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

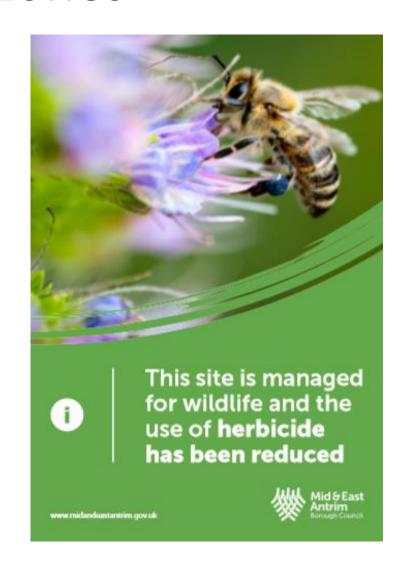
- Council currently uses a number of glyphosate weed control products (Roundup, Gallup, Nomix Dual and Pistol)
- In 2019 Council used 650 litres of herbicide
- From 1 April 2020 Council agreed a Herbicide Reduction Policy to reduce herbicide usage by 15% each year over the next 3 years (2020 to 2023) 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 glyphospate 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

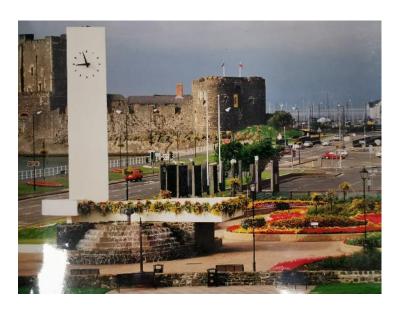
Sustainable bedding at Marine Gardens





















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



Reducing our use of herbicides

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

by accepting some areas looking a little more wild than usual. And why not consider going herbicide free in your own garden

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

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



Chaines Wood becomes **Local Nature Reserve**

Ballygally has officially tected area of land

welcoming red squirrels bats, birds and of course visitors. We are committed to conserving Antrim, and we would like to thank everyone who



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

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

"This park, as I have said.

public streets, but it is the starting point from which may proceed many fruitful currents of knowledge to the young. a botanical society givino 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

cholera and TB were at epidemic levels.

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 peop 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

in the local press, and on our website

damage shortly after. If those responsible are reading this, please

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

actions impact others and find a better way

For those needing to report damage you can contact our team at: parks@midandeast antrim.gov.uk

to spend your time.

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







Biodiversity

Strong starting position due to frequent promotion of biodiversity/organic gardening etc. via social media, local press, public newsletter, ratepayers magazine





Q&A: Local hero Cameron Liddle

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Project - September

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Day New Yorking

Total for all participants No need to regales aid form up on the day!

Forest Schools set up ranger base in People's Park

Foresi Schools Association

education, alterachool provision and family events With activities including games and learning about by being openinded by a

schools, youth groups and families across the Borough

Schools Association (NESA) open spaces. Hundreds of Kirkinnicka, St Colmolle: Movie Serview Victoria and

life providing outdoor recreational facilities all year round. The full Nature

food and hot beverage

will be served in 100%

it is a dog-friendly cale

bookings and trial sas

Winter wildlife

Ability café opens

breaklass and hos and cold snacks has opened

council and Catalyst Inc. will run the cale provide a welcome break for those using the building or the nature park.

animals are will arrive

You can still see buts hares, hedgehogs and even red squirels as winte begins to draw in. Along the share, look out for harbour seals, wildfowl and wading birds. Herons, kingfahers and otters. throughout the sauson.

xix nature reserves in the Borough? These are

wooderful wildlife. Beach Road

Bashinerhland Wood and Oakfield Glen;

Carrickfergus

Cranny Falls, Camlough Diamond Jubilee Wood, Whitehead

A park for the people

access to enable wheelcheir

other children. The new hallenges for all levels of ability This is part of a bigge

Four ways to get outdoors this winter!



MEAdventures

III And you have been income Commonweal Section 2005

Welcome to 2020's Creature Calendar



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

