

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL

Community Select Committee

25 September 2024

TITLE:	Mowing Regimes Changes
EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR:	Councillor Jean Todd - Executive Councillor for Climate Change and Environment
CONTACT OFFICER:	Sally Curley – Senior Strategy & Partnerships Lead
WARDS INVOLVED:	All Wards

Appendices Attached – None

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To seek approval to consider formalising the changes to mowing regimes at some Council owned sites.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Select Committee recommends that the Executive approves the approach outlined in the report to formalise changes to existing mowing regimes at some Council owned sites.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Traditionally, the Council has adopted a more formal, manicured way of managing and maintaining its green spaces, keeping amenity grassed areas short and cut on a fortnightly basis. This approach still has its place in some of the more formal historic sites, areas where visibility is important and where public perceptions may be that certain sites should be maintained this way to encourage different forms of use.
- 3.2 This report outlines the considerations for a proposed change to the formal approach of green space maintenance in some initial locations and aims to develop certain sites where a more blended, sustainable approach could be implemented with regard to mowing regimes.

- 3.3 With the recent changes to the Council's corporate priorities and following the development of both the Plan for Nature and the Parks strategies, which commit to enhancing nature and biodiversity, it has been identified that changes to mowing regimes are required but that a strategic and well planned approach is taken.
- 3.4 Pollinators like bees and butterflies are essential for our environment, but their populations are declining. By leaving grass to grow, we can provide important habitat for these insects, as well as birds and mammals. Adoption of this type of management on certain sites ensures that our green spaces contribute towards improving biodiversity, ecological connectivity and resilience to climate change impacts.
- 3.5 Green spaces across the Borough are maintained by our partner and contractor Alliance Environmental Services (AES). Changes to management, which include less frequent mowing, will require AES to assess the machinery required to deal with this approach. Specific machinery will be required which can cut taller grass, as well as needing the ability to collect arisings, which is critical to the management of long grass, meadows and verges. Discussions with AES will be needed to assess requirements for these sites, changes to machinery and the financial implications of these changes.
- 3.6 Changes to the management of our green spaces can be quite emotive within the communities we serve. Therefore, signage, interpretation and clear messaging will be critical to ensuring the success of the changes to management regimes at the sites identified across the Borough.
- 3.7 The approach being proposed through this report is initially to reduce the mowing frequency on identified Council owned sites, to enable review and monitoring over the first year of changes (2025/26). It is important to make clear that the revision to mowing is a different form of management to the intentional creation of seeded areas such as wildflower meadows.
- 3.8 The creation of wildflower areas forms part of the wider considerations for biodiversity enhancement and, as such, would be the subject of more detailed biodiversity plans for individual sites, where the appropriateness of each site would need to be considered along with seeking advice and expertise from partners such as Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.
- 3.9 As well as developing a communications plan for the wider community we will, where possible, look to involve and work with local community groups who are keen to support such initiatives, utilising expertise and advice where it may be available.
- 3.10 In High Peak we have already implemented changes to the mowing of certain areas in some of our open spaces over the last few years, and this has been a hybrid approach through both reduction of mowing as well as the creation of specific biodiversity areas. These include:-
- **Buxton:** Serpentine Walks, Temple Fields, Ashwood Park, Granby Road Park, Gadley Lane

- **Whaley Bridge:** Memorial Park, Whaley Incline
- **Glossop:** Bankswood Park

To ensure that the number of sites under review is manageable, it is proposed to seek formal approval to continue with the changes to the sites identified above, most of which have specific management plans, but also to include Manor Park in Glossop within this proposal. The sites for agreed changes will therefore include:

- **Buxton:** Serpentine Walks, Temple Fields, Ashwood Park, Granby Road Park and Gadley Lane.
- **Whaley Bridge:** Memorial Park and Whaley Incline
- **Glossop:** Bankswood Park and Manor Park

- 3.11 Other sites, especially smaller sites of incidental green space, could be included in the changes where it is deemed appropriate, once the above changes have been implemented. Initial sites will be monitored throughout 2025/26 and the learning reviewed before other sites are progressed in a similar way.
- 3.12 It is anticipated that the next steps in this process will be to start discussions with AES around the proposed sites where we are looking to reduce mowing. We will also start engagement with relevant internal colleagues, community groups in these areas who may support and local Councillors.
- 3.13 A more detailed plan will be developed for each site with a view to the proposed mowing changes commencing from April 2025. This will also include the installation of on-site signage/interpretation boards where required, prior to the start in March 2025, to explain to residents why areas are being maintained in a certain way and the implementation of a full communications plan. A further IED report will be brought forward for final approval by the relevant Executive Councillor confirming the proposed detailed arrangements for each site.
- 3.14 A communications plan will be developed with our Communication Team during the autumn and will involve a programme of press releases and social media posts setting out the intentions to reduce mowing at certain sites and the reasons for this, from early in 2025.
- 3.15 During the 2025 season we will review the success of the changes through continued discussions with AES and feedback from the local community. This will help inform whether amendments or changes are needed to certain areas and whether new sites can be included in following years.
- 3.16 Members have raised questions about changes to mowing frequencies on some grass verges which are in the ownership of Derbyshire County Council (DCC) and not this Council. We will make formal contact with DCC with a view

to discussions around possible changes, accepting that this will ultimately be DCC's decision.

