbeing. Most weeds are not weeds but simply 'misunderstood flowers'. For example, dandelions are an essential food source for bees and pollinators emerging from hibernation. And young dandelions are edible for humans and loaded with vitamins and antioxidants. Similarly, herbicide-free urban meadows and grasslands are havens for bees, butterflies and other wildlife.

We would encourage you to support this initiative by accepting some areas looking a little more wild than usual. And why not consider going herbicide free in your own garden or allotment?

Some useful tips can be found at www.pan-uk.org/gardening-without-pesticides

We will continue to use herbicides for the control of invasive species until greener alternatives are found.



Chaines Wood becomes Local Nature Reserve

Chaines Wood in Ballygally has officially been designated a Local Nature Reserve. This means it is now a protected area of land to be conserved for its environmental and recreational value.

We look forward to welcoming red squirrels, bats, birds and of course visitors. We are committed to conserving and enhancing biodiversity and green spaces in Mid and East Antrim, and we would like to thank everyone who helped make this happen.



The People's Park first opened in August 1870, and its creation is largely due to the foresight of Sir Robert Alexander Shafto Adair, who recognised the importance of a public park for health and wellbeing.

Writing at the time, he said: "The establishment of a free park must be regarded as a question of very great importance...for the preservation of health; the restoration of energy; regular, recreative exercise in the open air; the satisfaction of ourselves; and the well-being of the community."

"This park, as I have said, is not to be a mere walk and retirement from the public streets, but it is the starting point from which may proceed many fruitful currents of knowledge to the young... a botanical society giving life and grace to the daily existence of Ballymena.

"It is not for ourselves alone that these walls have been fenced, but that when a stranger comes to the town - even the passing stranger - that he shall have an opportunity of seeing Ballymena in relaxation as well as in its hours of labour."

In 1870, a time when diseases like smallpox, cholera and TB were at epidemic levels, treatment often cited the need for a change of air - a visit to the local park and spending times outdoors. And while medical advances in the last 150 years have ensured improved health care for all, spending time outdoors and getting fresh air is still high on the health agenda.

Isn't it amazing, that 150 years later, the basic needs of both local people and visitors to the park remain the same?

While we celebrate the park and its history in this anniversary year, we also look forward to ensuring the park continues to be a treasured resource for the next 150 years and beyond.



Ten for a pound on Ballymoney Street!

Ballymena's Saturday Market is on the move.

The weekly fixture at the Seven Towers Leisure Centre will soon relocate to the car park on Ballymoney Street in the town centre. Dates are yet to be confirmed for the move, but we will have all updates on social media, in the local press, and on our website.



Stop vandalising our playparks!

We were heartbroken to finally be able to open our playparks for children after lockdown, only to have to deal with vandalism and damage shortly after.

think about how your actions impact others and find a better way to spend your time.

For those needing to report damage, you can contact our team at parks@midandeastantrim.gov.uk

If those responsible are reading this, please



Supporting resident/community groups

- Council's policy with regards to queries, complaints or requests for weed control by members of the public should not be to revert automatically to herbicide application but to encourage and facilitate residents, communities and business groups to manage weeds in their area as part of their contribution to the 'in bloom' campaign and Local Biodiversity Action Plan via clean ups etc.
- Supporting resident/community groups carrying out clean ups in local areas through the provision of 'Green Clean Up' kits
- Large volunteer base already – Bloom and Friends Of

Friends Of

- Support interested parties to establish Friends Of groups
- Training provided e.g. Orchard management, meadow management, tree planting, wildlife surveying
- FO then complete tasks to help Council manage sites
- Approx 1200 volunteer hours per site annually (150 days)
- Paid value of work £10,464 based on minimum wage
- Support environmental targets e.g. herbicide reduction and biodiversity initiatives
- Eco seeds mix pictured (corn poppy, corn marigold, corn chamomile, cornflower and corncockle), meadow managed by hand
- Benefit to volunteers – sense of pride, accomplishment, new skills, new friends, improve their local area, physical and mental health benefits, ownership



Bloom

- Volunteers are supported via the 'In Bloom partnership' which meets quarterly
- Council support via regular meetings to discuss future plans, advice on planting, funding and training required etc.
- Networking and skill sharing between groups – Borough wide bloom community
- Best practice site visit annually
- 480 'bloom' volunteers amass approximately 115,000 hours per annum
- Top performing Council in UK – 57 awards at Britain in Bloom/Ulster in Bloom/Best Kept
- Support environmental targets e.g. herbicide reduction and biodiversity initiatives (hand weeding etc)
- Benefits to volunteers – sense of pride, sense of purpose, new skills, new friends, improving their town/village, physical and mental health benefits



