

DON'T MOW LET IT GROW	4th December 2018
TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE	
FOR INFORMATION	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting & Enhancing our Environments & Assets
Outcome	Natural assets carefully managed to generate economic and social returns without compromising their sustainability for future generations
Lead Officer	Head of Estates Biodiversity Officer
Cost: (If applicable)	Zero to Council (£140,000 funding)

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Don't Mow Let It Grow project:

The Don't Mow Let it Grow (DMLIG) project has proved to be very successful and popular over the last 3 years, now encompassing some 20 Dfl Roads verges and 17 Council owned sites spread across the Borough, equating to over 9Ha of Council land now being managed as meadows for the benefit of our native wildflowers and pollinators.

Management guidelines have been developed for all of the sites, highlighting the optimal management and the important species on each site. This management has been carried out through a combination of estates staff, contractors, volunteers and local farmers who cut and lift the grass for fodder. This year 3 Council meadows were cut & lifted by local farmers for fodder, at zero cost to the Council. The transformation in these sites has been remarkable, which has been shown through the results of the biodiversity surveys carried out by volunteers each year.

For example:

- Joey Dunlop Centre now has 3 species of orchid; marsh, northern & common spotted.
- Ramore Head now has a vast array of heath spotted orchids, spring squill & field gentian
- Portaneevy has beautiful knapweed, wild thyme & common blue butterflies
- Greysteel Glen is full of cuckoo flower, marsh bedstraw & water forget-me-not

We also have a number of notable rare plant & insect species turning up on our sites, including green figwort and bee orchid, along with heather colletes and bilberry bumblebees.

The project mantra of 'small change of management, big benefits' has certainly been proven.

The dedicated website (www.dontmowletitgrow.com) and Facebook page (don't mow let it grow) with over 1,500 likes, have both proved invaluable in engaging with the wider community and other organisations who manage grasslands.

There has been excellent volunteer engagement, with a core of over 30 volunteers involved in the project from carrying out habitat surveys, taking photos of the sites, assisting with the events, promoting the project, getting involved in the practical management of the sites and including managing the project facebook page. Without the dedicated support of these exceptional individuals this project would not have been the outstanding success that it is.

Don't Mow Let It Grow had interactive stands at several events over the 3 years including; Riverfest, Airwaves, Salmon & Whiskey Festival, Ballymoney Spring Fair, Lark in the Park, and hundreds of local event and talks to interest groups. There was an array of promotional materials including leaflets, Frisbees, windows stickers and cloth bags given out.

This year the project hosted an event in Flowerfield Art Centre to celebrate the projects achievements with its partners and volunteers along with organisations and individuals who had connected with the project. It was an excellent event, with the project partners and finders sharing their experiences and culminating in an inspirational keynote speech from the award winning wildlife cameraman and TV presenter Simon King.

Buzzy Flo and friends was also created to help engage primary school children. Six, two minute animations were developed along with presenter script and teachers notes, to teach children about pollination, meadows, invasive species and what they can do. We also trained a few volunteers who can now deliver it in schools upon request.

Training was a major element of this project and each year toolbox talks were given to all the Council estates depots and to the two Dfl Roads sections. There was also a variety of training annually for the project volunteer including biodiversity survey training, wildflower identification, Invasive Alien Species identification and management, habitat management, use of Austrian scythe, which were all very popular and well attended. Totalling more than 30 training sessions.

Key information was gathered through the Public Perception Survey, which was carried out annually to provide evidence of the support and benefits of Don't Mow Let it Grow. More than a 1000 surveys were completed over the 3 years and some of the results are summarised overleaf:

PP Survey question (No of participants in brackets)	Yr 1 (190)	Yr 2 (263)	Yr 3 (590)
Respondents think it's important to manage areas in Northern Ireland for wildlife	97%	98%	98%
When shown a picture of long grass or short mown grass, a high percentage preferred the long grass	80%	87%	81% (+8)
The quality of green space impacts their decision on wither or not and how often to visit an area	80%	93%	98%
Not happy with the current amount and quality of greenspace in their local area	56%	54%	60%
Every year wildlife benefits were consistently rated as the most important benefits of the project, followed by well-being, and monetary savings benefits respectively			

(Note: year 3 results still being analysed so figures are draft)

Throughout the 3 years many other organisations and individuals have watched the progress of the project, seeking advice and help to develop their own projects including; Ards & North Down Council, Mid Ulster Council, Causeway Hospital, the new DAERA offices at Ballykelly, Roe Valley Country Park, Thepavial Barracks to name but a few. The project has had contact and influenced people and organisations from Craigavon to America, the Netherlands to Mid Ulster, England to Wales and beyond.

The project has been a huge success and reached hundreds of thousands of people over the three years with an overwhelming positive response, in addition to establishing meadows within the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough and beyond.

We are currently using all the data collected from the various project activities to carry out a cost benefit analysis, not just looking at the monetary benefits which initial findings would indicate are positive, but also looking at wider economic benefits, health and wellbeing, and ecosystem services benefits too. This report will be available by the end of December.

The final part of the project will be the creation of a toolkit, which will contain all the materials generated by the project from the survey forms, training programmes, management options, site selection criteria, cost benefit analysis, engagement activities, brand guidelines, Buzzy Flo education pack, etc. This will be available on the website for everyone to use to help spread the message and develop their own Don't Mow Let It Grow projects.

The positive public engagement and increased biodiversity of the project sites have created a change in management of our public grasslands which will be continued by DfI Roads and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council creating a lasting legacy, which shows that 'Small change in management, big benefit'!



Harebells at Ramore Head



Knapweed at Portaneevy



Common spotted orchids at Rasharkin



Cuckoo flowers at Greysteel Glen



Volunteers survey training, Riverside Park





Don't Mow Let It Grow Roadshow
At Airwaves 2016



Local farmer cutting & lifting hay for fodder



Buzzy Flo animation & education programme



Toolbox talk at Limavady depot

NOTES: Don't Mow Let It Grow is a 3 year project in partnership with DfI Roads, NIEA and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, funded by the Heritage Lottery