



Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date Thursday 16 January 2025
Time 9.30 am
Venue Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham

Business

Part A

**Items which are open to the public and press.
Members of the public can ask questions with the Chair's agreement
and if registered to speak.**

- 1 Apologies for Absence
- 2 Substitute Members
- 3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 November 2024 (Pages 3 - 12)
- 4 Declarations of Interest
- 5 Items from Co-opted Members and Other Interested Parties
- 6 Public Perceptions of Greenspace Management Amongst County Durham Residents - A Report of Empirical Evidence for Durham County Council
 - a. Public Perceptions of Greenspace Management Amongst County Durham Residents - Summary Document (Pages 13 - 20)
 - b. Public Perceptions of Greenspace Management Amongst County Durham Residents - Full Report (Pages 21 - 90)
 - c. Presentation by Dr Jack Hughes and Dr Michael Lengieza, Department of Psychology, Durham University (Pages 91 - 104)

- 7 Management of DCC Land for Biodiversity - 2024-25 Update
 - a. Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change (Pages 105 - 120)
 - b. Presentation by the Principal Parks and Countryside Manager and the Technical and Service Development Manager (Pages 121 - 132)
- 8 Ecological Emergency - Update
 - a. Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change (Pages 133 - 146)
 - b. Presentation by the Environment and Design Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change (Pages 147 - 156)
- 9 Quarter Two Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2024/25 - Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change (Pages 157 - 170)
- 10 Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration

Helen Bradley
Director of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
8 January 2025

To: **The Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities
Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

Councillor B Coult (Chair)
Councillor J Elmer (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Abley, E Adam, P Atkinson, L Brown, R Crute, C Kay,
C Lines, B McAloon, I McLean, D Nicholls, D Oliver, J Purvis, S Robinson,
P Sexton, A Simpson, T Stubbs, D Sutton-Lloyd, S Townsend and R Yorke

Co-opted Members:

Mr B McArdle, Ms K Monahan

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DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 22 November 2024** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Coult in the Chair

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Elmer (Vice-Chair), E Adam, R Crute, L Mavin (for Councillor A Simpson), D Nicholls, D Oliver, J Purvis, S Robinson and T Stubbs

Co-opted Members:

Mr B McArdle, Ms K Monahan

Also in attendance:

Ms R Morris (Member of Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Committee welcomed newly appointed co-opted members, Bill McArdle and Kelly Monahan.

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors P Atkinson, L Brown, A Simpson, D Sutton-Lloyd, S Townsend and Mr E Simons (Member of Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

2 Substitute Members

Councillor L Mavin attended for Councillor A Simpson.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the Joint Special meeting held on 23 September 2024 and the meeting held on 4 October 2024 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Items from Co-opted Members and Other Interested Parties

There were no items reported.

6 Physical Activity Strategic Framework

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an update on the Physical Activity Strategic Framework for the Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure section within Culture, Sport and Leisure (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure, Deborah Holmes, introduced the presentation by describing the Physical Activity Strategic Framework (PASF), which had led to the development of the County Durham Physical Activity Strategy for 2023-28, 'Moving Together'. A Moving Together Network was established in 2024, to support the strategy and facilities were transformed into physical activity hubs.

The Committee heard that despite the diverse service offer, the number of people in County Durham participating in the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week was below the national average. Sport England's Active Lives survey found that whilst approximately 60% of County Durham's adults were physically active, disparities existed across the county and the figure increased to almost 70% in the more affluent parts of the county, whilst reducing to almost 48% in the most disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, the research found that those living in more deprived areas held the view that they did not have equal opportunities to be active. The framework, therefore, aimed to realign resources to address inequalities.

The Moving Together 'plan on a page' illustrated the vision of the strategy which was that County Durham residents should be more active, enabling them to live longer, healthier and happier lives. The Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure noted that on average, adults in County Durham lived in a state of good health until the age of 59, which was four years below the national average. The Moving Together strategy identified four key priority areas: children and young people, inclusive communities, active environments and health and social care and the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure provided practical examples of the implementation of the framework across each of the four key priority areas.

The Committee heard that the framework was a change of approach and a number of processes were being developed to enable the service to benchmark and review the programme. Details were provided as to the positive impact of the framework to date, including the offer for children and young people; those who were new to exercise and the gym membership offer.

Concluding the presentation, the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure informed the Committee that the service continued to develop the offer, using learning to adapt approaches and embed transformational change.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure for the informative presentation and she commended the team for the good work. Comments and questions from the Committee were invited.

Councillor Nicholls welcomed the work and he remarked on the inequalities in the levels of physical activity throughout the county, saying that whilst people were living longer lives, it was clear that did not necessarily mean healthier lives. He observed a lack of provision for individuals, who were not members of sports clubs, to participate in team sports for fun, regardless of ability. In reply, the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure commented on the changes in behaviour following the Covid-19 pandemic, with activities such as five-a-side football declining in popularity and physical activity levels, particularly in males aged 20-25, reducing. She added that leisure programmes and facilities were, therefore, adapting to changes in demand and the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy had identified a gap in outdoor provision. The findings from surveys of leisure-users and non-users were helping to inform the future direction.

Councillor Adam congratulated the team on the amount of work undertaken and he asked for information on the learning to date, in particular, the reasons why people were inactive and where the areas of focus should be. The Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure referred to the development of the 'Moving Together in Peterlee' pilot project, in partnership with Sport England, to drive forward positive lifestyle changes in the town. It was hoped that learning from that project could be used to develop similar pilots across the county, however, all communities had different challenges. With regard to current data, the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure highlighted that Durham Insight provided current data relating to living in County Durham, including health and wellbeing data, which was used to inform strategic planning.

In reply to a question from Councillor Adam as to what metrics were in place, the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure responded that the service was developing the benchmarking process and an evaluation toolkit. In addition, information was captured through the use of the 'Thrive' membership card and links were established across other Council services, such as Rights of Way, to collate information on the use of public rights of way. Data was also gathered through surveys, including Sport England's Active Lives survey.

In response to a question from Councillor Stubbs, the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure confirmed that community classes usually carried a small cost for the user. Councillor Stubbs replied that individuals must take some responsibility for their health and he pointed out that there were opportunities to be active, for free, such as Parkrun or merely, going for a walk. Councillor Stubbs spoke anecdotally of his experience as a sports coach, saying that most of the young people he had coached, continued to take physical exercise in their adulthood. He suggested that one way to achieve a positive change would be to focus on building foundations for an active lifestyle from an early age and he asked how the service reached the early years cohort.

The Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure explained that one of the target areas was prenatal provision, to encourage new parents not only to attend prenatal classes but also to continue to exercise after the baby's birth, at parent and baby exercise classes. The Strategic Manager added that children were a key priority and work was carried out with early years practitioners and head teachers, to promote good physical exercise habits in young children and this extended to encouraging parents to become involved in the work.

Co-opted member, Rosemary Morris, thanked the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure for the detailed presentation and she asked whether there were specific target areas where physical activity uptake was low. She raised concern at the number of primary school-aged children who were inactive and she asked whether the service encouraged walking buses, as walking to school could make a substantial contribution towards achieving the recommended level of exercise per day, as well as being beneficial to reducing traffic congestion. The Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure confirmed that walking buses were encouraged as the active environments key priority area engaged with schools in respect of active travel and a dedicated officer worked with schools, to promote sustainable travel.

In reply to a question from co-opted member, Bill McArdle, who asked whether work was undertaken with neighbouring authorities, the Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure confirmed that work was carried out across county boundaries, for example, there had been shared-learning with Teesside on Sport England's place-based pilot. Additionally, the work of the North East Combined Authority would enhance collaborative working and the Leader of Durham County Council was the North East Combined Authority's portfolio holder for Culture, Tourism, Sport and the Arts.

Councillor Elmer stated that participation in physical activity should be an integral part of everyday life and society must acknowledge the significant challenge to young people's physical activity levels and overall health, from the use of technology.

Councillor Elmer also commented on the need to embed the 'Move' principles throughout Council services and he referred to a recent Planning Committee meeting at which a bulk development was approved in a location that would inevitably increase the number of families who were dependent upon cars. He stated his support for walking buses and he remarked that there was only one officer responsible for sustainable transport for schools when previously there had been a sustainable transport team. He concluded by stressing the need to adapt transport infrastructure to support active travel, saying that many people who were in agreement with active travel, found it difficult to put active travel into practice, due to the lack of infrastructure.

Councillor Robinson praised the work and he highlighted that a small boxing club, based within Consett Sports Centre in the 1980s had produced a world champion boxer, Glen McCrory. He gave the view that increases in rent led small clubs to relocate from local authority leisure centres to alternative premises and he questioned whether the boxing academy at Peterlee was well-used. The Strategic Manager for Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure clarified that a budget was available to subsidise the use of local authority leisure centres and the Club Durham scheme worked with community sports clubs to provide practical advice and support with funding applications, in addition to supporting talented athletes. The Strategic Manager said she would be happy to discuss the matter further with Councillor Robinson following the meeting.

The Chair concluded the discussion by encouraging members to share the 'Move County Durham' Facebook page and she suggested that the service should consider promoting the 'Move' timetable through the Area Action Partnership webpages. She echoed the previous comments from the Committee with regard to embedding the work across all Council services and she added that she would like to see the government being urged to introduce a trial, to ban cars from entering the immediate vicinity of schools, to encourage pupils who were able to do so, to walk to school.

Resolved:

Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented upon the information provided in the report and presentation.

7. Durham County Council Theatres and Cinemas

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an overview of the management of Durham County Council's theatres and cinemas (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager for Culture, Sarah Glynn, presented the report and delivered a presentation which included information on the regional and national context, details of the Council's three cultural venues, the approach to the visitor experience and current pressures.

The Committee noted that for every £1 spent in the north east theatre sector, an additional spend of approximately £2 was generated in the local economy. The Strategic Manager for Culture described the range of local cultural and entertainment venues throughout the county, including a detailed breakdown of the three cultural venues operated by Durham County Council ie Gala Durham, Empire Consett and Bishop Auckland Town Hall.

The Strategic Manager for Culture referred to the previous presentation and she highlighted that research showed that active engagement in arts, culture and creativity was beneficial for health and wellbeing. The service was developing a programming policy for theatres, in line with the wider service objectives. These objectives were: inclusivity, professional development and supporting local talent, community involvement / social benefit, ensuring a place-based approach and promoting opportunities for young people.

The Committee noted that cultural venues were facing a number of challenges including the age of buildings, sector competition and the need for specialist skills and experience. Film screening attendances were declining year on year and the cinema offer faced strong competition from other operators and streaming services. Initiatives such as 'Event Cinema,' 'Bringing in Baby' and 'Gala Seniors' were part of the work to address the shift in audience behaviour. The catering offer across venues was being considered as part of a wider catering review and the Council's central marketing and communications team delivered marketing of the venues, however, most theatre venues in the country had dedicated marketing teams.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Manager for Culture for the detailed presentation and comments and questions were invited.

Councillor Nicholls commented that society had created a divide between academic and creative skills, with creative skills perceived as having less value. He spoke of how studying drama from a young age had increased his confidence and taught him important life-skills. He added that there was work to be done to challenge perceptions and increase inclusivity and one of those ways was to make culture affordable to all. Councillor Nicholls highlighted that the Gala provided value for money and he suggested more could be done to market the Gala's offer. He also commented that the presentation touched only briefly on dance and he asked what provisions were in place to promote dance. The Strategic Manager for Culture responded that dance formed an important part of the programme and the service supported the dance sector with delivery, such as the work carried out with TINArts dance school.

In addition, the service was considering ways in which to link the festival and events programme with the 'Move' agenda.

In response to a question from Councillor Nicholls as to how the culture offer catered for those with additional needs, Lizzie Glazier, Culture, Venues and Programme Manager, highlighted that relaxed theatre performances, cinema screenings and break-out spaces were offered.

Councillor Stubbs gave the view that the Gala was a great asset to Durham and he expressed concern that cinemas were under-utilised. He referred to the recent recruitment of an Audience Development and Engagement Manager and he asked whether the new post had made an impact. Councillor Stubbs also commented on the number of music venues and music festivals held in areas such as Newcastle and Stockton, saying that contrasted with Durham's limited offer. Highlighting Durham's student population and the income that could be generated from hosting music, he asked whether any consideration had been given to changing the use of cinemas, in order to host live music. In reply, the Strategic Manager for Culture commented that cinema audiences had changed, with an increasing demand for a cinema 'experience.' Initiatives such as 'Event Cinema' had resulted in a higher yield, however, in order to secure new releases, there was a requirement for a fixed number of showings to be held over one week. The Strategic Manager agreed that there were fewer music venues in Durham compared to some of its neighbours, however, a number of successful music festivals were held. She agreed that a market existed for live music and the Empire was particularly popular for live music. The Strategic Manager for Culture added that the service would continue to consider the best use of space at the Gala, as part of future programme development.

Councillor L Mavin recognised the increasing competition from other cinema operators and commented that she hoped that the service would not follow competitors who were offering 'table-service' as that was at odds with the ethos of the Council's 'Move' strategy. In reply, the Strategic Manager for Culture reassured the Committee that the aim was not to offer the same as competitors but to consider how best to deliver a programme which built audience satisfaction.

Councillor Adam asked for clarification on the impact of the recruitment of the Audience Development and Engagement Manager. The Strategic Manager for Culture explained the role of the Audience Development and Engagement Manager was to work across the service to understand audience data, as opposed to marketing. Marketing was carried out through the Council's corporate marketing team, however, competitors had access to specialised, often higher-cost marketing.

Marketing continued to be a challenge across the service, however, in recent years, there had been positive signs, with the success of 'Event Cinema' and an increase in sales for in-house pantomime productions. Councillor Adam suggested that the future development of the marketing strategy should be discussed with the relevant Cabinet Portfolio holder. Alison Clark, Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism, replied that whilst the service would welcome further investment to enable more creative marketing to be carried out, the wider challenges to the Council's budget were recognised.

Councillor Adam referred to the demolition work at Claypath which had impacted the Gala and he asked when the work would be completed and whether any compensation was available for loss of income. The Strategic Manager for Culture clarified that the demolition works, which were required for safety reasons, were carried out by the Council and, as access was limited to the stage door, some shows with larger sets, could not be accommodated. The demolition work was complete and the service yard was back in operation, however, access was likely to be limited again, when the land was redeveloped. The Strategic Manager clarified that some additional costs were covered, however, loss of income was not compensated. The Empire had also undergone building repairs which had resulted in lost income and the older buildings presented a constant challenge. The service, however, continued to consider income streams to offset loss of income.

Co-opted member, Kelly Monahan, observed that the report did not mention the role of amateur theatre groups who perform at venues including schools and community centres. She remarked that for many people, amateur theatre was accessible and affordable. In addition, it offered opportunities for local people to become involved in the arts and to develop theatre skills and she asked for detail as to how the Council engaged with amateur theatre companies. In response, the Strategic Manager for Culture spoke of the importance of amateur theatre in the programme, with the hosting of amateur productions, including the annual pantomime performed by the CBS musical theatre group. The Culture, Venues and Programmes Manager highlighted that all three venues hosted amateur productions and a large number of enquiries were generated from amateur companies. Kelly Monahan then asked, if the Council was unable to accommodate requests from amateur theatre companies, whether it offered support to smaller venues, to host amateur productions. The Culture, Venues and Programmes Manager confirmed that the service provided support and the service's technical team engaged with venues including schools, community centres and leisure centres, whenever they had the capacity to do so, to assist with activities including lighting and staging. The Strategic Manager for Culture added that the service aimed to deliver a programme for theatres which was in line with the wider culture service objectives, whilst balancing budget requirements to ensure sustainability of the venues.

Resolved:

Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented upon the information provided in the report and presentation.

8. Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided an update on the progress of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Principal Ecologist, Stuart Priestley, presented the report and recalled that Durham County Council was appointed as the responsible authority for the production of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), to improve the biodiversity resource across the county. The strategy was to comprise of a local habitat map to define existing biodiversity resources and to identify where further resources should be directed to deliver nature conservation. A Statement of Priorities would identify the results the strategy sought to achieve (priorities) and actions to achieve the results (measures).

The Committee noted that the LNRS was being developed alongside communities and the process included engagement with stakeholders, landowners and the wider public. The Principal Ecologist confirmed that the first round of consultation was complete and a suite of draft priorities and measures for the plan's delivery were being formulated by partnership-based sub-groups. A proforma for the Statement of Priorities was drafted and engagement was taking place with the Environmental and Records Information Centre for the North East (ERIC NE) to lead on discussions with the sub-groups to develop the mapping element of the LNRS.

The Chair thanked the Principal Ecologist for the update and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

Councillor Nicholls extended his thanks to the team for their work. He noted that Defra's timescale for the delivery of the strategy had been relaxed, and the expectation was now that the LNRS would be completed in autumn 2025. Councillor Nicholls commented that the work was being carried out within the context of the Council's declaration of an ecological emergency and he expected the strategy to be an emerging document. He added that he would like to see the completion of the strategy as soon as possible. The Principal Ecologist replied that Defra recognised that its initial timescale for the production of LNRSs was over ambitious, however, his aim was to draft the strategy by spring, with a view to producing the strategy in the autumn, which would align with work by North Yorkshire and South Tyneside.

Whilst the government had not confirmed the exact timescale, it was expected that the strategy would be refreshed every 3 to 10 years. In addition, the Principal Ecologist referred to the complexities of the production of the strategy, which involved various consultations and internal processes. In the meantime, Defra continued to work on the delivery model.

Councillor Elmer praised the excellent progress and he remarked that the strategy was a rare example of work which received cross-party support. He stated frustration that the Council, as a land-owner, had an opportunity to contribute and that there remained a great deal of work to be done, by the Council, to evaluate land ownership and to understand the opportunities. The Principal Ecologist clarified that work was ongoing with the Corporate Property and Land team with regard to land management for nature conservation and the draft strategy would help to identify gaps. Councillor Elmer gave his view that the Council's current approach was focused on land value in terms of housing and income, however, there were wider issues to consider.

Bill McArdle thanked the Principal Ecologist for the interesting report and he asked for information on the working relationship with neighbouring authorities with regard to the compilation of the habitat map. The Principal Ecologist explained that 48 LNRSs were in production across the country, which would link across regional boundaries. He added that he was in contact with areas including North Yorkshire, South Tyneside and Cumbria with regard to their draft measures and priorities.

The Chair asked if it would be possible for Members to view the draft strategy. The Principal Ecologist explained that Members would have an opportunity to comment on the strategy, prior to the final draft, as formal consultation was required to be undertaken, however, prior to that, the draft measures and priorities would be made available on the website. Additionally, engagement would be carried out with landowners and farmers. The Chair thanked the Principal Ecologist and added that a discussion would take place, following the meeting, as to whether a further informal information session would be required on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Resolved:

Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report and welcomed the progress in the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Public Perceptions of Greenspace Management Amongst County Durham Residents: A Report of Empirical Evidence for Durham County Council.

Jack Hughes PhD.

Michael Lengieza PhD.



Psychologists for Environmental
Action

SUMMARY

In light of the length of the full report we have produced a summary document containing the key aspects of the report. This document is essentially a collation of the section summaries from the full report and is therefore not intended to be as comprehensive, detailed, or precise. Given the number of findings produced from our research the results section of this document is subdivided by research question. However, we hope that this document can provide the interested but busy members of council with an overview of the main points found through our work.

This summary is divided into five main sections, with subsections within the Results:

Background	2
Methods	2
Results	3
Do People Support a Mowing Reduction and a Wilding Increase?	3
Does Preference Differ by Geographic Region or Demographics?.....	3
How Accurate are Perceptions About Mowing Frequency?	3
What are the Primary Concerns and Perceptions that Predict Mowing/Wilding Preferences? .	3
Perceptions	3
Concerns.....	4
Does The Type of Land Influence How Important People Feel Mowing Is?.....	4
Does The Association Between Mowing Preference and Both Perceptions and Concerns Depend on Land Type?.....	5
Do People’s Perceptions of Norms Match the Norm?	5
Practical Findings	6
Conclusions	6
Recommendations	6

Background

- The world is currently facing an ecological emergency with significant deterioration in nature and biodiversity.
- Reduced biodiversity has potentially catastrophic impacts to habitat survival, economic growth, resource production, and climate change.
- High levels of biodiversity are associated with climate change mitigation, habitat stability, and improved psychological wellbeing.
- Intensive mowing causes significant damage to biodiversity and ecology. Ecologically Conscious Land Management (ECLM) can have a powerful effect on reversing this damage.
- Durham County Council mows a large amount of land but is unsure if the residents of County Durham are supportive.