4. **How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

4.1 **Aim 4:** Protect and improve the environment.

Objective: Meeting the challenges of climate change.

Objective: Provision of quality parks and open spaces.

Priority action: Implement the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plans in response to a declared climate emergency.

Priority action: Develop a Parks & Open Spaces Strategy.

Priority action: Develop and implement a Plan for Nature.

5. **Alternative Options**

5.1 As considered within the report.

6. **Implications**

6.1	<u>Community safety, including safeguarding and prevention of terrorism</u> None
6.2	<u>Workforce</u> Consideration will be given to any impact on staff who currently deliver the grounds maintenance contract from AES within the review.
6.3	<u>Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment</u> None
6.4	<u>Financial Considerations</u> All financial implications will be considered as part of the review. These could be both positive and negative and will be interrogated to fully understand and report back.
6.5	<u>Legal</u> None
6.6	<u>Climate Change and Sustainability</u> The changes will directly impact the Council's climate change and sustainability agenda.
6.7	<u>Conservation and Enhancement of Biodiversity</u> The changes will directly impact the Council's conservation and biodiversity agenda.
6.8	<u>Consultation</u> The Council will seek local consultation with residents and site

	users through the review.
6.9	<p><u>Risk Assessment</u></p> <p>New risk assessments will be developed for any areas which move to a changed cutting regime.</p>

Mark Trillo
Executive Director (Governance & Regulatory)

**Web Links and
Background Papers**

All available background papers

Contact details

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7. Detail

7.1 Traditionally, the Council has adopted a more formal manicured way of managing and maintaining its green spaces, keeping amenity grassed areas short, cut on a fortnightly basis between March and October, and areas of planting quite structured and heavily maintained.

7.2 This approach still has its place in some of the more formal historic sites, and where public perceptions are that certain sites should be maintained in this way.

7.3 We know that biodiversity needs protecting more now than ever and that, by reducing mowing in certain areas, we can create important habitats for pollinators and support our local ecosystems.

7.4 This report outlines the considerations for a proposed change to the formal approach of park maintenance and identifies sites where a more long-term sustainable approach could be implemented with regard to mowing regimes.

8.0 Parks Strategy and High Peak Plan for Nature

8.1 The Parks Strategy was formally adopted in 2021 and sets out the Council's vision for maintaining, developing and improving its green spaces.

8.2 In 2019 the Council declared a climate change emergency and we realise that the environmental impacts of all planning and decision making relating to the delivery of the Parks Strategy need to be carefully considered, so that green spaces contribute in the best way possible towards the Council's targets for zero carbon emissions.

8.3 Objective 1 of the Parks Strategy outlines the Council's commitment to review maintenance regimes to ensure that our green spaces are maintained to a

high standard, in an affordable and sustainable way, and make improvements to increase and enhance biodiversity and positively affect climate change.

- 8.4 The newly developed High Peak Plan for Nature forms the basis of a Biodiversity Strategy, providing ecological expertise on the key opportunities and challenges facing biodiversity within the High Peak. Priorities from the Plan for Nature will feed into the Green Spaces Strategy and relevant action plans within site specific Management Plans.
- 8.5 With these strategic documents now in place guiding our approach to protecting and enhancing biodiversity, it is an appropriate time for the Council to consider its approach to reviewing and implementing changes to mowing regimes across some Council owned sites.

9.0 Benefits from Changes to Mowing Regimes

- 9.1 Pollinators like bees and butterflies are essential for our environment, but their populations are declining. By leaving grass to grow in appropriate places, we can provide important habitat for these insects, as well as birds and mammals. Longer grass improves conditions for bugs and insects, which in turn support the wildlife across the district.
- 9.2 Adoption of this type of management regime on certain sites ensures that our green spaces contribute towards improving biodiversity, ecological connectivity and resilience to climate change impacts.

10. No Mow May

- 10.1 No Mow May is a national campaign championed by the organisation Plantlife and has been very successful in raising awareness about the benefits to reduced mowing. It was borne out of encouraging individuals to avoid mowing their lawns during May, at a local community level.
- 10.2 Whilst the Council has been part of this initiative over the last couple of years, there are wider considerations for large scale review of mowing across parks and open spaces for a single month, and considerations around how beneficial this initiative is for a one month period only.
- 10.3 The Council has therefore decided to move away from this limited short-term, once a year approach and would like to consider a more beneficial and long-term sustainable approach to mowing regimes across the borough, starting with the identified list of key sites.
- 10.4 This is also coupled with opportunities to further explore and develop other initiatives to protect and enhance biodiversity.

11. Implications and Considerations

- 11.1 Biodiversity

As stated above in 7.1, pollinators like bees and butterflies are essential for our environment, but their populations are declining.

11.2 Adoption of this type of management on certain sites ensure that our green spaces contribute towards improving biodiversity, ecological connectivity, and resilience to climate change impacts.

