

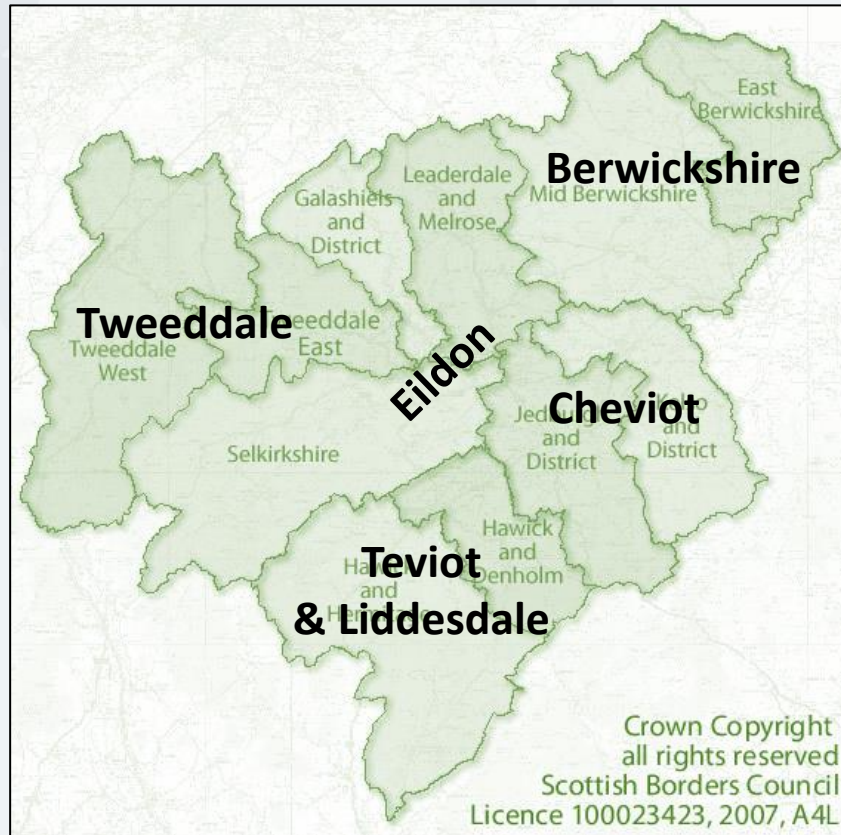


Scottish Borders Council Parks & Environment Service Grass Management Pilot



Parks & Environment Service

The Service currently operates across the Scottish Borders from a network of 5 main depots in Berwickshire, Cheviot, Eildon, Teviot & Liddesdale and Tweeddale;



Staff	130
Locality Depots	5
Settlements over 150 pop.	83
Regional area	1827 sq miles

Urban Parks	≈23 (Green Flag: 1)
Public greenspace	766ha
Woodland	23ha
Play Areas	137
Cemeteries	150



Operating Context

Local Authorities are facing significant challenges around;

- **Budget:** significant spending pressure + increasing demand for services
- **Net Zero & Climate change adaptation:** adapting our services to a changing climate and responding to the Biodiversity crisis

Simultaneously we are changing the way we work with communities, in the landscape of **Community Empowerment** and **Participatory budgeting**.

In this context Authorities are all grappling with

- ✓ **Making the most of resources** –prioritising precious resource deployment within communities
- ✓ **Better performance for local climate resilience** – nature networks and more agile cutting frequencies
- ✓ **More transparency with communities** – around service delivery



Background to the Pilot

- In 2018 changes were implemented in our grass management operations to deliver financial savings, which saw us make the move from a 10 working day to a **20-working day cutting cycle for General Amenity grass areas (= 6 cuts per year)**.
- This 'one size fits all' approach has generated challenges around frequency and finish = complaints around grass length and arisings left. This has been compounded by:
 - climatic conditions affecting grass growth
 - diminishing resources: impact of delay from machinery breakdowns (ageing fleet) & staff shortages (ageing workforce) = > 20 days
- The number of customer enquiries relating to grass management rose sharply in 2023.
- There is no resource available to revert to previous Service Standards



Purpose and aim of the Pilot

In recognising these challenges and thinking about service design we wanted to ‘recalibrate’ cutting frequencies to achieve a more targeted approach to grass management.

The aim was simple - to improve outcomes for communities and biodiversity.