Methods

- Participants indicated how much they supported **mowing reductions** and **wilding increases**.
- Participants indicated how important mowing was for **specific types of land**.
- Participants indicated how they perceived mown spaces (relative to unmown spaces). These were grouped into 4 main **perceptions**: Participants were essentially asked whether they thought mown spaces were more attractive, more socially desirable, better buffers against antisocial behaviour, and more environmentally beneficial.
- Participants indicated how important a number of greenspace-relevant **concerns** were to them. These were grouped into 7 main concerns: Neatness, environmental impact, aesthetics, amount of litter, cost, accessibility, and safety.
- Participants reported how often they thought the council mowed (i.e., **mow frequency**).
- Participants indicated if they thought they cared about mowing more or less than other people in the county.
- **Demographic** questions related to age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, occupation, and education were also given to participants.

Demographic information

	Sample (n=709)	County Durham (2021)
Gender		
Female	64.7%	51.1%
Male	37.3%	48.9%
Age		
Mean age in years:	51.7	41.7 ^a
Ethnicity		
White	94.5%	96.8%
Any other ethnicity	5.5%	3.2%

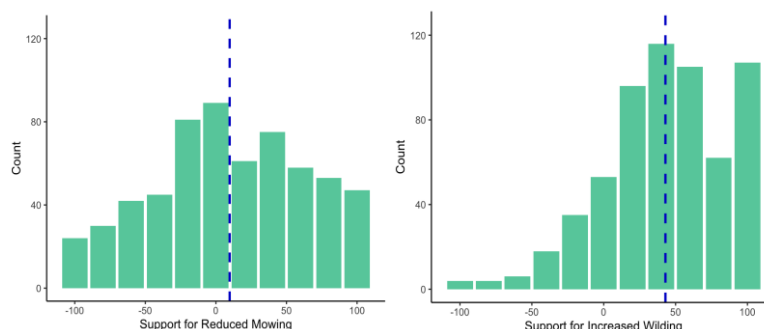
Note: ^acensus provides median age for people over 18 years old.

Results

Do People Support a Mowing Reduction and a Wilding Increase?

- There is a slight (but significant) desire to reduce the amount of mowing in the county.
- There is a large (and significant) desire to increase the amount of wild space in the county.

Histograms for support for reduced mowing and support for increased wilding



Note. Blue line represents mean of responses. Zero on the X axis indicates no preference one way or the other. 100 on the X axis represents support for mowing reductions/wilding increases, -100 represents opposition.

Does Preference Differ by Geographic Region or Demographics?

- Men neither support nor oppose reduced mowing, whereas women support significantly less mowing.
- Women are more supportive of increasing wild spaces than men, but both are still very supportive.
- The more educated respondents were, the more they supported ecologically conscious land management practices.
- There was no difference in support for ecologically conscious land management practices between different postcodes, ages, or occupations.

How Accurate are Perceptions About Mowing Frequency?

- On average people think the council mows less than the 2 times a month the council aims for. See full report for caveats about the use of 2 times a month as a benchmark.
- This underestimation is statistically significant but not necessarily a dramatic underestimation.

What are the Primary Concerns and Perceptions that Predict Mowing/Wilding Preferences?

Perceptions

- Perceptions of mowing's environmental friendliness, visual appeal, and desirability were the perceptions most influential for ecologically conscious land management practices. People were less in favour of ecologically conscious land management practices if they saw mowing as environmentally friendly, visually appealing, and desirable.

- Perceptions of mowing’s cost-effectiveness was notably uninfluential. People who thought mowing was expensive and people who thought it was inexpensive showed no difference in their support for ecologically conscious land management practices.
- Perceptions of ecological impact and desirability are slightly more relevant for mowing reduction than for wilding.
- Overall, perceptions of mown spaces seem to predict support for mowing reductions and support for wilding increases quite similarly.

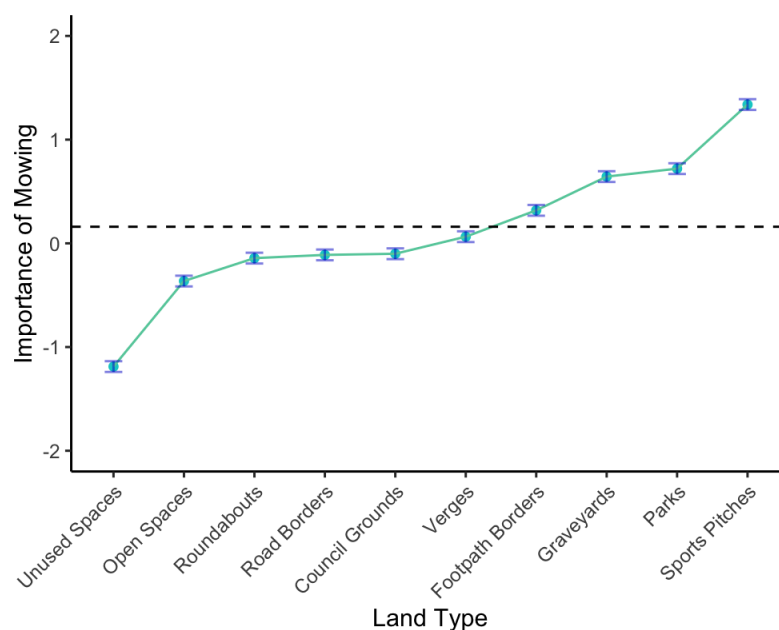
Concerns

- The two most influential concerns in peoples ecologically conscious land management preferences are concerns about neatness and ecological impact. The more people emphasize concerns about neatness and ecological impact, the less supportive they are of ecologically conscious land management practices.
- Neatness concerns specifically were found to be more important for people’s preferences for mowing than they were for their preference for wild spaces. However, they are still quite relevant to people’s preferences about wild spaces.
- Overall, practically speaking, the same set of concerns seem to predict mowing and wilding preferences.

Does The Type of Land Influence How Important People Feel Mowing Is?

- On average people have no strong opinions about the mowing of any green space, either for or against, even the average importance of mowing sports pitches was closer to just ‘important’ than it was to ‘very important’.
- In general, the only places where people clearly felt mowing was important (as opposed to neutral or unimportant) were pitches, parks, graveyards, and footpath borders.

Reported importance to mow different land types.



Note. The dashed line represents the point at which importance of mowing would have been significantly greater than neutral.

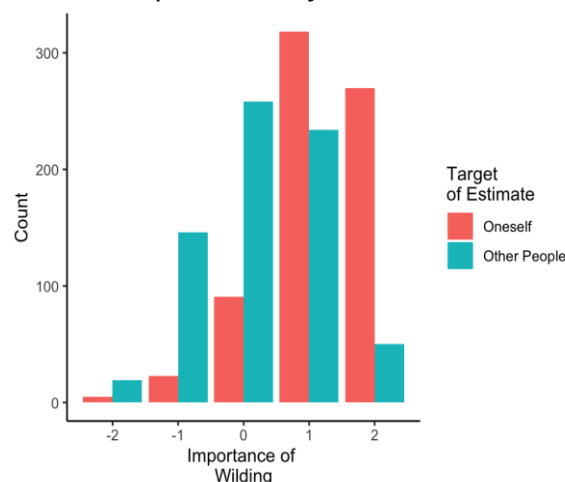
Does The Association Between Mowing Preference and Both Perceptions and Concerns Depend on Land Type?

- Consistent with earlier analyses, mowing (in general) was seen as more important amongst people who thought mowing was environmentally friendly, pretty, and socially desirable.
- Desirability, eco-friendliness, and prettiness seemed to matter for most land areas.
- If mown space was seen as ecologically harmful, people thought it was less important to mow, especially for unused spaces, council grounds, and roundabouts.
- If mown space was seen as pretty, people thought it was more important to mow, especially for footpath borders, roundabouts, parks, and open spaces.
- If mown space was seen as more desirable, people thought it was important to mow, especially graveyards, open spaces, parks, footpath borders, and council grounds.
- Consistent with earlier analyses, mowing importance (in general) was most influenced by concerns around neatness and ecological impact. As people became more concerned about neatness, they felt mowing was more important. In contrast, as people became more concerned about ecological impact, they felt mowing was less important.
- With only a small handful of exceptions, reported mowing importance for all types of lands was only predicted by concerns around neatness and eco-friendliness. Many other concerns did not actually impact how important people felt mowing was for most spaces.
- While the strength of associations for both concerns varied significantly depending on type of greenspace, the substantive association was largely the same for most spaces.
- Overall, this suggests that considering these two levers (neatness and eco-friendliness) as ways of framing any mowing reductions might prove to be useful for multiple land types.

Do People’s Perceptions of Norms Match the Norm?

- People generally assume that they are more supportive of wild spaces than other people. Or in other words, people underestimate how much other people support wilding.

Distribution of responses related to how important people think wilding is personally and how important they think it is to others.



Practical Findings

- Based on the means for perceptions, people saw mown spaces as harmful to the environment, generally desirable, and neither attractive nor unattractive.
- The perceptions that mown spaces were less harmful to the environment, more desirable, and attractive grew stronger as level of education decreased.
- Based on the means for concerns, people were very worried about environmental impact and somewhat worried about neatness.
- While people indicated that they are more concerned about environmental impact than attractiveness, it was concerns about attractiveness that predicted preference for mowing reductions more closely (nearly 7 times stronger).
- Compared to women and those with higher levels of education, respectively, men and those with lower levels of education were more worried about neatness and less about environmental impact.

Conclusions

- On average, County Durham residents were slightly supportive of reduced mowing.
- County Durham residents underestimate how much the council currently mows.
- County Durham residents strongly want more wild spaces.
- Beauty, environmental impact, and social desirability were the important factors for people when thinking about mowing. These are the levers that seem likely to work, beauty/neatness, in particular.
- Mowing was only deemed expressly important for graveyards, parks, sports pitches, and footpath borders. Otherwise, mowing was seen as ‘neither important or unimportant’ or flatly unimportant.

Recommendations

- The council would likely be supported in at least partially reducing their mowing practices, especially for specific locations.
- In areas such as unused space, roundabouts, motorway and road borders, council grounds, and open green spaces, reductions in mowing may avoid significant opposition as, on average, mowing was not seen as decidedly important for these spaces.
- Visual appeal was reportedly important to perceptions of whether an area should be mown, much more so than environmental impact. Therefore, interventions may be more palatable if they highlight the improved beauty of a less mown area rather than highlighting the environmental impact. However, without behavioural research it cannot be said for certain which predictor will be most fruitful to target to change perceptions. Therefore, it would be advisable to highlight the positive impact on all three of the most important predictors of aesthetic, social desirability, and environmental impact until further research using randomised controlled trials can identify which produces the strongest results.

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Public Perceptions of Greenspace Management Amongst County Durham Residents: A Report of Empirical Evidence for Durham County Council.

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Psychologists for Environmental Action

Contents

List of Figures.....	4
List of Tables	4
Summary	5
Introduction.....	7
Background.....	8
Biodiversity	9
The Ecological Emergency	10
The Problem with Mowing	11
Damage to biodiversity.....	11
Reduced climate change mitigation	12
Impact on people.....	13
County Greenspace	14
Methodology	16
Sample	17
Survey	19
Green Space Definitions	19
Subjective Responses	19
Mowing Perceptions.....	20
Ecologically Conscious Land Management (ECLM) Preferences	20
Concern Importance.....	21
Perceptions of Others' Wilding Support.....	22
Where to Mow	22
Demographics.....	23
Additional Comments.....	24
Data Collection and Research Integrity	26

Public Perceptions of the Council’s Current Practices 27

 Public Opinion on Ecologically Conscious Land Management (ECLM) Practices..... 28

 Do People Support a Mowing Reduction and a Wilding Increase? 28

 Does Support Differ by Geographic Region or Demographics?..... 29

 How Accurate are Perceptions About Mowing Frequency?..... 30

Broader Perceptions of, and Concerns About, Mowing 32

 What are the Primary Concerns and Perceptions that Predict Mowing/Wilding Preferences? 33

 Perceptions of Mowing..... 33

 Associations between general ECLM preferences and mowing perceptions (main effects)..... 33

 Associations between specific ECLM preferences and mowing perceptions (interactions) 34

 Greenspace Concerns..... 35

 Associations between general ECLM preferences and greenspace concerns (main effects)..... 35

 Associations between specific ECLM preferences and greenspace concerns (interactions)..... 36

Differences between type of greenspace..... 37

 Does the Type of Land Influence How Important People Feel Mowing is?..... 38

 Does the Association Between Mowing Importance and Both Perceptions and Concerns Depend on
Land Type?..... 40

 Greenspace Perceptions by Type of Greenspace 40

 The overall association between greenspace perceptions and reported mowing importance (main
effects) 40

 The unique associations between greenspace perceptions and reported mowing importance for
specific land types (interactions)..... 41

 Greenspace Concerns by Type of Greenspace 44

 The overall association between greenspace concerns and reported mowing importance (main
effects) 44

 The unique associations between greenspace concerns and reported mowing importance for
specific land types (interactions)..... 44

Perceptions of Fellow Residents’ Support..... 47

Do People’s Perceptions of Norms Match the Actual Norm?	48
Descriptive Considerations	49
How are Mown Spaces Perceived?.....	50
In General	50
Differences between Demographic Groups	50
Differences between areas.....	50
Differences between genders.....	50
Differences between ages	50
Differences between levels of education	50
Practical Relevance	51
Levels of Concern	52
In General	52
Differences between Demographic Groups	52
Differences between areas.....	52
Differences between genders.....	52
Differences between ages	52
Differences between levels of education	52
Practical Relevance	53
Free Text Responses	54
What do People Say About the Councils Mowing Practices?.....	55
Conclusions.....	57
What are the Overall Findings and Conclusions?	58
Recommendations.....	60
What do the Results of this Report Mean for Durham County Council?	61
References	63

List of Figures

Figure 1. Countries with the highest biodiversity based on the Global Biodiversity Index.....	9
Figure 2. Species abundance relative to 1970s levels for priority species within the United Kingdom.....	10
Figure 3. Comparisons of lawns and meadows.....	11
Figure 4. Increases in carbon sequestration in soil as species richness increases in grasslands.	13
Figure 5. Histograms for support for reduced mowing and support for increased wilding.....	21
Figure 6. Distribution of responses on the question: Now thinking of the county, how do you feel about current mowing practices?.....	26
Figure 7. Histograms for support for reduced mowing and support for increased wilding.....	28
Figure 8. Reported importance to mow different land types.	38
Figure 9. Distribution of responses related to how important people think wilding is personally and how important they think it is to others.	48

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic information.....	17
Table 2. Occupation, qualifications, and income of sample.....	18
Table 3. Summary of research questions and analyses.....	25
Table 4. The influence of perceptions of ecological impact on reported mowing importance	41
Table 5. The influence of perceptions of prettiness on reported mowing importance	42
Table 6. The influence of perceptions of desirability on reported mowing importance.....	43
Table 7. The influence of concerns around eco-friendliness on reported mowing importance.....	45
Table 8. The influence of concerns around neatness on reported mowing importance	45
Table 9. The influence of concerns around aesthetics on reported mowing importance	46

SUMMARY

Biodiversity is in significant decline in the United Kingdom. This decline is detrimental to the UK economy, wellbeing of UK citizens, presence of nature in the famous UK countryside, and to the aim to reach net zero as a nation. In response to this, Durham County Council declared an ecological emergency in 2022 providing a fresh impetus for a re-evaluation of how the Council uses, maintains, and manages the greenspace under their jurisdiction. One of the potential remedies to declining biodiversity would be to curtail mowing practices for spaces managed by Durham County Council. Such curtailment, however, might be met with scepticism. For example, in the period of April 1st 2023 – March 31st 2024, the Council received complaints about unmown grass from 1404 people, suggesting that there may be serious opposition to any adoption of ecologically conscious land management practices. Yet, this is a sample of unsolicited complaints and, therefore, it is possible that the only individuals who are speaking up are those who have strong opinions. This theory is supported by some research in the field of how people discuss brands and companies which shows a U-shaped distribution with extreme voices significantly overrepresented (Hydock et al., 2020; Schoenmueller et al., 2019). Additionally, there is evidence that people may be more impacted by negative emotions, events, and outcomes, than positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001). Thus, the research team at Durham University was interested in gaining a more representative view of what the residents of County Durham would like to see when it comes to green spaces. Therefore, the research team sought out to collaborate with Durham County Council on a survey sent to all County Durham residents asking them about their views on mowing and green space practices.

The key findings of this survey were:

- County Durham residents underestimate how much the Council mows.
- County Durham residents were slightly (but significantly) in favour of reducing the amount of mowing in County Durham even despite their subjective underestimations of how much the Council mows.
- County Durham residents were quite in favour of there being more wild spaces in County Durham.
- The two most important factors when considering opinions to increase or decrease mowing were beauty and environment. The more people cared about beauty the more regularly they wanted greenspace mown, whereas the more they cared about the environment the more they wanted greenspace left wild.

- Participants indicated indifference toward mowing for most types of green spaces. The only places with a clear indication that mowing was important were graveyards, parks, sports pitches, and footpath borders. Mowing was seen as decidedly unimportant for unused spaces, in particular.

These findings indicate several potential recommendations. The three most relevant ones are:

1. The council would likely be supported in at least partially reducing their mowing practices, especially for specific locations, as detailed next.
2. In areas such as unused space, roundabouts, motorway and road borders, council grounds, and open green spaces, reductions in mowing may avoid significant opposition as, on average, mowing was not seen as decidedly important for these spaces.
3. Aesthetic was reportedly important to perceptions of whether an area should be mown. Therefore, interventions highlighting the improved beauty of a less mown area may be more palatable than highlighting the environmental impact. However, without behavioural research it cannot be said for certain which predictor will be most fruitful to target to change perceptions. Therefore, it would be advisable to highlight the positive impact on all three of the most important predictors of aesthetic, social desirability, and environmental impact until further research using randomised controlled trials can identify which produces the strongest results.

INTRODUCTION

This report begins with a brief outline of current greenspace management practices and their impact on the environment. This is followed by an explanation of the methodology and results of a research team at Durham University led study on what people think about greenspace management practices. Finally, ending with brief conclusions and recommendations of how Durham County Council can use these insights to address the ecological emergency.

The following pages consist of a brief discussion of the ecological emergency, the importance of wild space, and the previous understanding from academic research of the public's views of mowing practices. After the presentation of this background knowledge, a summary of existing Council greenspaces will be given followed by listing the current Council greenspace policies that are public knowledge. After the preamble, this report will outline the methodology of our research, present the statistical analysis results, explain the findings, and will conclude with an assessment of the key takeaways and the recommendations we believe are implied by the discoveries of this research.

The reader might find it helpful to know that the key conclusions from each section are summarized in boxes at the end of every section. If pressed for time or the mental bandwidth to juggle the details of this report, they may wish to skim these summary boxes first.