11.3 Maintenance and Management

Green spaces across the Borough are maintained by our service provider Alliance Environmental Services (AES). Their current maintenance regimes, and the machinery used to support this, are still very focussed on more formal management.

11.4 Changes to management, which include less frequent mowing, will require AES to assess the machinery required to deal with this approach. On a more infrequent mowing basis, cuts are usually just twice a year (spring and autumn) which means that on the final cut in the Autumn, grasses will be long and will exceed normal heights. Specific machinery will be required which can cut this length as well as needing the ability to collect arisings, which is critical to the management of long grass, meadows and verges.

11.5 Discussions with AES will be needed to assess requirements for these sites, changes to machinery and the financial implications of these changes. AES work across the Alliance area and the implications can be considered holistically across both Staffordshire Moorlands and High Peak.

11.6 Community Expectations and Information

Changes to the management of our green spaces can be quite emotive within the communities we serve. Planned reductions in mowing frequency can be seen by some as neglect, and the Council not delivering what may be required or expected. This can lead to complaints being made, however we will need to understand and appreciate the differences in opinion that changes to mowing frequencies can and will undoubtedly create and manage this appropriately.

11.7 Signage, interpretation and clear messaging will be critical to ensuring the success of the changes to management regimes at the sites identified across the Borough. We will utilise the Council's website, social media and on-site signage to communicate the changes to management to residents, stakeholders and visitors.

11.8 The approach being proposed through this report is initially to reduce the mowing frequency in specific areas on identified Council sites, to enable review and monitoring over the first year of changes (2025/26). It is important to make clear that the reduction in mowing is a different form of management to the intentional creation of seeded areas such as wildflower meadows.

11.9 The creation of wildflower areas forms part of the wider considerations for biodiversity enhancement and as such would be the subject of more detailed biodiversity plans for individual sites, where the appropriateness of each site

would need to be considered along with seeking advice and expertise from partners such as Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.

11.10 Community Involvement

As well as developing a communications plan for the wider community we will, where possible, look to involve and work with local community groups who are keen to support such initiatives, utilising their expertise and local knowledge.

12. **Proposed Sites**

12.1 In High Peak we have already implemented changes to the mowing of certain areas in some of our open spaces over the last few years, and this has been a hybrid approach through both reduction of mowing as well as the creation of specific biodiversity areas. These include:-

- **Buxton:** Serpentine Walks, Temple Fields, Ashwood Park, Granby Road Park, Gadley Lane
- **Whaley Bridge:** Memorial Park, Whaley Incline
- **Glossop:** Bankswood Park

12.2 To ensure that the number of sites under review are manageable, it is proposed to continue (and make further changes where possible) with the mowing regimes at the sites identified above, as most of which have specific management plans, but to also include Manor Park in Glossop. The sites for agreed changes will therefore include:-

- **Buxton:** Serpentine Walks, Temple Fields, Ashwood Park, Granby Road Park and Gadley Lane.
- **Whaley Bridge:** Memorial Park and Whaley Incline
- **Glossop:** Bankswood Park and Manor Park

12.3 Members have raised questions about changes to mowing frequencies on some grass verges which are in the ownership of Derbyshire County Council (DCC). We will make formal contact with DCC with a view to discussions around possible changes, accepting that this will ultimately be DCC's decision.

12.4 Other sites, especially smaller sites of incidental green space, could be included in the changes where it is deemed appropriate, once the above changes have been implemented. Initial sites will be monitored throughout 2025/26 and the learning reviewed before other sites are progressed in a similar way.

13. Next Steps

- 13.1 It is anticipated that the next steps in this process will be to start discussions with AES around the proposed sites where we are looking to evolve mowing regimes. This will include identifying the specific areas on sites to be left, producing site maps, agreeing possible mown strips to path edges and planning the process for the cut, collection and disposal of arisings in the late summer 2025. We will also start engagement with known community groups in these areas who are keen to support and be involved with this type of initiative.
- 13.2 Discussions with AES will commence, along with identifying key community groups with whom to engage, continuing during autumn time. A more detailed plan will be then put in place for each site with a view to the proposed mowing changes commencing from April 2025. This will also include the installation of on-site signage, prior to the start in March. A further Delegated Decision report will be brought forward for final approval by the relevant Executive Councillor when the detail is available.
- 13.3 A communications plan will be developed with our Communication Team in the autumn this year and will involve a programme of press releases and social media posts setting out the intentions to change the frequency of mowing at certain sites and the reasons for this, from early in 2025. In March next year we will be in a position to launch the changes with further communication and utilising the Council's website for additional information.
- 13.4 During the 2025 season we will review the success of the changes through continued discussions with AES and feedback from the local community. This will help inform whether amendments or changes are needed to certain areas and whether new sites can be included in following years.
- 13.5 An internal Project Team will be established which will include the Senior Strategy & Partnerships Lead for Service Commissioning as well as the Council's Biodiversity Officer, Commissioning Officer (Parks & Open Spaces) and colleagues from AES to manage this process. This group will also monitor and review progress on the changes to mowing regimes at the identified sites.