The objectives of the Grass Management Pilot were:

1. create capacity to provide additional cuts on priority sites
2. offset this by creating more naturalised networks within our greenspace, freeing up resource at peak growth times
3. empower both staff and communities in Service Design, seeking to improve outcomes and their sense of ownership and buy-in to any changes.
4. build a more progressive, flexible approach to operations to become more responsive to climate change adaptation. Not ‘one size fits all’.

The pilot **was not** about making financial savings.



Our approach

- Three operational routes (both urban and rural) in different localities in the region;

Berwickshire	Duns/Chirnside/Westruther route
Eildon	Galashiels/Earlston route
Teviot & Liddesdale	Hawick town route

- The routes were revised to include areas which would benefit from an additional cut, as well as areas where a reduced cutting regime could be deployed to form naturalised areas which are cut and lifted at the end of the season.
- This new approach aims to make better use of available resources at peak growth times to target local priority sites = it is not about increasing overall frequencies but building in flexibility and agility.



Staff and Community engagement

- Members of the project team engaged with Forepersons and frontline staff on each pilot route to discuss the sites which they felt appropriate for either extra or reduced cuts throughout the season, based on their expert knowledge of communities/sites/routes.
- Community Councils, In Bloom Groups, Town Teams were all engaged & fed into route design. In person meetings were held with every Community Council as well as online meetings to review proposals.
- Elected Members were then presented with the collated community feedback to ensure wider input and sense checking, so all community views and concerns were taken into account.



Pilot Route Design

- The operational routes were revised to include the agreed areas which would benefit from additional cuts at peak growth times, as well as areas to be left and cut and lifted at the end of the season.
- **Priority sites:** Active Burial Grounds/Cemeteries and Play Parks
- **Naturalised sites:** Inactive burial grounds/margins and edges/'no mans land' areas/bankings

Key principles:

- Grasscutting is recorded (timesheets), monitored and feedback gathered
- Working agilely: the Pilot can flex
- Existing High Amenity routes (sports pitches, key civic spaces and memorials) remain unchanged.



Community feedback opportunities

- Press releases and web information were designed to promote the Pilot in advance providing further detail on specific site proposals (additional cuts / reduced cutting) within each pilot route.
- Signage was deployed throughout at all sites
- Communities asked to provide feedback throughout the growing season and can complete a survey using any of the following methods:
 - scanning a QR code on their smartphone
 - visiting the Grass Management pages on SBC's website
 - contacting our Customer and Advice Support service

GRASS MANAGEMENT PILOT

This site is part of a grass management pilot being undertaken throughout the 2024 growing season (April – October). After speaking with staff and local communities, we are trialling a new approach to grass management aimed at responding to local priorities while also delivering biodiversity benefits.

This area has been identified as somewhere that is important to the community and will receive additional cuts, when required. The identification and creation of some more naturalised areas, which are cut at the end of the season, has made this possible, as we try to deploy our resources more effectively.

This pilot is all about recognising that greenspaces each have a different role to play and, through focussing our resources on priority sites, we can strive to improve specific areas which are important to communities, moving away from a 'one size fits all' approach.

We are interested to hear your views and would appreciate feedback throughout the pilot to help us plan future service provision in your community.

For more information and to submit your feedback:

Scan the QR code opposite

Visit www.scotborders.gov.uk/grassmanagement

Or call 0300 100 1800 to talk to one of our Customer Service Advisors.



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This area has been identified as somewhere to trial a more naturalised approach to grass cutting. The term 'naturalised' means leaving the grass to grow as it naturally would, with one or two cuts per year to manage weed growth and encourage less dominant vegetation to establish. The benefits of leaving some areas more naturalised include:

- Areas of longer grass which are only cut once a year provide habitat and food for insects and other wildlife.
- Only cutting access paths through the older part of cemeteries allows the grass to remain undisturbed around headstones, reducing the need to use weedkiller.
- These areas can add a distinctive contrast and natural beauty to the area.

By changing to this approach, we are able to undertake additional cuts at other sites which have been identified as being important to the community - such as more active parts of cemeteries, play parks and other important greenspaces.