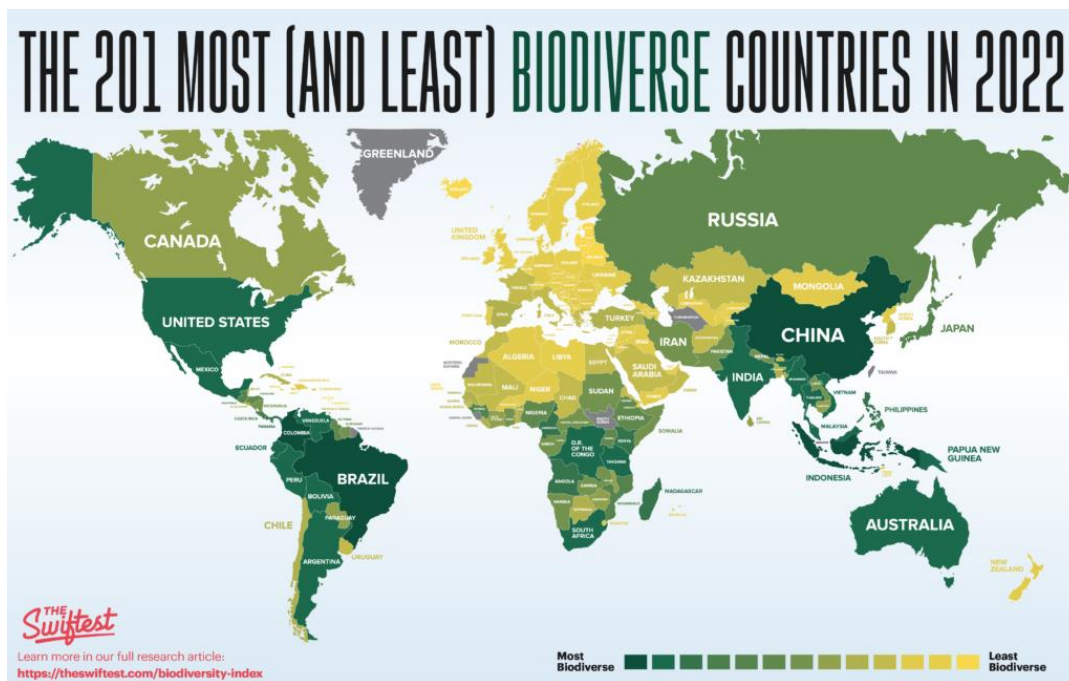


BACKGROUND

Biodiversity

Planet Earth is home to an estimated 8.7 million different species of plants and animals (Díaz et al., 2009; Mora et al., 2011). Biodiversity refers to this variation and is used to reference the number of distinct species contained within a specific area, this can be globally, within a country, or within a specific region (National Geographic, 2024). Put plainly, biodiversity is essential to plant, animal, and human life. More biodiverse habitats support more life (Chase et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2012), produce more resources (Parks & Mulligan, 2010), store more carbon (Daba & Dejene, 2018), and create more resilient habitats (Vasiliev, 2022). If biodiversity declines, ecosystems collapse (MacDougall et al., 2013). Without these ecosystems we cannot harvest food (Díaz et al., 2006), produce medicine (Neergheen-Bhujun et al., 2017), or have habitable land (Díaz et al., 2006). Additionally the World Economic Forum has estimated 44 trillion US dollars, more than half the world's total GDP, is expected to be lost due to ecosystem collapse (*Half of World's GDP Moderately or Highly Dependent on Nature, Says New Report*, 2020). Thus, biodiversity is an integral part of a habitable planet and humanity's survival, and significant biodiversity loss has catastrophic consequences.

Figure 1. Countries with the highest biodiversity based on the Global Biodiversity Index

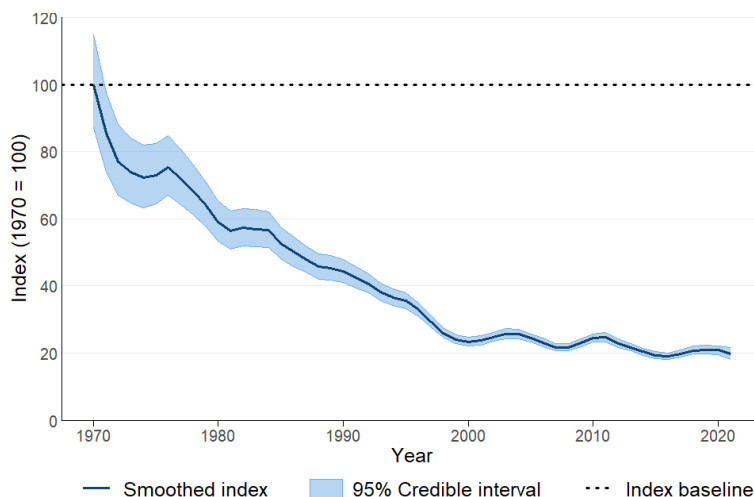


Note. Image taken from <https://theswiftest.com/biodiversity-index/>. Based on the data informing this graphic, the United Kingdom is the 142nd most biodiverse country in the world (out of 195 countries).

The Ecological Emergency

It has been recognised by at least 78 local authorities within the United Kingdom, including Durham County Council, that we are in an ecological emergency (Duckles, 2021; Durham County Council, 2022; *The Council and Climate Crisis*, 2024), this means that nature is in decline globally. A report by the United Nations in 2019 estimated that around a million species may become extinct within the coming decades (Martin, 2019). According to the State of Nature report, the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries on the planet. Nearly one in six species are under threat of becoming extinct on Britain's shores. UK species have already seen an average decline of 19% since 1970 (*State of Nature 2023 - Report on the UK's Current Biodiversity*, 2023). In other words, on average, every single species in the UK has lost one-fifth of their population. In this same time period over half of all plants have stopped existing in areas they once thrived (Pescott et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2023). Specifically, 54% of all flowering plants and 59% of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) can now be found in fewer places than they could be in 1970. Importantly, 1970 was by no means the gold standard of ecological protection or biodiversity. We compare current nature to that of 1970 because this is when widespread data gathering began, however in order to truly protect and conserve nature, biodiversity levels need to improve beyond 1970s levels. Given the importance of biodiversity for the planet and humanity, and the significant decline in biodiversity in the UK, there is an urgent need to identify areas where biodiversity can be restored. Greenspace management (mowing in particular) is one such area where biodiversity is significantly impacted and, therefore, can potentially be addressed.

Figure 2. Species abundance relative to 1970s levels for priority species within the United Kingdom



Note. Taken from [a UK Government Report](#). Priority species are defined as species of high conservation concern for any reason, species must also appear on one or more of the biodiversity lists of each UK country.

The Problem with Mowing

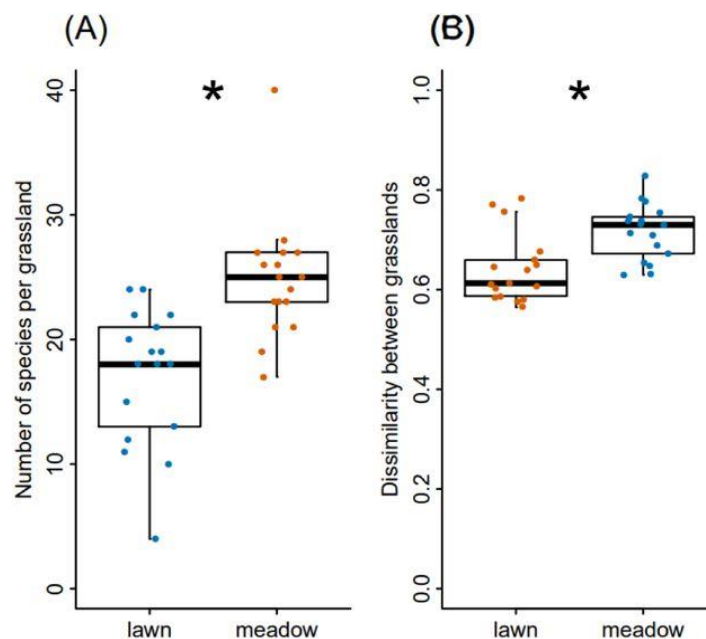
To the extent that apparent declines in biodiversity are something that we ought to address, then it is important to recognize the deleterious effects that over-mowing can have on biodiversity levels. Importantly over-mowing has detrimental impacts to multiple aspects of human and planetary existence, impacting biodiversity, climate change, and public life. The following sub sections will briefly describe research that demonstrates this connection.

Damage to biodiversity

The most obvious negative impact of mowing is the effect it has on biodiversity. Mowing kills flowers, plants, insects, and other invertebrates that make grasslands their homes (Sehrt et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2020).

Indeed, a meta-analysis of 14 studies on the biodiversity of mown spaces found that biodiversity is significantly depleted in intensively mown lawns compared to unmown or minimally mown lawns (Watson et al., 2020). This meta-analysis highlighted that a reduction in mowing would prevent losses of insect and plant species and provided strong evidence for multiple negative impacts caused by mowing intensity on plant and insect diversity.

Figure 3. Comparisons of lawns and meadows



Note. Graphs taken from Sehrt et al., (2020). Graph (A) presents the increase in species present in meadows compared to lawns. Graph (B) presents how similar lawns are to each other compared to how similar meadows are to each other within one city. All comparisons were significantly different with the meadow performing better on all measures of biodiversity compared to the lawn.

Additionally, a study of the plant diversity of urban grasslands where mowing had been significantly reduced showed that within six years of management changes there were 30% more plant species present in the green space (Sehrt et al., 2020; see

Figure 3). This study both demonstrated that mowing can prevent the biodiversity growth of urban green spaces and, more importantly, that changes in greenspace management practices can yield dramatic changes in biodiversity.

Finally, a randomised controlled trial comparing multiple mowing regimes found that mowing every 2 weeks lead to 3 to 5 times less biodiversity than not mowing, and significantly less biodiversity than when mowing every two weeks with a summer period (June to September) of zero mowing (Garbuzov et al., 2015). As the studies in this section outline there is significant evidence that regular mowing has a damaging impact on biodiversity and there is strong empirical research demonstrating the positive impact of Ecologically Conscious Land Management practices (ECLM practices).

Reduced climate change mitigation

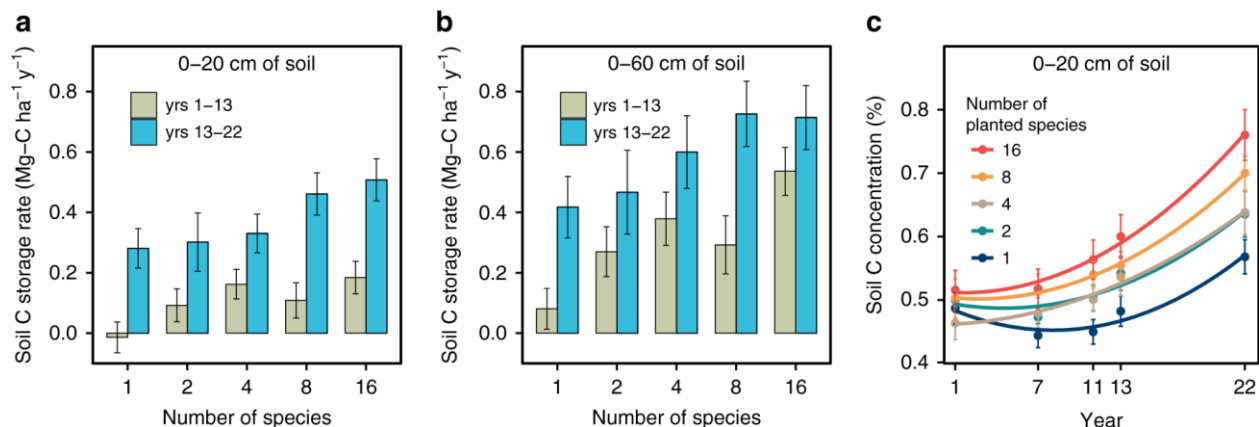
In order for the UK to reduce CO₂ levels in the atmosphere it is necessary that our natural land and carbon capture technologies are storing more carbon than we produce (*How Much Carbon Dioxide Would We Have to Remove from the Air to Counteract Climate Change?*, n.d.) and evidence has shown that reduced mowing of green spaces can improve carbon sequestration capacity of the landscape.

In a review paper produced in 2018 (Daba & Dejene, 2018) it was found that increased biodiversity plays an important role in increasing the amount of carbon being sequestered. Plants take carbon from the air during photosynthesis and store that carbon either in their bodies or in the soil, thereby reducing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere (Robinson, 2007; Schindler et al., 2010). The significant role biodiversity plays in carbon sequestration is theorised to be due to the variety of species leading to varied ways to utilise nutrients and resources, this makes biodiverse habitats more efficient and productive, thereby increasing the habitats' capacity to sequester carbon (Hooper et al., 2005; Loreau & Hector, 2001; Weiskopf et al., 2024). Additionally, diverse habitats are more likely to have the most effective carbon storing plants due to the sheer volume of plants in the habitat (Aarssen, 1997; Hooper, 1998). It is therefore essential to maximise biodiversity within the green space available.

A 5-year field experiment looking at the impacts of mowing and nitrogen introduction showed that mowing was detrimental to the carbon intake of lawns and green space (Wang et al., 2020). In a multiyear study of grassland in China, the less mowing was undertaken the higher the amount of carbon stored within the green space. With 'no mowing' schemes sequestering the largest amount of carbon. Additionally, a 22-year

experiment in the United States found that biodiverse habitats stored 178% more carbon in their soil than the monocultures they were compared to, and it was demonstrated that the more biodiverse a habitat the higher the amount of carbon stored in the soil, as can be seen in Figure 4 (Yang et al., 2019).

Figure 4. Increases in carbon sequestration in soil as species richness increases in grasslands.



Note. Graphs taken from Yang et al., (2019). Graph (a) presents the amount of carbon stored in the first 20cm of soil in the first 13 years of a habitat compared to the 13th to 22nd year for areas with different numbers of species. Graph (b) presents this same data but for the first 60 cm of soil. Graph (c) shows the relationship found between variety of species and amount of carbon stored in the first 20cm of soil over time. Error bars represent standard errors (SE).

In an assessment of the intervention to create a wildflower meadow on Kings College Cambridge’s back lawn, meadows were found to have reduced carbon emissions due to the reduction in maintenance and fertilising and reduced costs. The research estimated that GHG emissions are 112 times higher for lawns than they are for meadows and that lawns are 132 times more expensive to maintain than meadows (Marshall et al., 2023).

Impact on people

The link between green space and wellbeing is well established (see Liu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2020 reviews) and will not be addressed here as it is largely incidental to the primary purpose of the report. However, the specific impact of wild or biodiverse green space is less well known and more relevant to this report. Hence the following section will outline three seminal pieces of research that highlight the value for individuals of wild green spaces.

Biodiversity may increase satisfaction and happiness.

In one piece of research (Southon et al., 2017) participants were presented with various types of perennial meadow ranging in species richness (i.e., variety of species present) and structural height (height of the plants present). The intention was to identify what was the preferred type of green space and what effect that had on satisfaction and appreciation for the area. This study found evidence that highly species rich

grassland was considered preferable and made people feel more satisfaction and appreciation for the area than grassland of lower species richness. In other words, the more biodiverse the green space (achieved in the study through reduced mowing) the happier it made people feel about the area.

Biodiversity may ameliorate stress.

In a study conducted in Bradford UK, an epidemiological study was conducted that assessed whether the biodiversity of parks predicted the wellbeing of the park's users (Wood et al., 2018). Specifically, this research aimed to see if biodiversity had a restorative effect on people, helping them to escape from everyday life and recover from its stresses. After analysing the biodiversity of 12 parks and running surveys with park users, they then analysed whether the restorative capacity of the park had any relation to the richness of plant species present within the park. The results of this study found that the restorative effects of the park were indeed greater the more biodiverse the parks green space.

Biodiversity may ameliorate depression and adverse blood pressure.

Finally, a systematic review and bibliometric analysis synthesised results from 5 review papers and 17 experimental studies that were focused on the relationship between biodiversity and health (Houlden et al., 2021). Whilst many of these studies took different measures of biodiversity (species richness, wildlife abundance, diversity of flora and fauna, or simply the number of species) there were far too few studies to give definitive answers. However, studies contained within this review provided variable evidence for a link between intermediate species richness and reduced blood pressure; and for biodiversity having psychologically restorative effects; improving general wellbeing; and reducing symptoms of depression. It is however important to note that these studies were often stand alone and do not benefit from the usual consensus provided by systematic reviews and the combining of multiple studies on the same topic.

In summary, experimental, epidemiological, and systematic review papers have all demonstrated that increased biodiversity can lead to increased satisfaction and happiness in relation to the biodiverse area; can reduce stress and have restorative effects for mental health; can reduce blood pressure and depression; and improve general wellbeing.

County Greenspace

When looking at overall green space the North East of England has 8,371 hectares of green space. Compared to other regions of the United Kingdom this number is much lower than, for example the neighbouring North West's 20,207 hectares, Yorkshire and The Humber's 14,782 hectares, and even London's 17,458 hectares (*Green Space Index*, n.d.). In County Durham, Durham County Council maintains 20,780,833.35m² or 2078 hectares of green space, making it the council with the third highest land ownership in England

(‘What Land Is Owned by Councils?’, 2020). This encapsulates anything from roadside verges to public parks, and from graveyards to wild spaces. The Council currently aims to mow this vast swathe of land every two weeks during the mowing season, resulting in 16 cuts per year. To decide whether this massive and costly task is worth undertaking, it is essential for the council to know whether the residents of County Durham support it (or would, instead, support mowing reduction). The purpose of this report is to address this and several related questions to gauge the mowing preferences, perceptions, and concerns of County Durham residents.

Section Summary

The world is currently facing an ecological emergency with significant deterioration in nature and biodiversity.

Reduced biodiversity has potentially catastrophic impacts to habitat survival, economic growth, resource production, and climate change.

High levels of biodiversity are associated with climate change mitigation, habitat stability, and improved psychological wellbeing.

Mowing causes significant damage to biodiversity and ecology and Ecologically Conscious Land Management (ECLM) can have a powerful effect on reversing this damage.

Durham County Council mows a large amount of land but is unsure if the residents of County Durham are supportive.



METHODOLOGY

Sample

The Council and University teams collaborated on sharing the survey across the entirety of County Durham, with participants approached through mailing lists, internal university systems, internal council systems, a press release, and through the research being featured in the April 2024 edition of the 'County News' magazine which is sent to all households in County Durham. As a result of this concerted effort, 1560 responses were received. However, some of these responses were from non-residents as it was agreed with the council that, in the interest of inclusivity, anyone interested in the survey would be allowed to complete it and non-residents would be filtered out after the fact. Accordingly, the sample was subsequently reduced to the 712 participants who indicated that they lived in County Durham.

Of the 712 residents who took part, three were removed from the final analysis. Two residents were removed for taking more than 24 hours to complete the survey and 1 resident was removed for completing the survey in less than one third of the median time for the overall sample, indicating a rushed response. Specifically, this individual took less than 4 minutes to complete the survey whereas 75% of the sample took at least 8.71 minutes to complete the survey.

Of these 709 residents in the final dataset 64.7% identified as women, and 94.5% classed themselves as white. The average age of participants was 51.7 years old and ranged from 18 – 81 years. Most importantly the sample was a good reflection of the variety of residents of County Durham with similar proportions of age and ethnicity (See Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic information

	Sample (n=709)	County Durham (2021)
Gender		
Female	64.7%	51.1%
Male	37.3%	48.9%
Age		
Mean age in years:	51.7	41.7 ^a
Ethnicity		
White	94.5%	96.8%
Any other ethnicity	5.5%	3.2%

Note: ^acensus provides median age for people over 18 years old.

Whilst the sample is representative in terms of age and ethnicity, it is important to recognise the dimensions where this sample seemed not to mirror the County population. The sample of this research had a slight over-representation of women. It was also predominantly a sample of medium to high earners with some level of qualifications and reasonably high-status occupations. In total, 72% of those who responded to the survey work in supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional roles or higher. However, there is also a reasonable proportion of skilled manual workers and unemployed individuals (18%). The most underrepresented group is semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers with only 1% of respondents identifying themselves as belonging to this group. For a detailed breakdown of occupations, qualifications, and household incomes of the sample see Table 2 below.

Table 2. Occupation, qualifications, and income of sample

Occupation	%
Higher managerial, administrative and professional	18%
Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional	32%
Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional	22%
Skilled manual worker	9%
Semi-skilled and unskilled manual worker	1%
State pensioner, casual and lowest grade worker, unemployed with state benefits only, student	9%
Prefer not to say	7%
Skipped	1%
None	1%
Qualifications	
One to four GCSE passes ^a and any other GCSEs at other grades, or equivalent qualifications	3%
Five or more GCSE passes ^a or equivalent qualifications or apprenticeships	7%
Two or more A Levels or equivalent qualifications	17%
Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor's degree, or PG qualifications	64%
Other vocational/work-related qualifications	6%
Prefer not to say	3%
Income	
Up to £17,499 a year	10%
Up to £29,999 a year	15%
Up to £49,999 a year	23%
Up to £99,999 a year	26%
£100,000 or more	5%
Prefer not to say	8%
Skipped	12%

Note: ^a Passes were specified to be grade A* to C or grade 4 and above. PG = Post-graduate.

Survey

The research carried out for this report consisted of a short survey asking respondents a series of questions about their perceptions of green spaces. No images of grasslands, lawns, or nature were shown to participants at any point in the survey, to avoid biasing responses. This survey is detailed below.