Tree planting

- Tree planting reduces management required
- Rather than cutting grass/spraying off, volunteers can weed and mulch young trees initially
- 20+ x Community Orchards – great for pollinators and community
- MEA4Trees - 58,000 trees planted in the next 5 years, one tree for every household in the Borough, partner Woodland Trust
- Schools, community groups, land owners
- Staff team building



Welcome to 2020's Creature Calendar



Starling

The Starling is a common bird found in urban areas, particularly in the city of Antrim. It is a member of the Sturnidae family and is known for its iridescent plumage. Starlings are highly social birds and often form large flocks. They are omnivorous, feeding on a variety of insects, seeds, and human refuse. In the city of Antrim, Starlings are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

January

#MEAdventures



Hedgehog

Hedgehogs are small mammals with a unique defense mechanism: their spines. They are omnivorous and feed on a variety of insects, including beetles, caterpillars, and earthworms. Hedgehogs are also known for their ability to curl up into a ball when threatened. In the city of Antrim, hedgehogs are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

February

#MEAdventures



Minke Whale

The Minke Whale is a large whale found in the waters of the North Atlantic. It is a member of the family Cetacea and is known for its long, slender body. Minke Whales are highly intelligent and are known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech. In the city of Antrim, Minke Whales are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

March

#MEAdventures



Barn owl

The Barn owl is a species of owl found in the city of Antrim. It is a member of the family Strigidae and is known for its heart-shaped face. Barn owls are highly intelligent and are known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech. In the city of Antrim, Barn owls are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

April

#MEAdventures



Bees

Bees are important insects that play a vital role in the ecosystem. They are responsible for pollinating a wide variety of plants, including many of the crops that we eat. In the city of Antrim, bees are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

May

#MEAdventures



Lizard

Lizards are small reptiles with a variety of species found in the city of Antrim. They are known for their ability to change color and their agile movements. In the city of Antrim, lizards are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

June

#MEAdventures



Butterfly

Butterflies are beautiful insects that play a vital role in the ecosystem. They are responsible for pollinating a wide variety of plants, including many of the flowers that we love. In the city of Antrim, butterflies are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

July

#MEAdventures



Bat

Bats are fascinating mammals that play a vital role in the ecosystem. They are responsible for pollinating a wide variety of plants, including many of the flowers that we love. In the city of Antrim, bats are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

August

#MEAdventures



Red squirrel

Red squirrels are common mammals found in the city of Antrim. They are known for their bushy tails and their ability to store food for the winter. In the city of Antrim, red squirrels are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

September

#MEAdventures



Beetle

Beetles are a diverse group of insects that play a vital role in the ecosystem. They are responsible for pollinating a wide variety of plants, including many of the flowers that we love. In the city of Antrim, beetles are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

October

#MEAdventures



Pine Marten

Pine Martens are small mammals found in the city of Antrim. They are known for their long tails and their ability to climb trees. In the city of Antrim, pine martens are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

November

#MEAdventures



Heron

Heron is a large wading bird found in the city of Antrim. It is known for its long neck and its ability to stand on one leg. In the city of Antrim, herons are particularly common in the areas around the city center and the waterfront. They are also known for their ability to learn and imitate human speech.

December

#MEAdventures



Explore more in 2020
#MEAdventures



Community engagement

- 60 x free community workshops/events e.g. gardening for wildlife, wildlife walks, wildlife surveying, foraging and cooking, GYO workshops, Land management training (hedgelaying, coppicing), Bird Ringing training and qualification, Big Garden Bird Watch, Bat Night, Guided Hill Walking, Bioblitz
- 16,000 attending per annum
- 15 x days of Biodiversity University annually
- 17 x schools completed Forest School programme since 2016. 500 x pupils. 17 x teachers trained
- 7 sites securing Local Nature Reserves status
- Newsletter reaching 3000+ readers as well as elected members and staff
- 12 x priority species highlighted per annum via Creature Calendar
- £5000 funding secured for “Beelicious” programme to enhance areas for pollinators. 7565 x people involved





Awards

- Britain in Bloom Discretionary Award for Biodiversity – Ballymena (2018)
- Ulster in Bloom Special Award for Biodiversity – Carrickfergus (2016)
- Ulster in Bloom Special Award for Biodiversity – Cullybackey (2017)
- 57 x awards at BIB, UIB, Irelands Best Kept
- Green Flag awards (11 sites)

- Best Urban Parks Team, Horticulture Awards (2018)
- APSE Best Service Team Parks and Open Spaces winner (2019)
- APSE Best Service Team – Best Cemetery team finalist (2020)

Teamwork

- Operations & Development staff working together
- Support from Comms team on publicity campaigns
- Partnership with volunteers
- Training and support for staff when required