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Monitoring and evaluation

- An end of the season report is being collated to inform future planning and provision of grass management, including:
 - Community feedback audit
 - Staff feedback audit
 - Manpower analysis
 - Biodiversity impacts

Timeline:

September 2023	APWG
November 2023	Executive approval
Nov – Dec 2023	Staff engagement
Dec – Feb 2024	Community engagement
Apr – Sep 2024	Pilot rollout across season; monitoring feedback captured
Oct 2024	Staff engagement on outcomes
Oct – Dec	Evaluation data collated



Monitoring and evaluation

01 July 2024 - top level flora walkaround survey, Hawick route

Site	Cut amenity grass	Naturalised area
Wellogate cemetery	White clover, buttercup, plantain, dandelion, dock	Common knapweed, daisy, stitchwort, oxeye daisy, selfheal, ragwort, buttercup, yarrow, grasses, speedwell, campanula, birds foot trefoil, fox and cubs
Waverley Walk	Daisy, white and red clover, plantain, dock, buttercup	Community orchard, yarrow, buttercup, common knapweed, willowherb, cornflower, clover, selfheal, thistle, doc, stitchwort, ragged robin, hawksbit, lesser trefoil
Volunteer Park	Daisy, white and red clover, pineapple weed plantain	Yarrow, white & red clover, ragwort, hawksbit, purple vetch, yellow rattle, cow parsley, white campion, cornflower



Lessons Learned

- Very resource intensive on public engagement at design stage; consider engaging on principle rather than exhaustive detail
- Some areas it just didn't work – combined impact of Depot break-in, no staff buy-in, Flood Protection works
- Even with positive community engagement, resistance to fear of being held 'accountable'
- Staff buy-in and understanding critical - some staff didn't support the change. Where staff understood and had buy-in = most success. Getting the information out correctly and ensuring staff are supported
- Data-driven decision-making key; very resource heavy capturing and collating the data; digital transformation can support future rollout
- Naturalised grass management still needs to be resourced; time-intensive at back end
- Communication and signage helped – but more impactful comms could have gone further; not about savings
- Member support – briefing against the pilot even though mandated as a learning exercise; perhaps some clear 'house rules' at the outset
- A silent majority – the formal feedback data does not reflect the wins achieved