Green Space Definitions

After a brief information sheet and consent form, the first section presented participants with a definition of green space:

For the purposes of this research "Green space" is defined as: Anything that supports the development of a healthy environment in harmony with the natural world. Green space is a type of land use which has notable contributions to urban environments in terms of ecology, aesthetics or public health, but which basically serves human needs and uses. It could include, but is not limited to parks, motorway borders, cemeteries, gardens, verges, hedgerows and roundabouts. Simply put, any natural area can be considered a green space.

Some green spaces are frequently mown or taken care of. So, for this research we use "**mown green spaces**" to refer to any area of green space that is regularly mown or otherwise actively managed.

Other green spaces are still managed, but are generally allowed to exist in a more wild state. So, for this research we use "**managed wild green spaces**" to refer to any area of green space that is infrequently mown, or is managed in a more passive way."

Subjective Responses

After reading the definitions of greenspaces, participants answered a number of survey items based on their subjective impressions and preferences. The questions asked in the survey were split into 6 broad sections relevant for this report.

- Mowing perceptions
- ECLM preferences
- Concern importance
- Where to mow
- Demographics
- Additional comments

Mowing Perceptions

Following the definition of green space, respondents' perceptions of mown green space was measured using 11 questions. Participants were asked to indicate how much they "agree with the following statements comparing mown green spaces to managed wild green spaces." They answered by indicating their agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" with the centre point being "neither agree or disagree" The statements in question were:

- Mown green spaces are neater
- Mown green spaces are more attractive
- Mown green spaces are better for the environment
- Mown green spaces are more expensive to maintain
- Mown green spaces discourage littering
- Mown green spaces improve my local area
- Mown green spaces add value to my area
- Mown green spaces are important for my community
- Mown green spaces are more clean
- Mown green spaces are more pleasing to be in
- Mown green spaces discourage antisocial behaviour

Subsequently respondents were asked to "Think of the green space you have to look at most often in your day-to-day life, please indicate how many times a month you estimate the council mows that space" possible answers ranged from 1 – 20+ with an additional option for "never".

Based on reliability analysis completed after data collection, perceived attractiveness, neatness, and pleasantness of mown spaces were combined into an index of prettiness ($\alpha = .83$). Perceived importance, value, and improvement were combined into an index of social desirability ($\alpha = .90$). Finally, lack of litter, perceived cleanliness, and lack of antisocial behavior were combined into an index of anti-social buffering ($\alpha = .82$).

Ecologically Conscious Land Management (ECLM) Preferences

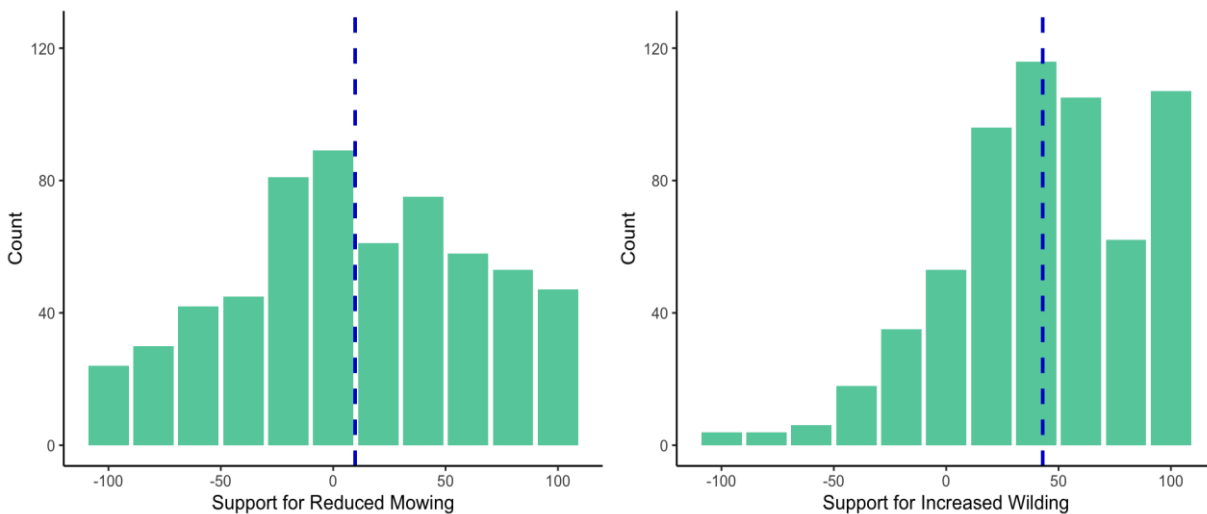
We also asked participants to indicate their preferences for a relative increase or decrease in mowing practices and wilding. Specifically, we asked "Now thinking of the county, how do you feel about current mowing practices? (use your mouse to drag the slider)" and "Now thinking of the county, how do you feel about the current wildness of existing greenspace? (use your mouse to drag the slider)" These questions took the form of two sliders ranging from -100 "absolutely needs to decrease" to +100 "absolutely needs to increase" with a midpoint of 0 "no change". The slider started at the midpoint and participants were forced to provide a response or explicitly indicate they wished to skip the question by checking a box on the side

that said “skip”. This was done to separate people who did not wish to respond from those who specifically meant to indicate 0.

It is important to note that the question about mowing was reverse coded to reflect a preference for mowing reduction. Both values for mowing and wilding used later were coded such that *higher* numbers indicate a *greater preference* for ECLM practices.

While these two items could have been combined into a single index for some of our research questions, namely—whether perceptions and priorities predicted land management preferences—we chose to leave them separate given the correlation between the two preference types was below the 50% overlap point (i.e., $|r| < .70$) and the obvious difference between the distributions (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Histograms for support for reduced mowing and support for increased wilding



Note. Blue line represents mean of responses.

Concern Importance

We then wished to understand different concerns people might have when thinking about green space management, in order to do this we asked participants to consider green space management practices and indicate how important each of several concerns were to them. Respondents indicated the importance on a 5-point scale from “Not at all important” to “Very important” with a midpoint of “Neither important nor unimportant”. We then listed the potential concerns as follows:

- Cost of management
- Accessibility of the space
- Neatness of the space
- Littering
- Local biodiversity

- Aesthetic of the space
- Climate change
- Safety of the space
- Local wildlife

In contrast to the perception items, apart from the eco concern items, the concern importance items did not associate as expected. The importance of climate, wildlife, and biodiversity impact were combined into a single score reflecting ecological-impact importance ($\alpha = .73$).

We attempted to combine neatness, aesthetics, and lack of litter ($\alpha = .54$) and cost, access, and safety ($\alpha = .39$) into a single score for the importance of prettiness and social impact, respectively. Both sets of items fell well below the standard for reliability. None of these items correlated strongly enough to warrant combining any of them ($r < .42$; items all overlapped less than 18%) and were therefore not combined.

Perceptions of Others' Wilding Support

The concern importance questions were followed on the same page by two questions gauging how important they felt it was that space be wild, and how important they believed wild spaces were to others:

“When considering green space how important is it to you that spaces are allowed to be wild”.

“When considering green space how important do you think it is to other people in your community that spaces are allowed to be wild”.

Where to Mow

We were then interested in which land types the public felt it was important to mow. Respondents were asked to indicate how important they thought it was to mow 10 different land types using a scale of 1-5 (1 = Not at all important to 5 = Very important, with a midpoint of “Neither important nor unimportant”). The types of green spaces we asked about were:

- Roadside verges
- Cemeteries
- Parks
- Open green spaces
- Motorway and road borders
- Council grounds
- Public footpath borders
- Roundabouts
- Sports pitches
- Unused fields

Demographics

Finally, participants completed demographic questions concerning gender, age, ethnic group, qualifications, occupational status, and income. Additionally, we asked whether people lived, worked, visited, or studied in County Durham, and we asked people to input the first half of their postcode so we could identify whether they lived in the County. The exact questions are outlined below.

Gender: “What gender do you most identify with?” Male/Female/Other/Prefer not to say.

Age: “How old are you?”

Ethnic group: “What is your ethnic group?” White/Mixed or multiple ethnic groups/Asian or Asian British/Black, African, Caribbean, Black British/Other ethnic group. With subcategories within each option.

Qualifications: “What is the highest qualification you have achieved?” None/Up to 4 GCSEs/5 or more GCSEs or 1 A level/2 or more A levels/Bachelor’s degree/Post-Graduate degree or qualification/Other vocational/Work related qualifications.

Occupational Status: “Using the classification of the National Readership Survey please indicate the occupational status of the Chief Income Earner in your household. The person in the household with the largest income is the Chief Income Earner, however this income is obtained. If the Chief Income Earner is retired and has an occupational pension, please select according to their previous occupation.” Higher managerial, administrative and professional/Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional/Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional/Skilled manual worker/Semi-skilled and unskilled manual worker/State pensioner, casual and lowest grade worker, unemployed with state benefits only, student.

Income: “Please select the letter for the row in which you would place your total household income per year, from all sources, before tax and other deductions” with letters corresponding to incomes presented in a table ranging from A = up to £4,499 a year to O = £100,000 or more.

Relationship to Durham: “Please select which of the following are most applicable to you (please select all that apply)”. The options were: I live in County Durham/I work in County Durham/I visit County Durham/I study in County Durham.

Postcode: “Please input the first part of the postcode which you reside in for more than half of the year”. Participants could type in the first part of their postcode into a free text box below this instruction.

Additional Comments

In order to allow participants to voice opinions not captured in our study design or to make specific comments to the council about mowing practices we included a free response question asking, “If you have any additional comments at all to make about the survey or the councils management of green spaces, please take this opportunity to detail your thoughts below.” This was followed by a free text box.

After items were combined a series of statistical tests were run to investigate our research questions (See Table 3).

Section Summary

For the skimmer, the following methodological points are important to note:

Participants indicated how much they supported mowing reductions and wilding increases. For both scores used in the report, *higher numbers indicate greater ecologically conscious land management (ECLM) preferences.*

Participants indicated how important mowing was for specific types of land. *Higher numbers indicated that mowing was seen as more important.*

Participants indicated how they perceived mown spaces (relative to unmown spaces). *Higher numbers indicated that mown spaces were seen as more attractive, more socially desirable, better buffers against antisocial behaviour, and more environmentally beneficial.*

Participants indicated how important a number of greenspace-relevant concerns were to them. *Higher numbers indicate that neatness, environmental impact, aesthetics, amount of litter, cost, access, and safety are more important.*

Table 3. Summary of research questions and analyses

Research Question	Analysis	Comparisons	Outliers
Do People Support a Mowing Reduction and a Wilding Increase?	Two one-sample t-tests	Tested whether preference for mowing reduction, and for wilding increase, differed significantly from a preference for no change (i.e., from 0).	No outliers removed
Does Preference Differ by Geographic Region or Demographics?	A one-way between subjects ANOVAs	Tested whether preference for mowing reduction, and for wilding increase, was predicted by any of the demographic variables.	No outliers removed
How Accurate are Perceptions About Mowing Frequency?	One-sample t-test	Tested whether estimated frequency differed from the actual frequency (i.e., twice a month).	Two obvious outliers ^a
What are the Primary Concerns and Perceptions that Predict Mowing/Wilding Preferences?	A multi-level regression	Tested which concerns and perceptions significantly predicted preference for mowing reduction and for wilding increase.	No outliers removed
Does The Type of Land Influence How Important People Feel Mowing Is?	A one-way repeated measures ANOVA	Tested whether perceived importance of mowing differed based on the type of space.	No outliers removed
Does The Association Between Mowing Preference and Both Perceptions and Concerns Depend on Land Type?	Two multilevel models	Tested whether certain perceptions, and certain concerns, of mown spaces were more important for mowing preferences for certain types of spaces.	No outliers removed
Do People's Perceptions of Norms Match the Norm?	Correlation and a paired t-test	Compared people's attitudes towards wilding and estimates of other people's attitudes towards wilding.	No outliers removed

Note. ^a These individuals indicated they believed the council mowed twenty times a month, which indicated they believed the same space was mown more than every other day. These values were more than 10 SD above the mean indicating they were clear outliers.

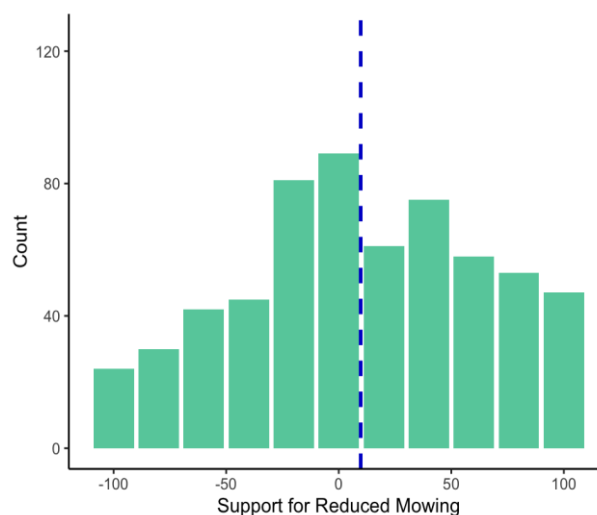
Data Collection and Research Integrity

The sample tested in this research provided a broad spread across occupation, qualifications, and income, and was broadly representative of the population in County Durham in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity. The mean age of the sample was 51.7 years old compared to the median age of 41.7 years old reported in the 2021 census. Importantly census data includes people under 18 thus, our sample, which was restricted to over 18 year olds, may have simply been higher because it did not include minors. The gender split was weighted towards females with 64.7% of our sample being female compared to 51.1% of the County Durham population. Ethnicity was similar to the county breakdown with 94.5% of the sample identifying as white compared to 96.8% of the County Durham population. For additional details on the sample see Table 1 in the “Sample” section on page 17.

The survey was disseminated through multiple channels, but the majority of participants were ultimately recruited in response to the council’s media posts, press release, and inclusion of the study in the County News Magazine sent to all households in County Durham (85.8%). A small portion came from the student subject pool (6.9%) and the rest came from university communication channels (5.6%).

The research also contained a reasonable range of opinions which were normally distributed, giving us greater confidence that the sample did not capture only those people who held strong opinions which would have instead revealed a bi-modal distribution.

Figure 6. *Distribution of responses on the question: Now thinking of the county, how do you feel about current mowing practices?*





PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE COUNCIL'S CURRENT PRACTICES

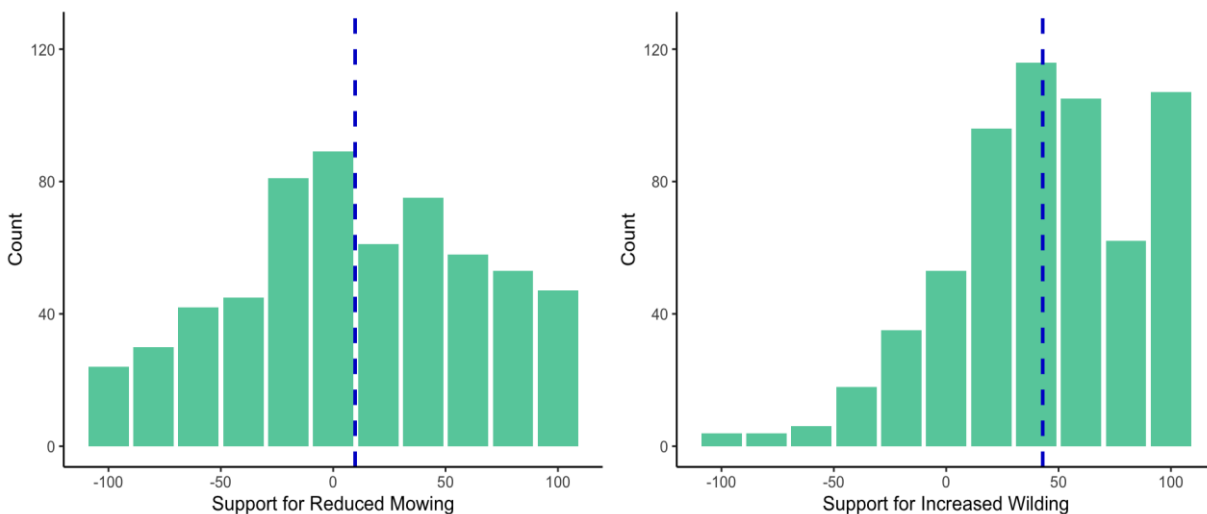
Public Opinion on Ecologically Conscious Land Management (ECLM) Practices

The key question we were interested in was whether people supported an increase or decrease in mowing practices (or preferred they remained the same). As a parallel to this, we were also interested in levels of support for an increase or decrease in wilding of greenspaces in the county (or a preference for them to remain the same). Together, we refer to support for mowing reduction and wilding increase as a preference for ecologically conscious land management practices (ECLM).

Do People Support a Mowing Reduction and a Wilding Increase?

One-sample t-tests revealed that the sample average indicated a slight, but significant, preference for reduced mowing ($M = 9.75, SD = 54.48, t(604) = 4.40, p < .001$), and a congruent—but considerably larger—preference for greater wilding ($M = 54.48, SD = 42.28, t(605) = 25.00, p < .001$). The two preference items were strongly correlated, $r(547) = .60, p < .001$. As preference for less mowing increased, so did preference for wilding.

Figure 7. Histograms for support for reduced mowing and support for increased wilding



Note. Blue line represents mean of responses.

It is interesting to note that the support for wilding is much stronger than the support for decreased mowing. There are a number of reasons this might have occurred. For one, it is possible that individuals support wilding without connecting it to specific land management practices. Alternatively, it could indicate that some individuals support wilding only if it can be achieved without impacting spaces that are currently mown (similar to NIMBY arguments), or it is possible that this simply reflects participants supporting wilding efforts in name without any consideration of what that would imply.

Section Summary:

There is a slight (but significant) desire to reduce the amount of mowing in the county.

There is a large (and significant) desire to increase the amount of wild space in the county.

Does Support Differ by Geographic Region or Demographics?

It is important to understand if different areas of County Durham were more or less supportive and if other individual characteristics such as age and gender predicted differences in opinion of altering mowing practices or wilding. This understanding of who is supportive of reduced mowing and who is not can inform council decision-making and allow the council to anticipate where in the county they might receive the most opposition if they were to adopt ecologically conscious land management practices. We therefore ran a series of ANOVAs to compare support for reduced mowing (and support for wilding) by postcode, age, gender, occupational status, and education:

- Post code predicted *neither* support for reduced mowing, $F(5, 586) = 1.21, p = .305, R^2 = .000$, nor increased wilding, $F(5, 588) = 1.40, p = .222, R^2 = .00$.
- Age predicted *neither* support for reduced mowing, $\beta = 0.01, t(589) = 0.32, SE = .14, p = .753$, nor increased wilding, $\beta = 0.01, t(589) = 0.32, SE = .14, p = .753$.
- Men ($M = 1.19, SD = 53.00$), relative to women ($M = 13.93, SD = 54.79$), tended to support a mowing reduction less, $t(414.87) = -2.76, p = .006$. This was to the point that men did not significantly support nor did they oppose a mowing reduction, $t(201) = .32, p = .75$, whereas women still supported a reduction, $t(401) = 5.10, p < .001$.
- Men ($M = 37.56, SD = 42.16$), relative to women ($M = 45.49, SD = 42.19$), also tended to support a wilding increase less, $t(387.7) = -2.17, p = .031$. Still, both men, $t(196) = 12.50, p < .001$, and women, $t(407) = 21.78, p < .001$, clearly supported an increase in wilding.

- Higher levels of education predicted support for reduced mowing, $\beta = 0.21$, $t(588) = 5.11$, $SE = 1.41$, $p < .001$, and increased wilding, $\beta = 0.11$, $t(588) = 2.67$, $SE = 1.09$, $p = .008$.
- Higher levels of occupational status did not predict support for reduced mowing, $\beta = 0.06$, $t(554) = 1.35$, $SE = 1.55$, $p = .176$, and increased wilding, $\beta = 0.06$, $t(553) = 1.52$, $SE = 1.17$, $p = .13$.

Section Summary:

Men neither support nor oppose reduced mowing, whereas women support significantly less mowing.

Women are more supportive of increasing wild spaces than men, but both are still very supportive.

The more educated respondents were, the more they supported ECLM practices.

There was no difference in support for ECLM practices between different postcodes, ages, or occupations.

How Accurate are Perceptions About Mowing Frequency?

We were also interested in the extent to which participants had accurate perceptions of mowing frequencies per month. Two responses were removed for being outliers, they indicated they believed the council mowed more than twenty times a month (as noted in Table 3, on page 25). The test revealed that the sample seems to under-estimate the frequency of mowing ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 1.38$), relative to the objective frequency (i.e., twice a month), $t(692) = -7.46$, $p < .001$.¹

Whilst not a dramatic difference, it is clear that, on average, people think less mowing is happening across the county than is actually the case. This is especially interesting to note as, on average, the sample indicated a slight preference for reduced mowing practices even though they already think less mowing is

¹ This analysis was performed under the assumption that respondents estimates did not adjust for lack of mowing in winter months. While it is possible that participants (1) made the judgement that, lately, they have been seeing the council mow X times a month, (2) recognized that the council only mows $y \pm 1$ months a year and (3) subsequently adjusted their estimate to reflect $X*(y \pm 1/12)$, this seems rather unlikely. It is more likely that participants would have simply used an unadjusted estimate from the last few months (data was collected exclusively during mowing season). That said, it is true that, in retrospect, a more carefully-worded question—specifying ‘during the mowing months’—would have rendered this discussion moot.

happening than is reflected by reality. In other words, even with most participants thinking that the council only mows approximately once every two and a half weeks, the sample still indicates a slight preference for a further reduction in mowing. This would tentatively suggest that the council could potentially adopt a mowing schedule of once every three weeks (instead of every two weeks) without a public pushback.

Section Summary:

On average people think the council mows less than the 2 times a month the council aims for.

This underestimation is statistically significant but not necessarily a dramatic underestimation.



BROADER PERCEPTIONS
OF, AND CONCERNS
ABOUT, MOWING

What are the Primary Concerns and Perceptions that Predict Mowing/Wilding Preferences?

As noted above, instead of combining the two ECLM scores into a single index, here, we left them as two separate scores and treated them as repeated measures in a multi-level regression which tested for an interaction between preference type and perceptions. This effectively allowed us to test the association between perceptions and management preferences when collapsing them into a single score (main effects in the first order model), which is the same as what we would have accomplished had we averaged the two scores. Yet, by leaving them separate, we were still able to account for possible differences in associations depending on preference type (interactions in the second-order model). That is, put as plainly as possible, our approach lets us know (a) what predicts preferences for ECLM practices *in general* and (b) what things might predict mowing preferences more or less than wilding preferences.

Perceptions of Mowing

Associations between general ECLM preferences and mowing perceptions (main effects)

Consistent with the visual pattern in the distributions in Figure 7 on page 28, the first-order multi-level model indicated that there was moderately more support for wilding compared to mowing reduction, $\beta = .29$, $t(597) = 16.51$, $SE = 1.83$, $p < .001$. More importantly, the model indicated that perceptions of mowing practices influenced preferences for ECLM practices. When ignoring the type of preference, the more mowing was seen as environmentally friendly, $\beta = -.14$, $t(616) = -4.72$, $SE = 1.46$, $p < .001$, as visually appealing, $\beta = -.20$, $t(637) = -5.15$, $SE = 1.98$, $p < .001$, as desirable, $\beta = -.27$, $t(622) = -7.73$, $SE = 1.77$, $p < .001$, and as something that buffers against antisocial outcomes, $\beta = -.13$, $t(613) = -4.11$, $SE = 1.68$, $p < .001$, the more participants disagreed with more ECLM practices. In other words, to summarise the general trend, the more mowing was seen as leading to positive outcomes, the more people tended to oppose ECLM practices—when people see mowing as positive, they want more mowing.

While the above conclusion is rather intuitive, what is more valuable to note is that the only non-significant predictor of preferences was the cost-effectiveness of mowing, $\beta = -.04$, $t(605) = -1.60$, $SE = 1.31$, $p = .109$. In other words, put quite literally, people who saw mowing as expensive had statistically equivalent ECLM preferences as people who saw mowing as inexpensive—perceptions of cost did not influence ECLM preferences. This is valuable as it highlights that attempting to change peoples' conception that mowing is (or is not) cheaper is unlikely to be a fruitful avenue if trying to change the publics' support for mowing

practices. These results also potentially indicate that a messaging campaign designed to highlight the beauty of unmown areas and the potential social value in unmown areas—with these being the two strongest predictors of preferences—may induce more support for ECLM practices. Additionally, campaigns educating people about the environmental damage of mowing might also prove effective. These possibilities, however, should be investigated empirically.

Section Summary:

When combining preferences for mowing practices with preferences for wild spaces into one score, there were many factors that effected peoples individual scores. People were less in favour of ECLM practices if they saw mowing as environmentally friendly, visually appealing, desirable, and protective against antisocial behaviour.

The only thing that did not affect people’s preferences for ecologically conscious land management practices was their perceptions of how cost-effective mowing was.

Associations between specific ECLM preferences and mowing perceptions (interactions)

The next step in this analysis was testing whether the association between specific perceptions and preferences depended on the type of preference. In other words, we tested whether visual appeal, for example, was stronger for mowing reduction compared to wilding. The second-order model testing this revealed an interaction between type of preference and perceptions of both ecological impact, $\beta = .09$, $t(592) = 2.31$, $SE = 2.25$, $p = .021$, and perceptions of desirability, $\beta = .15$, $t(606) = 4.16$, $SE = 2.63$, $p < .001$, indicating that for both perceptions, their association was stronger for mowing reduction relative to wilding. That is, for mowing reduction, environmental impact had a small negative association with support, $\beta = -.19$, $t(1138) = -5.19$, $SE = 1.82$, $p < .001$, whereas, environmental impact of mowing had a trivial, but still significant, negative association with support for wilding, $\beta = -.09$, $t(1146) = -2.30$, $SE = 1.85$, $p = .022$. This seems to indicate a disconnect between perceptions of the environmental impact that mowing has and its impact on the wildness of an area.

Similarly, for mowing reduction, desirability of mowing had a moderate negative association with support, $\beta = -.37$, $t(1124) = -8.72$, $SE = 2.19$, $p < .001$, whereas, desirability of mowing had a small, but still significant, negative association with support for wilding $\beta = -.16$, $t(1128) = -3.70$, $SE = 2.20$, $p < .001$. In other words, desirability of mowing feeds into preferences for wilding less than it does for preferences for mowing reductions.

The major conclusion from this subsection is that, on the whole, the evidence indicates that what predicts preferences for mowing also tends to predict preferences for wilding in largely the same way (i.e., even the two predictors that had differential associations with mowing preferences and wilding preferences still had largely the same trends across the two preferences). Thus, we can be more confident that whether the adoption of mowing reduction practices is framed as a ‘mowing reduction’ or a ‘wilding increase’, it will *not* impact the relevance of any given underlying lever to a meaningful degree.

Section Summary:

Perceptions of ecological impact and desirability are slightly more relevant for mowing reduction than for wilding.

Desirability of mown space is more important for reduced mowing than it is for increased wilding.

Overall, perceptions of mown spaces seem to predict mowing and wilding quite similarly.

Greenspace Concerns

Associations between general ECLM preferences and greenspace concerns (main effects)

Parallelling the above analyses, we tested how concerns about greenspace management practices impact ECLM preferences. The first-order model revealed that concerns around neatness, $\beta = -.42$, $t(627) = -14.10$, $SE = 1.35$, $p < .001$, concerns around safety, $\beta = -.13$, $t(619) = -4.75$, $SE = 2.00$, $p < .001$, and concerns around the ecological impact, $\beta = .28$, $t(636) = 1.40$, $SE = 2.30$, $p < .001$, all predicted desire for increased ecologically conscious land management practices. Specifically, as neatness became more of a concern, people supported ecologically conscious land management considerably less. This was likewise true, but to a lesser extent, as safety became more of a concern. Finally, as ecological impact became more of a concern, people supported ecologically conscious land management more. Thus, taking into consideration people’s concerns around neatness, safety, and ecological impact will likely impact the effectiveness of any specific campaigns. This would generally indicate that it would be wise to directly assess these concerns in specific areas (or with specific audiences) where mowing reductions are being considered.

Section Summary:

When combining ECLM preferences into one score, neatness and ecological impact emerged as the most influential concerns that impacted ECLM preferences.

Safety concerns also predicted ECLM preferences, just to a noticeably weaker extent.

Associations between specific ECLM preferences and greenspace concerns (interactions)

The second-order model revealed that the association between ECLM preference and concerns around neatness was the only one that depended on the type of preference, $\beta = .17$, $t(589) = 6.14$, $SE = 1.77$, $p < .001$. Specifically, neatness concern was more predictive for mowing reduction than it was for wilding.

That is, for mowing reduction, neatness concern had a strong negative association with support, $\beta = -.55$, $t(1066) = -15.19$, $SE = 1.62$, $p < .001$, whereas, for wilding, neatness concern had a moderate negative association with support, $\beta = -.30$, $t(1058) = -8.53$, $SE = 1.60$, $p < .001$. In other words, concerns about neatness feed into preferences for wilding less than they do for preferences for mowing reductions.

As above, the major conclusion from this subsection is that the evidence indicates what predicts preferences for mowing also tends to predict preferences for wilding in largely the same way (i.e., even neatness still had largely the same trends across the two preferences, just to slightly different degrees). Thus, we can be more confident that whether a mowing reduction is framed as a mowing reduction or a wilding increase will *not* impact the relevance of any given underlying lever to a meaningful degree.

Section Summary:

The three most influential concerns in peoples ECLM preferences are concerns about neatness, safety, and ecological impact.

The more people emphasize concerns about neatness, safety, and ecological impact, the less supportive they are of ecologically conscious land management practices.

Neatness concerns specifically were found to be more important for people's preferences for mowing than they were for their preference for wild spaces. In other words, concerns about neatness are most relevant to people's preferences about whether to mow, granted they are still quite relevant to people's preferences about wilding.

Overall, practically speaking, the same set of concerns seem to predict mowing and wilding preferences.

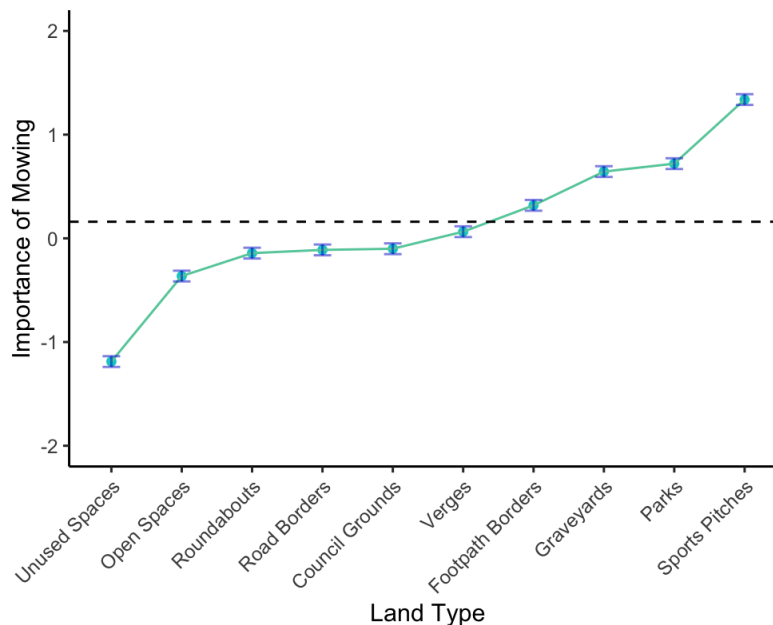


DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TYPE OF GREENSPACE

Does the Type of Land Influence How Important People Feel Mowing is?

We were interested in which types of green spaces participants felt were most in need of mowing. Thus, we conducted a one-way repeated measures ANOVA predicting the perceived importance of mowing from the type of space. The model indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated, therefore a Greenhouse Geisser correction was used. The adjusted model indicated that the importance of mowing was significantly influenced by type of greenspace, in other words the type of area determined how important participants felt mowing was, $F(7.04, 3841.94) = 338.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$.

Figure 8. Reported importance to mow different land types.



Note. The dashed line represents the point at which importance of mowing would have been significantly greater than neutral.

Given the number of significant comparisons, it is easier and more efficient to describe only the non-significant comparisons. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons with a Bonferroni correction, indicated that mowing was seen as equally important for roundabouts ($M = -0.14, SD = 1.33$) and road borders ($M = -0.11, SD = 1.33$), $t(546) = -.62, p = 1.00$, and council grounds ($M = -0.10, SD = 1.07$), $t(546) = -.78, p = 1.00$. The latter two were also statistically equivalent, $t(546) = -.19, p = 1.00$. Mowing was no more important for council grounds compared to verges, ($M = 0.06, SD = 1.33$), $t(546) = -2.96, p = .145$, nor was it more important for graves ($M = 0.64, SD = 1.07$) relative to parks ($M = 0.72, SD = 0.97$), $t(546) = -1.87, p = 1.00$.

More informatively, however, a series of one sample t-tests testing the average reported mowing importance for a piece of given land against perfect ambivalence (i.e., against zero) revealed that pitches ($t = 4.73, p < .001$), parks ($t = 17.36, p < .001$), graveyards ($t = 14.13, p < .001$), and footpath borders ($t = 6.02, p < .001$) were the only places where mowing was deemed significantly important (i.e., significantly above neutral). Verges were largely neutral ($t = 1.13, p = .26$)² as were road borders ($t = -1.97, p = .049$)³. Whereas council grounds ($t = -2.19, p = .029$), roundabouts ($t = -2.51, p = .012$), and both open ($t = -7.22, p < .001$) and unused spaces ($t = -29.05, p < .001$), were all places where mowing was deemed significantly unimportant (i.e., significantly lower than neutral), granted, the effects for council grounds and roundabouts were very small.

Thus, these analyses indicate that mowing *is* seen as more important for some spaces than others. Yet, for many spaces, mowing was not seen as especially important.

Section Summary:

People's preferences for changes in mowing vary depending on the green space they are asked about. On average people have no strong opinions about the mowing of any green space, either for or against, even the average importance of mowing sports pitches was closer to just 'important' than it was to 'very important'.

In general, the *only* places where people clearly felt mowing was important (as opposed to neutral or unimportant) were pitches, parks, graveyards, and footpath borders.

² Inspection of the distribution of responses for verges suggests this neutrality is largely due to ratings following a bimodal distribution (i.e., people's rating sat toward either extreme with few individual responses indicating true neutrality). Put simply, a roughly equal number of people think mowing is unimportant and important for verges. Footpath borders were also bimodally distributed but more people deemed it important to mow these areas than those who felt it unimportant. The inverse was true for road borders and roundabouts—more people deemed it unimportant to mow these areas than those who felt it important.

³ Given the sample size, the result for road borders is unwise to interpret ($p = .049$) as meaningfully significant.

Does the Association Between Mowing Importance and Both Perceptions and Concerns Depend on Land Type?

It is likely that certain perceptions and priorities are only relevant for particular types of greenspaces. For example, neatness might not be especially important for unused spaces whereas it might be very important for verges. Therefore, we tested two multilevel models, one predicting reported importance of mowing from type of greenspace, mowing perceptions, and their interaction, and another using greenspace concerns instead of mowing perceptions. These analyses also provide a test of the association between both mowing perceptions and concerns and the importance they ascribe to mowing in the aggregate (i.e., collapsing across types of green space).

Greenspace Perceptions by Type of Greenspace

The overall association between greenspace perceptions and reported mowing importance (main effects)

Consistent with the earlier analyses, the first-order model revealed that individuals who saw mowing as more environmentally friendly, $\beta = .12$, $t(703) = 5.94$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, as prettier, $\beta = .15$, $t(703) = 5.85$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$, and as more socially desirable, $\beta = .18$, $t(703) = 7.68$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, all tended to rate mowing as more important on average (i.e., when collapsing across type of greenspace). In contrast to the analyses above, the more individuals saw mowing as inexpensive, the more they saw mowing as important, on average, $\beta = .04$, $t(703) = 2.34$, $SE = .02$, $p = .02$. This, however, was a virtually negligible effect. Also, in contrast to the prior analyses, the extent to which they saw mowing as buffering against antisocial behaviour had no effect on average importance, $\beta = .04$, $t(703) = 1.76$, $SE = .02$, $p = .078$.

As with the analogous analyses reported earlier, these results are rather intuitive; if an individual sees mowing as cheap, pretty, eco-friendly, and desirable it makes sense they would consider it important that everywhere is mown. This may imply that altering these perceptions might allow for a reduction in how important people think it is to mow. For example, demonstrating that mowing is environmentally damaging, unattractive, and not desirable, may also reduce how important residents think it is to mow. Importantly these findings are about how important they think it is to mow green spaces, not about whether they want mowing to increase or decrease.

Section Summary:

Mowing was seen as more important on average amongst people who thought mowing was environmentally friendly, pretty, and socially desirable.

Cost and safety showed effects inconsistent with prior analyses. Given both the size and consistency of the effects, these are unlikely to be fruitful areas for further attention (i.e., they are not important levers).

The unique associations between greenspace perceptions and reported mowing importance for specific land types (interactions)

The omnibus test for the second-order model revealed that the importance of mowing depended significantly on the interaction between type of greenspace and perceptions of mowing as ecofriendly, $F(9, 6323) = 6.35, p < .001$, as pretty, $F(9, 6323) = 2.43, p = .009$, and as desirable $F(9, 6323) = 3.69, p < .001$. The interaction between type of greenspace and perceptions of cost, $F(9, 6323) = 1.69, p = .086$, and buffering against anti-social behaviour, $F(9, 6323) = 1.72, p = .080$, were both not significant. Moreover, these perceptions of cost and antisocial buffering were not meaningful predictors for any land type. The following tables show how much the relevant perceptions influenced mowing importance for specific land types (in order from most to least important). For comprehensiveness, all simple slopes for each land type are reported in Appendix A.

Table 4. The influence of perceptions of ecological impact on reported mowing importance

Land Type	β	<i>SE</i>	df	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Unused Spaces	.21	.04	5044.64	5.85	< .001
Council Grounds	.20	.04	5053.23	5.34	< .001
Roundabouts	.19	.04	5044.64	5.18	< .001
Road Borders	.16	.04	5044.64	4.49	< .001
Open Spaces	.13	.04	5044.64	3.59	< .001
Verges	.11	.04	5049.34	3.07	.002
Graveyards	.09	.04	5049.34	2.56	.010
Footpath Borders	.08	.04	5044.64	2.27	.023
Parks	.04	.04	5044.64	1.04	.300
Sports Pitches	-.05	.04	5044.64	-1.48	.139

As can be seen in Table 4, taking into account both the size and significance of the effect, the more people saw mowing as ecologically friendly, the more important they felt it was to mow unused spaces, council grounds, roundabouts, road borders, open spaces and verges. In contrast perceptions of eco-friendliness had trivial associations with reported mowing importance for, graveyards, footpath borders, parks, and sports pitches.

In other words, people who saw mown spaces as detrimental for the environment tended to feel it was less important for most spaces to be mown but this was strongest for unused spaces, council grounds, and roundabouts.

Table 5. *The influence of perceptions of prettiness on reported mowing importance*

Land Type	β	SE	df	t	p
Footpath Borders	.23	.05	5044.64	4.81	< .001
Roundabouts	.22	.05	5044.64	4.59	< .001
Parks	.20	.05	5044.64	4.06	< .001
Open Spaces	.19	.05	5044.64	4.03	< .001
Verges	.17	.05	5048.15	3.53	< .001
Road Borders	.16	.05	5044.64	3.27	.001
Graveyards	.14	.05	5048.15	2.90	.004
Council Grounds	.10	.05	5045.06	2.09	.037
Unused Spaces	.08	.05	5044.64	1.68	.093
Sports Pitches	.02	.05	5044.64	0.45	.656

As can be seen in Table 5, taking into account both the size and significance of the effect, the more people saw mowing as pretty, the more important they felt it was to mow footpath borders, roundabouts, parks, open spaces, verges, road borders, and graveyards. In contrast perceptions of prettiness had trivial associations with reported mowing importance for council grounds, unused spaces, and sports pitches.

In other words, people who saw mown spaces as prettier tended to feel it was more important to mow most spaces, but this was strongest for footpath borders, roundabouts, parks, and open spaces.