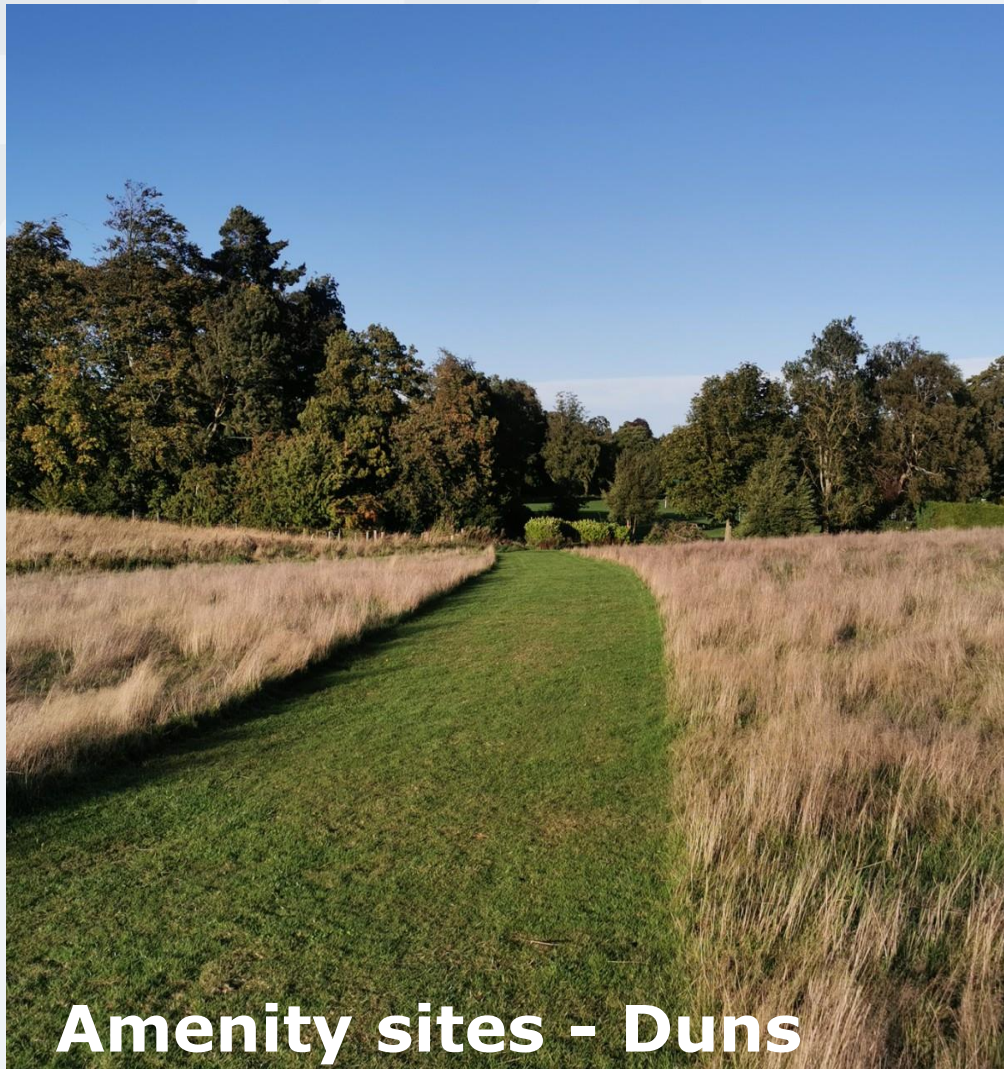
Next Steps



- Complete evaluation
- Report back to Members
- Potentially recommend a further rollout – currently exploring viability of building back in an additional 3 cuts a year (15 day cycle), offset by further naturalisation with appropriate P&V to support
- In tandem with reducing our ‘footprint’ as part of Nature Networks development – thinking about effective amenity grass estate alongside making space for Nature (30 by 30, SOLAS)



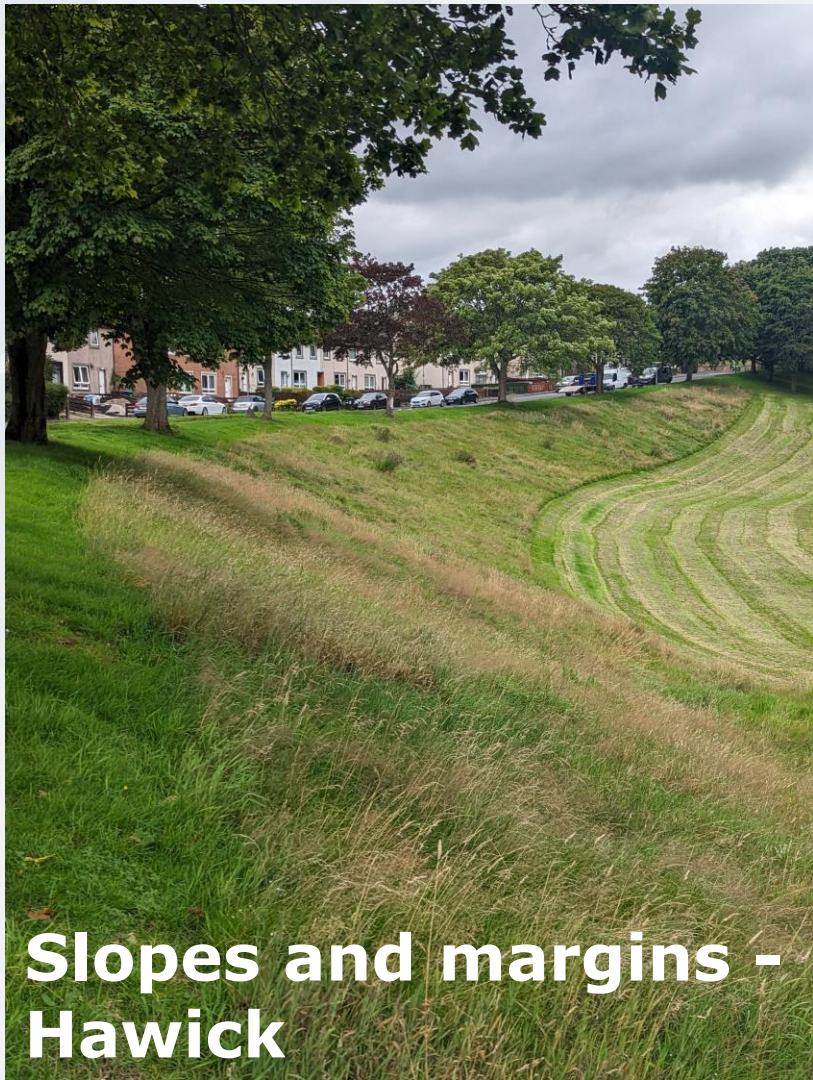
Marginal edge spaces - Bridgend Park, Kelso



Amenity sites - Duns



**Beneath tree canopies & by streams
- Lauder**



**Slopes and margins -
Hawick**



Public parkland - Tweedbank



Berwickshire



Foulden churchyard

Berwickshire



Mordington old and new cemeteries

Hawick



Wellogate cemetery



Inactive Churchyard - Stow



Questions