Table 6. *The influence of perceptions of desirability on reported mowing importance*

Land Type	β	SE	df	t	p
Graveyards	.25	.04	5045.18	5.81	< .001
Open Spaces	.25	.04	5044.64	5.78	< .001
Parks	.25	.04	5044.64	5.79	< .001
Footpath Borders	.24	.04	5044.64	5.70	< .001
Council Grounds	.19	.04	5047.66	4.53	< .001
Verges	.18	.04	5045.18	4.26	< .001
Sports Pitches	.15	.04	5044.64	3.39	.001
Unused	.11	.04	5044.64	2.56	.010
Roundabouts	.09	.04	5044.64	2.21	.027
Road borders	.05	.04	5044.64	1.19	.233

As can be seen in Table 6, taking into account both the size and significance of the effect, the more people saw mowing as desirable, the more important they felt it was to mow graveyards, open spaces, parks, footpath borders, council grounds, verges, sports pitches and unused spaces. In contrast perceptions of desirability had trivial associations with reported mowing importance for roundabouts and road borders.

In other words, people who saw mown spaces as more desirable tended to feel it was more important to mow nearly all spaces (except for roundabouts and road borders), granted, this was not quite as strong for verges, sports pitches, and unused spaces.

Section Summary

Desirability, eco-friendliness, and prettiness seemed to matter for most land areas.

If mown space was seen as ecologically harmful, people thought it was less important to mow, especially for unused spaces, council grounds, and roundabouts.

If mown space was seen as pretty, people thought it was more important to mow, especially for footpath borders, roundabouts, parks, and open spaces.

If mown space was seen as more desirable, people thought it was important to mow, especially graveyards, open spaces, parks, footpath borders, and council grounds.

Greenspace Concerns by Type of Greenspace

The overall association between greenspace concerns and reported mowing importance (main effects)

The first-order model predicting reported mowing importance from greenspace concerns revealed a pattern of results largely consistent with those reported in earlier analyses. Specifically, this model revealed that people who felt that neatness was important, $\beta = .29$, $t(700) = 14.69$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, and who felt that safety was important, $\beta = .06$, $t(700) = 3.33$, $SE = .02$, $p = .001$, tended to see mowing as more important. However, people who felt that ecological impact was important, $\beta = -.15$, $t(700) = -8.50$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, tended to see mowing as less important. In contrast to previous analyses, however, people who felt access was important, $\beta = .03$, $t(700) = 2.00$, $SE = .02$, $p = .045$, and who felt lack of litter was important, $\beta = .04$, $t(700) = 2.43$, $SE = .02$, $p = .015$, tended to view mowing as more important, granted, these were virtually negligible effects.

Section Summary

Mowing was seen as less important to people who were less concerned about the neatness and safety of greenspaces.

Mowing was seen as more important to people who were more concerned about the ecological impact of mown green spaces.

The unique associations between greenspace concerns and reported mowing importance for specific land types (interactions)

The omnibus test for the second-order model revealed that the importance of mowing depended significantly on the interaction between type of greenspace and the importance of eco-friendliness, $F(9, 6296) = 5.64$, $p < .001$, neatness, $F(9, 6297) = 9.13$, $p < .001$, aesthetics, $F(9, 6296) = 4.48$, $p < .001$, and access, $F(9, 6296) = 1.98$, $p = .037$.

The interaction between type of greenspace and the importance of cost, $F(9, 6296) = .39$, $p = .939$, buffering against litter, $F(9, 6297) = 1.65$, $p = .094$, and safety, $F(9, 6297) = 1.27$, $p = .246$, were all not significant. Moreover, cost, litter buffering, and safety concerns (with the exception of safety for roundabouts) were not meaningful predictors of mowing importance for any type of greenspace. However, for comprehensiveness all simple slopes are reported in Appendix A.

Table 7. *The influence of concerns around eco-friendliness on reported mowing importance*

Land Type	β	SE	df	t	p
Roundabouts	-.22	.03	4802.29	-6.88	< .001
Verges	-.21	.03	4802.30	-6.60	< .001
Road Borders	-.20	.03	4802.29	-6.39	< .001
Open Spaces	-.19	.03	4802.29	-5.97	< .001
Graveyards	-.16	.03	4802.30	-4.86	< .001
Unused Spaces	-.16	.03	4802.29	-5.08	< .001
Footpath Borders	-.14	.03	4802.29	-4.39	< .001
Parks	-.12	.03	4802.29	-3.82	< .001
Council Grounds	-.09	.03	4811.59	-2.75	.006
Sports Pitches	.00	.03	4802.29	-0.04	.966

As can be seen in Table 7, the importance of ecological impact was least important for council grounds (and sports pitches). Otherwise, it was, for all practical purposes, relatively consistent across most spaces.

Table 8. *The influence of concerns around neatness on reported mowing importance*

Land Type	β	SE	df	t	p
Open Spaces	.40	.04	4802.29	11.26	< .001
Council Grounds	.37	.04	4802.85	10.35	< .001
Verges	.35	.04	4817.38	9.77	< .001
Footpath Borders	.32	.04	4802.29	8.98	< .001
Road Borders	.31	.04	4802.29	8.54	< .001
Parks	.30	.04	4802.29	8.24	< .001
Roundabouts	.30	.04	4802.29	8.48	< .001
Graveyards	.27	.04	4817.38	7.40	< .001
Unused Spaces	.21	.04	4802.29	5.97	< .001
Sports Pitches	.06	.04	4802.29	1.80	.071

As can be seen in Table 8, the importance of neatness was least important for sports pitches. Otherwise, it was, for all practical purposes, relatively consistent across most spaces.

Table 9. *The influence of concerns around aesthetics on reported mowing importance*

Land Type	β	SE	df	t	p
Open Spaces	.08	.03	4802.29	2.38	.017
Footpath Borders	.07	.03	4802.29	2.20	.028
Parks	.07	.03	4802.29	2.13	.034
Sports Pitches	.07	.03	4802.29	2.05	.041
Unused	.02	.03	4802.29	0.71	.479
Council Grounds	.01	.03	4811.08	0.34	.732
Graves	.00	.03	4803.30	-0.09	.930
Verges	-.03	.03	4803.30	-0.85	.393
Roundabouts	-.04	.03	4802.29	-1.27	.205
Road Borders	-.11	.03	4802.29	-3.30	.001

As can be seen in Table 9, aesthetics was only important for road borders. Importantly, the more concerned about aesthetics people were, the less important they felt it was to mow road borders, perhaps suggesting that mown road borders are seen as less attractive.

Section Summary

With only a small handful of exceptions, reported mowing importance for all types of lands was only predicted by concerns around neatness and eco-friendliness. Many other concerns did not actually impact how important people felt mowing was for most spaces.

While the strength of associations for both concerns varied significantly depending on type of greenspace, the substantive association was largely the same for most spaces.

Overall, this suggests that considering these two levers (neatness and eco-friendliness) as ways of framing any mowing reductions might prove to be useful for multiple land types.

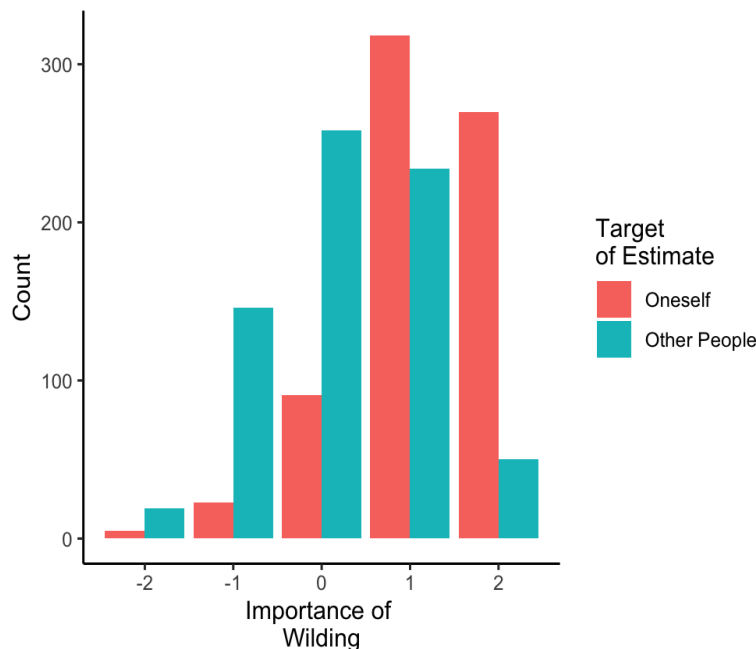


PERCEPTIONS OF FELLOW RESIDENTS' SUPPORT

Do People’s Perceptions of Norms Match the Actual Norm?

A correlation analysis between the two ratings of attitudes towards wilding and perception of others attitudes towards wilding found only a small correlation, $r(705) = .29, p < .001$, which corresponds to only sharing about 9% overlap in variance suggesting that participants had very inaccurate perceptions of norms. When comparing the distributions of the two types of ratings (See Figure 9) we can see that the two distributions are not visually similar and that it appears the distribution for *others* is shifted lower than the distribution for oneself.

Figure 9. Distribution of responses related to how important people think wilding is personally and how important they think it is to others.



Finally, the paired t-test indicated that participants average ratings of the importance of wilding for themselves ($M = 1.17, SD = 0.82$) was much higher than their perceptions of the same for other people, ($M = 0.21, SD = 0.94$), $t(1387.71) = -2.31, p < .001, d = -.91$. Overall, this indicates that participants systematically think everyone else is less supportive of wilding than they really are.

Section Summary

People generally assume that they are more supportive of wild spaces than are other people. Or in other words, people underestimate how much other people support wilding.

A photograph of a puffin standing on a grassy cliff edge. The puffin has a black cap, a white breast, and a large, colorful beak with red, white, and blue stripes. The background is a clear blue sky. The text "DESCRIPTIVE CONSIDERATIONS" is overlaid on a dark green horizontal band across the middle of the image.

DESCRIPTIVE CONSIDERATIONS

How are Mown Spaces Perceived?

In General

Given that perceptions of prettiness, eco-friendliness, and social desirability were revealed as highly influential for mowing preferences, it would be valuable to know which (if any) of these three perceptions are currently problematic (i.e., work to perpetuate support for mowing) and, therefore, are in need of addressing. A series of one-sample t-tests (comparing perceptions to 0 as a reflection of ambivalence) revealed that the sample tended to view mown spaces as clearly harmful to the environment ($M = -1.02$, $SD = 1.02$), $t(708) = -26.58$, $p < .001$, and as more desirable ($M = 0.39$, $SD = 0.99$), $t(708) = 1.44$, $p < .001$. In contrast, the sample appeared to have ambivalent perceptions of the prettiness of mown spaces ($M = 0.06$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(708) = 1.56$, $p = .119$.

Differences between Demographic Groups

It seemed likewise valuable to know whether these perceptions differed by the available demographic information. Accordingly, we conducted a series of regressions predicting each perception from demographics.

Differences between areas

The regressions predicting perceptions from postcode revealed that postcode did not predict any of the perceptions ($ps > .212$).

Differences between genders

The regressions predicting perceptions from gender revealed that men and women had statistically equivalent perceptions of mown spaces ($ps < .060$).

Differences between ages

The regressions predicting perceptions from age revealed that age did not predict perceptions of mown spaces ($ps < .098$).

Differences between levels of education

The regressions predicting perceptions from level of education revealed that level of education negatively predicted perceptions of prettiness, $\beta = -0.24$, $t(687) = -6.53$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, eco friendliness, $\beta = -0.25$, $t(687) = -6.66$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$, and desirability of mown spaces, $\beta = -0.11$, $t(687) = -2.95$, $SE = .02$, $p =$

.003. That is, individuals with lower levels of education tended to see mown spaces as more attractive, less environmentally harmful, and more desirable.⁴

Practical Relevance

Overall, this set of analyses suggests that, in general (i.e., ignoring specific audiences), people already seem to recognize that mowing is bad for the environment. While this should not be used to suggest there is *no* need to emphasize to the public the negative impact of mowing (i.e., by the nature of averages, there are still many people falling below the average who could reasonably be brought closer to the point of public consensus; this would seem to hold truest for lower levels of education), it does suggest that the environmental impact might not be the number one priority for targeting. Instead, the fact that people clearly see mown spaces as more desirable suggests that this is an area in need of further investigation. *Why*, for example, do people value mown spaces? Is there any way to retain that value while letting the space remain wild? Is there any way to re-orient people toward other, more important things? Finally, the analysis highlighted that perceptions of prettiness are quite ambivalent. This, ironically, might suggest this is the best area to direct attention. That is, with many people hovering near the midpoint (i.e., on the fence), it might prove easier to tip the scales toward seeing mown spaces as less attractive than it would be to make people see mown spaces as less desirable (which is much further from the midpoint).

Section Summary

People saw mown spaces as harmful to the environment, generally desirable, and neither attractive nor unattractive.

The perceptions that mown spaces were less harmful to the environment, more desirable, and attractive grew stronger as level of education decreased.

⁴ While we also have occupational status, logic suggests it would likely covary with level of education. While occupational status did predict perceptions, once level of education was accounted for, occupation no longer had any influence. Therefore, we have not reported the effects as they are better captured by level of education.

Levels of Concern

In General

Like perceptions, knowing how important the sample rated the most influential mowing concerns (i.e., neatness and environmental impact) seemed useful for guiding the council's future efforts. A series of one-sample t-tests (comparing concerns to 0 as a reflection of ambivalence) revealed that the sample was very concerned about mowing's impact on the environment ($M = 1.53, SD = 0.59$), $t(708) = 68.36, p < .001$, and only slightly concerned about neatness ($M = 0.25, SD = 1.11$), $t(708) = 5.95, p < .001$.

Differences between Demographic Groups

Paralleling perceptions, we conducted a series of regressions predicting both concerns from demographics.

Differences between areas

The regressions predicting concerns from postcode revealed that while postcode did not predict the importance of ecological impact ($p = .096$), it did predict the importance of neatness, $F(5, 687) = 2.83, p = .015, R^2 = .01$. A follow-up Tukey post hoc analysis adjusting for multiple comparisons indicated that the only significant difference was between postcodes "SR" and "DH" (difference = .60, $p = .011$). Otherwise, all other comparisons were not significantly different from each other.

Differences between genders

The regressions predicting concerns from gender revealed that men were slightly more concerned about neatness, $\beta = 0.08, t(706) = 2.23, SE = .09, p = .026$, and moderately less concerned about environmental impact, $\beta = -0.20, t(706) = -5.29, SE = .05, p < .001$, than were women.

Differences between ages

The regressions predicting concerns from age revealed that age did not predict either concern ($ps < .057$).

Differences between levels of education

The regressions predicting concerns from level of education revealed that level of education negatively predicted concerns about neatness, $\beta = -0.19, t(687) = -5.12, SE = .03, p < .001$, but positively predicted environmental concerns, $\beta = 0.15, t(687) = 4.01, SE = .01, p < .001$. That is, individuals with

higher levels of education tended to be more worried about environmental impact and less worried about neatness.⁵

Practical Relevance

This set of analyses is most useful for potentially guiding any tailoring of efforts to win over specific audiences in support of mowing reductions. In particular, it highlights that, for example, if one were to try and target men, it might make the most sense to focus on neatness as they are both (a) significantly less supportive of mowing reductions and (b) more worried about neatness than women. Similarly, it suggests that in areas with comparatively lower levels of education, the potentially more effective framing might be one that emphasizes neatness; in contrast, in areas with comparatively higher levels of education, environmental impact might prove more effective.

Section Summary

People were very worried about environmental impact and somewhat worried about neatness.

Compared to women and those with higher levels of education, respectively, men and those with lower levels of education were more worried about neatness and less about environmental impact.

⁵ As with perceptions, the effect of occupational status was accounted for entirely by level of education.



FREE TEXT RESPONSES

What do People Say About the Councils Mowing Practices?

325 free text responses were recorded and placed into four categories: pro-mowing reduction, anti-mowing reduction, in the middle, and unrelated. This coding method identified 57 comments in favour of reduced mowing, 58 against reducing mowing and 79 comments advocating less mowing in some contexts but not in others (in the middle). The remaining 131 comments were unrelated to mowing. A full list of the free text responses can be found in Appendix B. Below are presented some exemplars from each category.

Example comments in the “pro-mowing reduction” category:

“Durham council seems to be trying hard to manage green spaces. however, it needs a great mindset change from the majority of the general public who cling to the victorian idea of manicured grass. I hope the council continues to chip away at this attitude to increase and maintain biodiversity.”

“Help to bring back more natural meadows with native plants, and provide wildlife corridors for wildlife. Having more roundabouts/unused green spaces be turned into areas with wildflowers.”

“I absolutely love the roundabouts and grass verges when they are wild and covered in flowers for the wildlife.”

Example comments in the “anti-mowing reduction” category:

“Green spaces near homes in residential areas should be mowed regularly to be kept tidy.”

“I feel it’s great thr council maintain the green spaces the kids use them , it keeps the place tidy. It all together just makes a massive difference in lthe area if places are cut and mown nice , council do a great job.”

“I think 5he general public should have move access to the council owned green spaces or. le a village of 600 hours but 4 football pitches and zero place to exercise

animals. The drainage of fields because of lack of bushes and trees. The danger at road junctions when the grass is high and visibility becomes a problem."

Example comments in the "in the middle" category:

"For the questions where I've 'neither agree or disagree ' it's because I believe that there needs to be some mowing (e.g. for visibility) but otherwise left as wild."

"I believe areas do need to be maintained like paths, motorways, parks etc. however some areas could be let to go wild to increase wildlife populations like bee's etc."

"I believe there should be a balance between mown and unmown. On road verges, safety can be an issue but leaving some parts unmown encourages wild flowers and so insects and then birds."

Example comments in the "unrelated" category:

"Community orchards and vegetable gardens would be a good addition."

"Build less houses."

"I think that more effort needs to be directed at dealing with littering and fly tipping rather than grass cutting in County Durham."



CONCLUSIONS

What are the Overall Findings and Conclusions?

The council is actively pursuing ways to manage for biodiversity on the substantial amount of land managed across the county. The recent declaration of an ecological emergency has led to the reassessment of current practices and therefore an understanding of how supportive the county residents will be of these potential changes is essential. The analyses detailed in this report demonstrate that there is no evidence of opposition (i.e., there is evidence of a slight preference to the contrary) to reducing the council's mowing, and there is significant support for increasing the amount of wild space that is present within the county.

This report suggests two important conclusions, County Durham residents were:

- (a) significantly in favour of the Council reducing the amount it mows green spaces
- (b) they slightly underestimate the present frequency of mowing in the county.

In other words, residents think mowing is less frequent than it really is, yet, they *still* generally support mowing less frequently. On the whole, this optimistically suggests that the council might find less resistance to reduced mowing than originally anticipated.

Separate from resident's desire to reduce mowing there is an even stronger desire for the county to have more wild spaces. Whilst it is unclear exactly why the desire for wild spaces is much higher than the desire to reduce mowing (and also predicted by slightly different things), this finding clearly indicates that wild spaces are something that the people of County Durham want much more of. This is important for two reasons. First, it suggests that residents are potentially unaware of the connection between reduced mowing and increased wildness (or at least are failing to make the connection in the moment). In turn, given the clear desire for more wild spaces, this suggests that emphasising wilding as the goal of any mowing reduction (e.g., signs that say 'we are mowing this space less frequently to increase the number of beautiful wild spaces for nature') might help people see the mowing reduction as aligning with their desires.

- The two most important factors when considering opinions to increase or decrease mowing were beauty and environmental impact. The more people cared about beauty the more regularly they wanted greenspace mown, whereas the more they cared about the environment the more they wanted greenspace left wild.

- The only places where it was deemed notably important to mow were cemeteries, parks, and sports pitches. All other greenspaces had relatively ambivalent perceptions around the importance to mow them or it was actively deemed important to mow them less, again though this was not strong.
- County Durham residents generally assumed that they cared more about reducing mowing than other members of their community. This could imply that there is a misconception that most people are in favour of heavy mowing. Additionally, this could mean that the 1404 complaints received were lodged by individuals who believe that most people have even greater support for regular mowing than they do.

Section Summary

On average, County Durham residents were slightly supportive of reduced mowing.

County Durham residents underestimate how much the council currently mows.

County Durham residents strongly want more wild spaces.

Beauty, environmental impact, and social desirability were the important factors for people when thinking about mowing.

Mowing was only deemed expressly important for graveyards, parks, sports pitches, and footpath borders.

Otherwise, mowing was seen as neither important or unimportant or flatly unimportant.

County Durham residents assume *other* people want more mowing than the data suggests.



RECOMMENDATIONS

What do the Results of this Report Mean for Durham County Council?

Based on the findings of this report, there are several recommendations that are based on data driven insights and empirical evidence. The first recommendation is that based on this sample the residents of County Durham appear to be supportive—albeit slightly—of a reduction in mowing county wide.

Based on the analyses here, the most fruitful areas worth considering for reduced mowing (i.e., in the sense that these areas received, at most, neutral ratings of reported mowing importance) are unused spaces, roundabouts, grass verges, road borders, council grounds, footpath borders, and open spaces. The areas that would potentially receive the most opposition are sports pitches, park grounds, and graveyards.

While the report suggests that people might be open to changes in mowing, it also highlights that there are key dimensions that might prove to be useful levers in efforts to frame any changes in the public eye. Specifically, preferences for mowing reductions and reduced importance placed on mowing of specific places were most impacted by the perceived prettiness and desirability of mown green space, followed by the perceived environmental impact of mowing—neatness and environmental impact also happen to be the most influential concerns in the data. Whilst this report does not test any behavioural interventions or provide enough empirical evidence by itself to definitively suggest that these perceptions will be an effective lever for increasing support for any mowing reductions, it does suggest that perceptions of prettiness, desirability, and ecological impact may be a fruitful area into which further resources could be devoted. That is, it would likely be worth considering whether focusing messaging or signage in areas with reduced mowing on the enhanced beauty from, increased desirability of, and reduced environmental impact of allowing native plants to grow. An important caveat to this recommendation is that the changes to green space management must have a tangible impact. This is most readily illustrated by considering the lever of beauty as an example. If signage says, for example, ‘By not mowing, we are letting this space remain naturally beautiful’, people will likely respond negatively if the space does not look beautiful. Thus, any reductions in mowing/increases in wildness of the area must be accompanied by a tangible change in beauty so as to avoid backlash to the messaging and the perception that it is disingenuous, dishonest, or divorced from reality. Fortunately, research in Cambridge has shown that wildflower meadows are considered more aesthetically pleasing than traditional lawns (Marshall et al., 2023). Therefore, if the council decides to implement alterations to mowing practices, these could potentially be made more acceptable in the eyes of the public if they also include such attractive changes.

Here, it seems important to acknowledge the discrepancy between people’s most important concerns and the ones that were most statistically influential. In terms of overall scores, people indicated that they were most concerned about environmental impact and only slightly concerned about neatness. This alone would have seemed to imply that environmental concerns would most influence their preferences and, therefore, be worth targeting. Yet, from the analyses earlier in the report, we clearly see that the importance of neatness is more influential than environmental concerns. In fact, when environmental concerns are used to predict preferences for mowing reductions alongside neatness concerns, environmental concerns only account for 4.6% of the variance in preferences, whereas neatness concerns predict 28.8% of the variance. This clearly indicates that neatness is the more powerful force driving mowing preferences (and it also highlights an especially important social-psychological principle: people aren’t always the best judges of what drives their own behaviour). It is important to emphasize, however, that this does not necessarily mean one should blindly focus on the lever of neatness at the cost of environmental impact. If it is equally easy to frame wilding as ‘neat’ as it is to frame it as ‘environmentally friendly’, then the analyses here would clearly indicate effort is best placed on the neatness lever. At least as likely, though, is that convincing people that wild spaces are neater might prove more difficult than it is to convince them it is good for the environment. In such a case, the better lever to address might be the environmental lever—after all, even if a lever will cause greater movement, if it is stuck, it won’t matter. Accordingly, the malleability of both perceptions and concerns should be taken into account when deciding the way forward.

The report also suggests that people’s preference for wilding might be a stronger priority than their preference for reduced mowing. Thus, in a similar vein to the previous paragraphs, this might suggest framing mowing reductions as ‘wilding increases’ might help to direct the public’s attention to their stronger preference, thereby reducing the chance of any lingering opposition.

In contrast, this report also highlights some things that might be likely to be ineffective—and, therefore, our recommendation would be to avoid them. For one, cost does not seem to be a driving factor in people’s preferences about ECLM practices. That is, our analyses clearly suggest that people who want to save money have statistically equivalent preferences for mowing as those who do not care about saving money. Thus, there is little reason to tailor public-facing messaging or justification to this concern. Likewise, our analyses indicate that people who voice strong concerns about safety or accessibility also have similar preferences as those who have no such concerns—similarly suggesting that these dimensions are not useful levers.

The final recommendation from this report is based upon the findings that whilst people are generally supportive of reduced mowing, they routinely believe that most people are less in favour of this change than they are. Information and messaging could potentially be disseminated to the County's residents to outline that there is general support for less mowing county wide.

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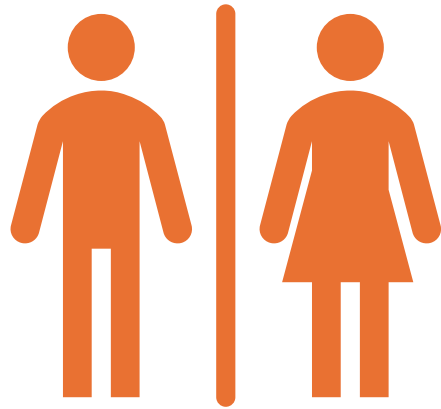
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ESCOC Presentation

Dr Jack Hughes

Dr Michael Lengieza

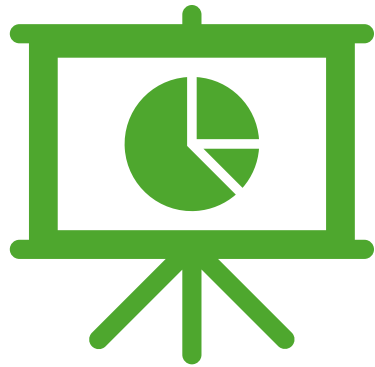
What I am going to talk about



Sample



Report



Results



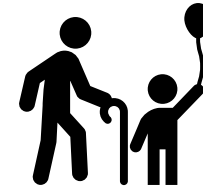
Questions



709 residents took part in the survey



64.7% female



Average age of 51.7 years



94.5% White



85.8% of the sample was collected by the Council

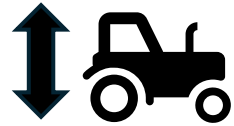


These numbers closely mirror the general population of the County

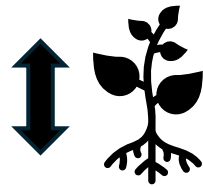


Report

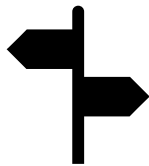
Did they want more or less mowing



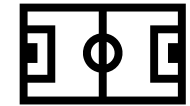
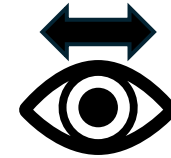
Did they want more or less wild spaces



Was mowing more important for certain land types



What were their perceptions of unmown vs mown green spaces



What were their concerns associated with greenspace management



Which perceptions and concerns made people want more or less mowing?

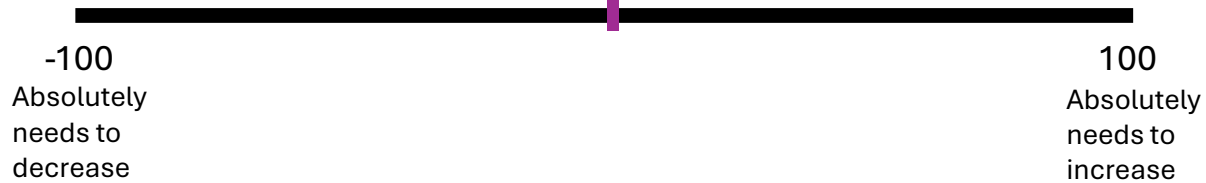
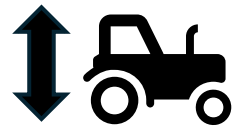




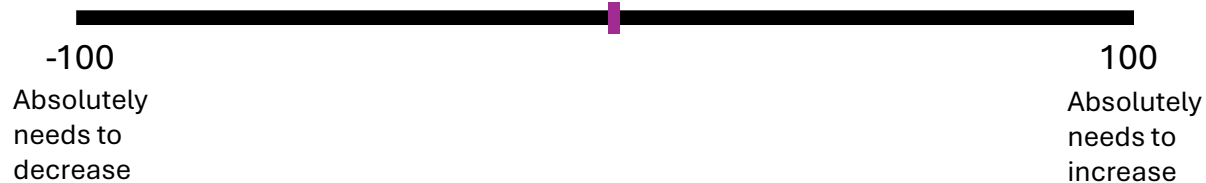
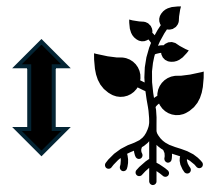
Report

Did they want more or less mowing, and more or less wild spaces?

How do you feel about current mowing practices within the county?



How do you feel about the current wildness of existing greenspace within the county?



We then flipped mowing to be in the same direction as wilding (so desire to decrease mowing and increase wilding were at the same end of the scale)



Report

Did they want it more on certain land types

How important do you think it is to mow each of these types of green space?

Rating from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important)

Listed 10 types of land



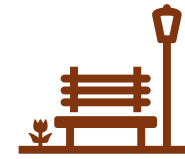
Sports Pitches



Cemeteries



Footpaths



Parks



Roadsides



Motorway borders



Council Grounds



Open Green Space



Roundabouts



Unused Fields



Report

What were their perceptions of unmown vs mown green spaces

“Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements comparing mown green spaces to managed wild spaces”

1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree

For example:



“Mown green spaces are better for the environment”



“Mown green spaces discourage anti-social behaviour”



“Mown green spaces are more expensive to maintain”



“Mown green spaces are neater”



Report

What were their concerns associated with mown and unmown greenspaces

“How important are the following concerns?”

Rating: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree

For example:



“Climate Change”



“Safety of the Space”



“Cost of Management”



“Neatness of Space”



Do people support more ecologically conscious land management?





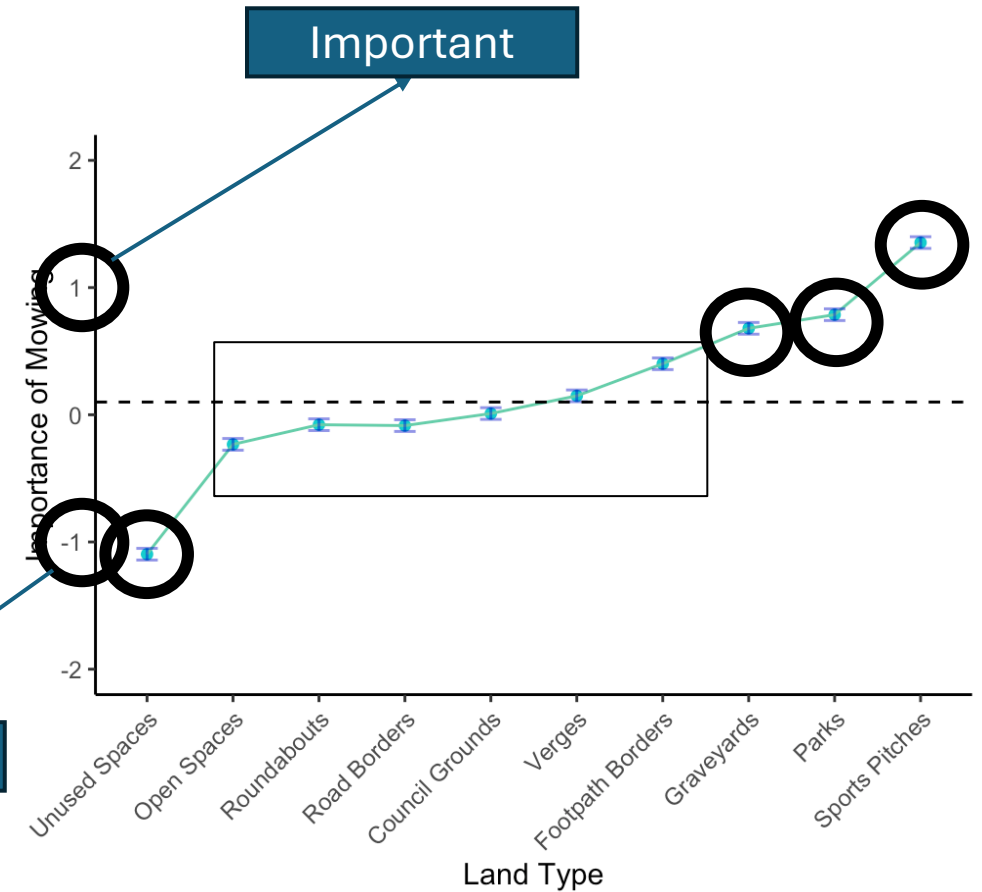
Are there areas that must be mown?

Not really

Only sports pitches, parks, and graveyards were deemed “important” to mow

Only unused spaces were deemed “unimportant” to mow

Most spaces received ambivalent responses



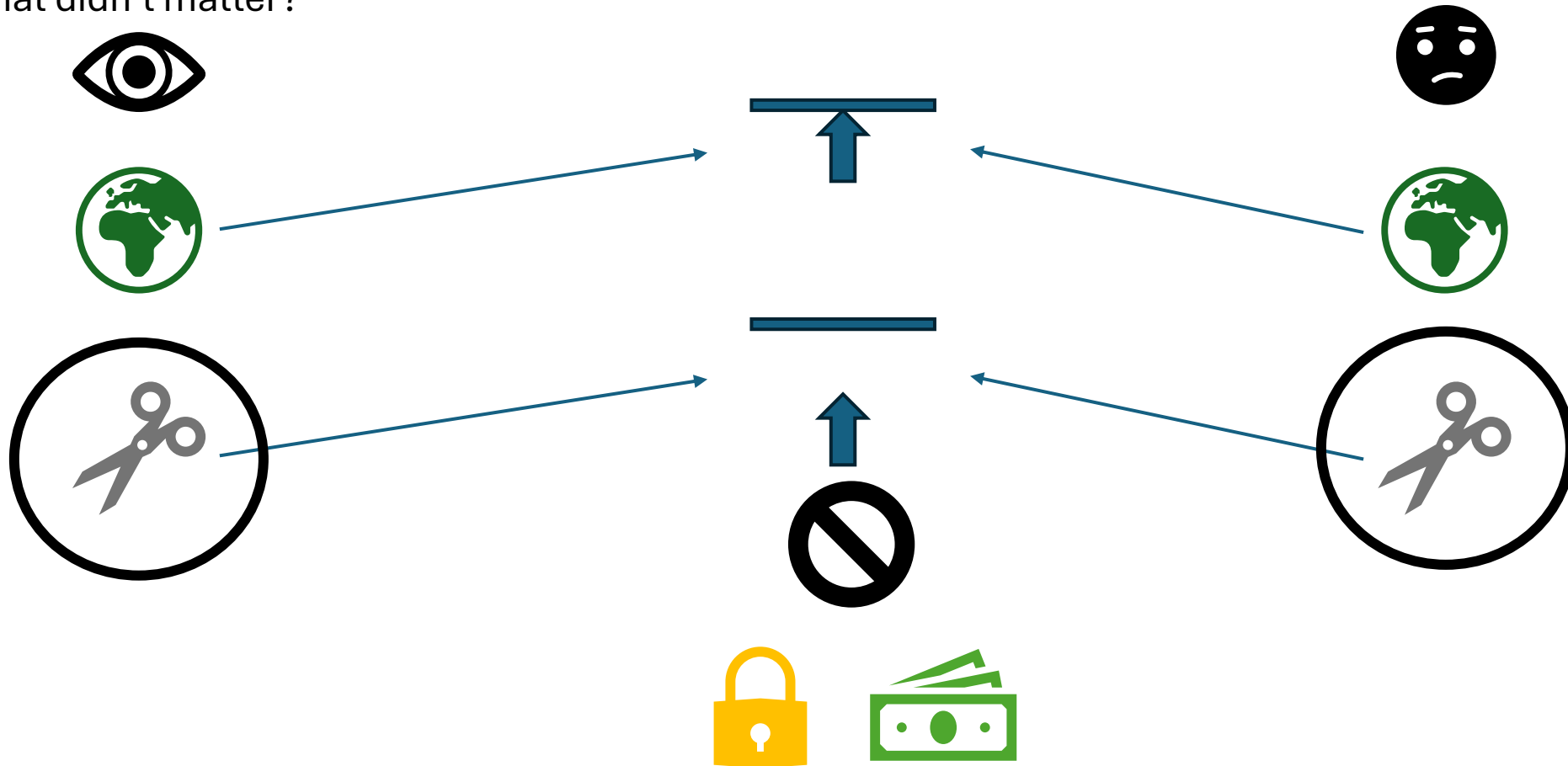


Results

What do people think about mown and unmown spaces?

What are people concerned about with mown and unmown spaces?

What didn't matter?



Key Takeaways

- People ARE supportive of more ecologically conscious land management practices. **They want less mowing and a lot more wild space.**
- The two most important predictors of support were **perceptions and concerns about environmental impact and neatness.**
- Changing perceptions around neatness or reducing neatness concerns is probably a more fruitful avenue for change.
- Unless it's a sports pitch, park, or graveyard there is no desire to mow
- Cost and safety were unimportant to people

Thank You



Durham
University





Questions

**Environment and
Sustainable Communities
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



16 January 2025

**Management of DCC Land for Biodiversity –
2024-25 Update**

**Report of Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods
and Climate Change**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update on the progress of the Parks and Countryside Team, together with colleagues within Clean and Green, in managing Nature Reserves and other Green Spaces for Biodiversity across Durham County Council (DCC) owned land.
2. To update on Parks and Countryside linkages to the Ecological Emergency and Climate Emergency reports. Full reports regarding the EEAP and CERP will be provided by colleagues separately.

Executive summary

3. The Council continues to support improvements to biodiversity, habitats, and landscapes for the benefit of people, communities, and wildlife.
4. Activities range from a host of landscape wide initiatives, through to the management of nature reserves, community conservation and education projects, facilities, and open space management. Progress continues to be evident across all work areas since previous committee presentations in May 2024.
5. The Parks and Countryside Team are continuing to make significant progress on the delivery of their objectives in terms of Biodiversity gain, alongside the wider Clean & Green adaption of current open space

management to benefit wider biodiversity goals, developed and reported through the recent Ecological Emergency Action Plan, (EEAP). Linkages refer to other projects and continuing delivery of programmes highlighting the issues referred to within this report.

6. The EEAP will soon feed into a County-wide Local Nature Recovery Plan, the development of which has seen progress in terms of public consultation and is currently finalising its overarching priorities and key measures for success. Countryside and Technical Services continue to play a role in inputting into the LNRS, giving guidance on a wide range of habitat types, including urban and peri-urban spaces within the strategy. The Ecology team are leading on the LNRS as the designated authority within the area.
7. The Parks and Countryside Team continue to deliver effective management for biodiversity across their 1500-hectare estate, which includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites and Destination Parks.
8. The Clean and Green Service now maintain 45 areas of meadow and wildflowers across the county. No new areas are currently planned until the biodiversity strategy is in place for the service. When this is complete, a more strategic and outcome-based approach can be taken in the selection of new sites. This will also partner with the LNRS.
9. The Teams have continued to effectively communicate key messages relating to biodiversity and climate change themes to a wide variety of schools and local communities. Specialist community projects and volunteering opportunities have continued to be delivered across the county. These have been targeted to facilitate a greater understanding of the value of biodiversity and of the countryside sites within people's own neighbourhoods and promote awareness of a wider nature recovery strategy and the impact of climate change. Groups engaged include primary and secondary schools, university/college students, pre-school children, groups of young people, adult groups, and retired communities.

Recommendation

10. That Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
 - a) Note that continued effective management of nature reserves, other countryside sites, and green spaces across Durham County Council is contributing significantly to biodiversity protection and gain.

- b) Note the progress made in delivering the linked objectives of the Parks and Countryside Service and Durham County Council's Ecological Emergency and Climate Emergency reports.
- c) Recognise the progress that has been made in the development of links between the Parks and Countryside Service and the delivery of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the county. Work in this area will continue as the LNRS develops and the Services remain committed to supporting the effective development of this strategy and aiding its delivery.
- d) Recognise that the proposed impacts of MTFP 15 may require mitigation in terms of prioritisation of site management and programming outputs.
- e) As per (d) above, mechanisms for seeking additional resource to continue successful programmes will be investigated.

Background

11. In their 2022-23 work programme, the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee included an item on the management of parks and green spaces across DCC owned land to come to formal committee. Members were provided with an overview of the management of DCC owned land for biodiversity on 23 February 2023, and the committee then attended a visit to Local Nature Reserves and open spaces on the 10 May 2023.
12. In their 2023-24 work programme the committee asked for an update on the progress of the Parks and Countryside and wider Clean and Green teams in managing DCC land for biodiversity. The committee attended a site visit at Hardwick Park on the 1 May 2024 led by the Principal Parks and Countryside Manager to see first-hand how biodiversity can be supported within a more formal outdoor setting. During this visit, members also heard about biodiversity management of other outdoor areas managed by the wider Clean & Green team. On the 10 May 2024 formal presentations were made to the committee and its members, offering further updates on the progress made, as well as the links between management practices and both the Ecological Emergency and Climate Emergency Response Plans, and the development of the county's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Update on Policies and Strategies

13. Management of the Parks and Countryside Estate continues to be shaped by Durham County Council's Vision, Environmental Statement and relevant policies within the Local Plan that aim to protect and enhance our biological resource, as well as be cognisant of the level of protection afforded to designated sites.

14. The updated 2024 Tree Management Policy continues to shape the corporate approach to managing trees for beauty, character, heritage, and biodiversity, whilst providing a level of reassurance for the public and householders regarding general tree safety and specific tree management.
15. The Council continues to react proactively to new legislative requirements pertaining to the environment; most recently the need for most developments within the catchment of the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area to be nutrient neutral. The Council is collaborating with partners, including Natural England, Northumbrian Water, Environment Agency, and Durham Wildlife Trust to develop mitigation strategies to enable development to proceed without negatively affecting the protected areas.
16. The council's Climate Emergency Response Plan 3 was adopted in July 2024. This plan runs from 2024-2027. Ensuring the county's natural environment is thriving and that it continues to play an important part in offsetting residual carbon emissions remains a key part of the plan's vision. The Parks and Countryside Team, alongside wider Clean and Green colleagues are continuing to contribute to this throughout their management practices and how they combat biodiversity loss. Positive management is currently aiding specific targets including halting the decline in the abundance of species, increasing tree and woodland cover, and restoring and creating habitats. The service areas are also continuing to support CERPs commitment to effective communication for action and informed decision making, breaking down the barriers to public understanding through comprehensive volunteering and education programmes, and targeted community activities. These continue to foster awareness of biodiversity and eco-systems, as well as climate change and natural solutions.
17. The work above links to the development of the county's Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Parks and Countryside and wider Clean and Green Teams have been supporting the ongoing development of the LNRS by being a part of the Ecological Emergency work stream, and specialist sub-groups who are coming together to establish the key priorities of the strategy, and the practical measures needed to achieve them. Parks and Countryside Team have also been supporting public consultation on the strategy through their work with schools and other stakeholders. The LNRS is being developed to represent the views and needs of communities across the county and the Service continues to play an important part in this ongoing engagement process. Aiming for a draft by Spring 2025 and publication in Autumn 2025 – this aligns with what neighbouring authorities are planning.

Update on Resources

18. Investments for 2022/23 announced as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This included additional staffing for the delivery of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Temporary Programming staff in the Countryside team, Rangers/Nature Reserve Officers, as well as support for woodland creation.
19. Temporary programming staff roles were extended for one financial year, with contracts now ending on 31 March 2026. These roles include one full-time Volunteer Programme Coordinator, one part-time Community Programme Coordinator and one full-time Assistant Education Officer.
20. Since recruitment to these three posts, engagement numbers have risen significantly across the Parks and Countryside Estate. The posts have played a central role in the delivery of engagement opportunities to over 5000 school pupils through 220 facilitated school visits in our destination parks. Their informal learning opportunities which include events, under-5s programmes and summer holiday clubs have engaged with 4000 people across the same period.
21. Across the wider countryside estate, the Volunteer Programme Coordinator has supported 66 new volunteers since the last committee presentations in May, bringing the total number of engaged volunteers to 336 since recruitment to the post. The work of the Community Programme Coordinator has engaged with over 600 members of harder to reach groups over the same period, and 2200 since the post began.
22. These engagement figures continue to show a significant level of growth across the three programming areas, providing benefits to biodiversity that include:
 - a. A large, growing volunteer workforce facilitating the management of our high-quality green spaces - nature reserves, country parks, railway paths and picnic areas are all supported by this workforce who undertake a wide range of practical activities around the county. Volunteers are supporting Ranger staff in their delivery of site management plans and associated biodiversity objectives.
 - b. Other community group involvement in practical activities and learning including harder to reach groups (e.g., those with additional needs, young people, those affected by poverty and deprivation) supporting the management of the countryside estate as well as helping to build resilient communities, tackle negative behaviours and develop local connections to countryside sites and green spaces.
 - c. Providing educational programmes that remind people of the value of high-quality green spaces, biodiversity, and eco-systems, increasing their understanding of the role the environment plays in the future of our planet and effects on climate change. Instilling

a life-long learning approach, providing opportunities for people of all ages to better connect with these themes and their local environment.

- d. Encouraging the people of County Durham to become more involved in the protection of biodiversity in their own neighbourhoods and support ecological recording. Undertaking effective interpretation, marketing and communication that increases public understanding of biodiversity, vital habitats, and the county's unique environmental features, many of which support rare, nationally significant, and protected species. Utilising all available resources to develop these communications – including digital opportunities and new technologies.

23. The Parks and Countryside Team and their role in managing DCC land for biodiversity has benefitted hugely from the decision to continue temporary programming contracts into the 2025/26 financial year, allowing a level of forward planning to retain and build on community linkages already established. The ongoing temporary nature of these roles, however, remains a real concern for the Service.

24. The Parks and Countryside team have been delivering for biodiversity through active land management of the Countryside Estate for over 50 years. Biodiversity is considered in all activities undertaken. Resource needed to manage the 1500 ha Countryside Estate which comprises of designations - SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest - 6), LNR (Local Nature Reserve - 22), LWS (Local Wildlife Site - 20), Destination Parks (2) and recreational assets such as the railway path network is significant.

25. The recruitment of two new Ranger/Nature Reserve Officer posts as part of the 2022/23 MTFP has provided an increase in resource that had a profound effect on the Service's ability to deliver its site management objectives. However, as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan 15 there is a proposal to lose one full time Ranger post. If this goes ahead, we will look to mitigate impacts through reprioritisation of site management and programme support and seek further development of external funding streams.

26. Resources have been redirected onto Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) with baseline habitat assessments being undertaken this year at: Broompark, Hayberries, Pity Me Carrs, Low Newton Junction, Tanfield Lea, Causey Arch, Witton Dene, Lanchester Valley RP – hurbuck triangle, Hardwick Park, Cocken Wood, Ferryhill Carrs. Some of these sites have existing assessments that are historical, so a comparison of habitats is timely.

27. Ranger staff continue to play a significant role in community engagement programmes, providing expert advice and support to programming staff and their delivery of volunteer services, targeted community projects and outdoor learning across the wider countryside estate (nature reserves, picnic areas and the railway path network) to provide a sustainable approach to land management, and an ongoing commitment to DCC's Climate and Ecological Emergency declarations.
28. The additional staffing resource provided to the Parks and Countryside Service since 22/23 has allowed increased capacity to secure external funding for the benefit of biodiversity. This has continued this year with additional funding schemes being supported by Northumbrian Water, Durham Heritage Coast, Newcastle University, the AONB and various Local Area Action Partnerships and local councillors. Commercial acumen remains present and supporting biodiversity management using external opportunities is significantly adding value to existing capital investment projects, revenue growth opportunities, and other Environmental Service level priorities, including those highlighted by the CERP, EEAP reports.
29. The Council continues to make use of new funding streams and opportunities to diversify biodiversity on selected areas of amenity green space, for instance successful rounds on Urban Tree Challenge Fund, as well as a recently awarded Parks Levelling up Grant, and Towns and Villages Walking and Cycling Capital investment programme.
30. The Parks and Countryside Team and wider Clean and Green Colleagues continue to lead on and feed into wider projects and initiatives across teams, with efficient partnership working regularly undertaken for the benefit of biodiversity. The National Trust led Durham City Green Corridor Project has developed significantly over the last six months. DCC staff have had a significant role in the planning for biodiversity management and community engagement for council sites within the corridor, taking on the role of one of the projects main partners. The Service is also a principal partner in the Species Coastal Grasslands Reconnected Project, being led by Durham Heritage Coast, with other principal partners including the National Trust and Durham Wildlife Trust. This project is in the early stages of delivery but has brought £975,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and National Lottery Heritage Fund to restore Magnesian Limestones grasslands and create further habitats along Durham's Heritage Coast. The service also fed into the EOI leading to a potential Nature Towns and Cities bid to expand capacity whilst building a broader approach to whole a wider landscape project.
31. External funding streams can deliver action held within the EEAP, most notably developer contributions for biodiversity net gain (BNG) to deliver

habitat enhancement on Council land. This work will be highlighted by colleagues as part of EEAP updates.

32. Currently, Parks and Countryside Team are responsible for delivering environmental benefits through Higher level Stewardship Schemes on five sites across the County. These schemes effectively pay the Authority for carrying an agreed specification of actions to improve habitat quality. All these schemes are nearing or finished the ten-year contract, and have annual, rolling contracts used until the future of environmental schemes are clearer. The forthcoming Environmental Land Management (ELMs) scheme, which will replace current Agri-environment schemes, should provide a mechanism to fund positive land management for biodiversity on parts of the Councils rural landholdings. We may look to increase the amount of land managed this way. However, we are still to see what the new schemes entail and until then will continue our existing schemes on an annual basis.

Clean and Green - Biodiversity and Sustainability Delivery

33. Durham County Council continues to provide major, active land management through both the Parks and Countryside, and Clean and Green and services involved with the woodland estate (CPAL and Landscape).
34. Parks and Countryside resources continue to be allocated to effective biodiversity management practices in high priority areas, such as the SSSI's and through ongoing Countryside Stewardship schemes.
35. Agreed work (through Natural England) is being achieved, with regular assessments of SSSIs being carried out by Natural England. These assessments facilitate targets established as part of the Environment Act. They monitor the effectiveness of biodiversity management practices implemented on SSSIs, and the current condition of rare and protected features on a landscape scale to help work towards nature recovery. There is a requirement that management practices are extremely high-level on all SSSIs, and favourable feature condition assessments are a strong measure of success. One such assessment was undertaken by Natural England within the last seven months. This showed feature conditions to be 'favourable' on the Parks and Countryside SSSI of Quarrington Hill Grasslands which was assessed as species rich, exceeding its targets for the presence of positive indicator species.
36. The Service continues to follow individual site management plans which have been established for all Parks and Countryside sites and are valid for 5 years. Each plan has an annual work programme that identifies what tasks are carried out in any year. Reactive work continues to be needed regularly - due to adverse weather, anti-social behaviour, or

customer comment or queries. Available resource will dictate actual works on site.

37. Contractors continue to be used to deliver larger targeted actions on sites, particularly those that have Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) support payments from DEFRA agreements. Parks and Countryside are awaiting confirmation of Defra review of the HLS regime and what this means for financial support of high value site management moving forward.
38. The 22/23 growth investments have provided further opportunities to engage the wider public in facilitating the collection of data, but there is little potential for full ecological assessments and reports across the entire estate (apart from LWS) – which would increase the potential to deliver significant biodiversity benefits through the restoration and creation of wildlife habitats. This will continue to be a piecemeal informal process, as per below.
39. Engaging the public in the collection of data has continued to be achieved through citizen science projects included as part of targeted sessions with community groups, and public Bioblitz events. The service has also supported national initiatives to encourage participation in surveying species including Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count and National Insect Day since the last committee presentations were made in May 2024. The ongoing commitment to providing these activities has facilitated species identification and recording by the public with assistance from local recording experts. Community based data collection continues to be achieved through the promotion of self-led opportunities to get involved in surveying, which has been communicated in print and through digital/social media platforms.
40. The wider Clean and Green Team are responsible for providing a variety of services including grounds maintenance of parks, open spaces, school grounds, cemeteries, and closed churchyards. Currently, the Clean and Green team are responsible for around 21 million square metres of green space across the county.
41. The Clean and Green Service has implemented a suite of biodiversity enhancements on open spaces ranging from habitat creation to changes in cutting regimes. The largest of the habitat creation projects has been the seeding of a hectare of open space in Durham to create a species rich grassland supporting a range of wildlife. Other interventions include overseeding grasslands with wildflowers at the Durham Coast and reducing cutting regimes on amenity grasslands across the county to allow wildflowers to set seed and spread. The service has also planted scrub woodland and installs and maintains all the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCF) sites, with around eight hundred trees planted per year under this scheme.

42. Clean and Green Service currently maintains forty-five areas of meadow and wildflowers. This number includes 8 new sites (2023/2024). No new sites are currently proposed as we are currently completing a strategy for future sites, which will tie into the LNRS and give good strategic direction to new areas and deliver an outcome-based approach.
43. Other notable achievements include the continual reduction in the use of herbicides, and this will continue. Trials in several wards to cease spraying around obstacles on green areas has been very successful. A wider reduction in herbicide use was agreed as part of MTFP 15 (subject to financial settlement from central government).
44. Peated compost is still used by Morrison Busty nursery as peat free trials are continuing. Yet, no viable alternative has been found. The team are intending to undertake trials in 2025 of biochar enriched compost, and that is hoped to provide a viable alternative to peated compost.

Engagement, Education, and Behaviour Change

45. The Parks and Countryside Programming Team have continued to deliver biodiversity/climate change themed learning to large numbers of children and young people through school education, events, and activities. A captivating programme for schools engaged has engaged with 5000 school pupils since the last reporting period in May 2024, with an additional 4000 people taking part in informal learning opportunities, events, and activities.
46. The nature of many of these visits has been shaped by DCC's climate change and ecological emergency delivery plans. The formal education programmes at our destination parks have several new facilitated workshops on offer for primary schools including *Keep the World Clean, Let Nature Recover, Eco-Explorers, Animal Adaptations, There is no Planet B and Temperate Forest*. Over 100 sessions of these workshops have been delivered to primary schools over the last seven months. A strong new KS3 offer for schools is also in development, ready to be launched early 2025 which focuses entirely on themes linked to nature recovery biodiversity and climate change themes. Links to the EEAP remain interlaced throughout the Parks and Countryside outdoor learning programme at all key stages and explores the ecological emergency in detail with groups, delivering activities that focus on vital themes alongside biodiversity, including ecology, food, energy, and weather/landscape changes.
47. A full programme of educational opportunities to support consultation on nature recovery has now been delivered by the Parks and Countryside Education Team, giving over 400 children a voice to the Local Nature

Recovery Strategy. Consultation work is continuing with to gauge the level of environmental understanding that exists among young people.

48. An extensive level of other public engagement work has continued to take place across the Parks and Countryside Estate in the last seven months in the form of targeted community programmes. These have included a comprehensive volunteer led guided walks programme, alongside workshops that have supported 600 hard to reach individuals into our parks, nature reserves, railway paths and picnic areas. These harder to reach groups have included children, young people, older people, those with additional needs (physical, emotional, behavioural), and those affected by deprivation.
49. The delivered community projects have directly supported the Climate Emergency and Ecological Emergency response plans, bringing information on climate change effects and natural solutions to people on a more personal and local level, and directly influencing behaviours for the benefit of biodiversity and conservation.
50. Planned community projects are in place for 2025-26 financial year focusing on sites identified as at higher risk of anti-social behaviour, lack of public buy-in in terms of habitat protection, and low levels of engagement/learning in terms of biodiversity, ecology, and climate change priorities.
51. The Parks and Countryside Team has continued to see a significant rise in the number of volunteers supporting both practical site management activities and programming objectives. This increase now equates to a percentage rise of 246% in the number of volunteers who have supported the Service since the appointment of a new Volunteer Co-ordinator in 2022. This includes regular weekly volunteers alongside corporate groups who have contributed hours to the Service.
52. Volunteer hours have risen by over 90% since 2022 with 14,200 volunteer hours being undertaken throughout 2023. This huge number of volunteer hours equates to the equivalent of £160,000 of annual in-kind assistance. This figure is based on the metric used by DCC AAP projects when calculating volunteer match funding. Over 9,400 volunteer hours have been delivered so far, this financial year (April-November 2024), showing a consistent high-level of commitment from individuals and groups, while demonstrating the continued positive impact of the Volunteer Programme Coordinator role. This work continues to include practical tasks that are undertaken in support of site management staff and their biodiversity management priorities. They also include hours devoted by volunteers to the community guided walks programme which helps promote the historical, cultural, and environmental features and value of the county's countryside to the public, and sense of ownership for local green spaces.

53. New opportunities for corporate groups to become involved in Parks and Countryside volunteering has continued to be developed since the last committee report in May 2024, with 550 corporate volunteering hours delivered from a range of local businesses and organisations. Development of the corporate offer will continue into the new financial year, with additional opportunities on offer and successful marketing and promotion strategies remaining in place to maximise uptake.
54. The Parks and Countryside Team have developed higher levels of involvement in national initiatives to support the protection of nature reserves and other countryside sites and green spaces around the county. A full programme of community engagement was delivered over the summer months and included community litter picks, bioblitz events, bat walks, *Big Butterfly Count* activities and celebrations of *National Insect Week* and *Don't Step on a Bee Day*. The Service also promoted activities as part of *Heritage Open Days* and carried out community activities linked to fire prevention on countryside sites and effective dog control. Community and educational opportunities were also provided to harder to reach communities through the Fun and Food initiative to support those who may otherwise have been unable to visit our green spaces.
55. Interpretation improvements continue to be made across the Parks and Countryside Estate. Since the last update to the committee in May 2024, new interpretation has been installed at Low Newton Junction, and projects developed for replacement interpretation, signage and waymarking across the Auckland Way Railway Path, Ferryhill Carrs and Hardwick Park. These will continue to provide new levels of information relating to site specific biodiversity and conservation value, historical and cultural significance, as well as how countryside sites play a role in nature-based solutions and the effects of climate change. Interpretation improvements continue to make a significant contribution to education and promoting public awareness and ownership objectives highlighted by the CERP, EERP, and LNRS.
56. Social Media channels managed by the Parks and Countryside Team in partnership with DCC marketing and communications are seeing a consistently good level of engagement and are continuing to be used to promote key topics linked to the ecological and climate emergencies. - Public posts are published regularly to raise awareness of the work of the Team across the estate and its importance to biodiversity and the ecological emergency. General posts are also regularly made on the platforms, often linked into national initiatives to educate followers about County Durham's wildlife and habitats, as well as ways they can get involved in helping their local green spaces. Just recently we have been given permission to develop a logo for the Service, which will assist with promoting our objectives.

Clean and Green Open Space Management for Biodiversity

57. Ongoing intensive maintenance is the enemy of biodiversity; restricting plant growth through mowing and strimming limits or prevents habitat creation for insects, small mammals, birds, and other animals. In addition, native weed species are more than twice as beneficial to pollinators and insects as ornamental and wildflowers (Balfour & Ratnieks 2022, appendix 4). By using different methods, Clean and Green are seeking to change the management of currently mown grassed areas to make them havens for wildlife. However, a good balance between providing useful public amenity and aesthetics and creating wildlife habitats is possible. The approach is also dependant on future BNG aspirations, the LNRS and wider policy needs.
58. In partnership with DCC's Ecology team, a strategy for habitat and meadow creation across the county is in development, which will follow national mapping from agencies such as Bug life, who have created a Bee-lines map, showing the commonly used pollinator corridors across the country. By cultivating meadow and wild sites along the bee lines, their use by pollinators can increase. In turn, and in doing so, other animals, insects, and plant species are supported as well. This approach is intended to dovetail with the LNRS and BNG strategy and will not therefore be finalised until after those policies have been approved.
59. The approach for each site will be determined by the nature of the site itself, some will significantly benefit from wildflower meadows, some will be grassland meadows, many will be encouraged to self-seed to produce native grass meadows. When developing plans for each site, a wide variety of factors will be considered when dividing how to manage. Including native species in the area, soil and land type, cost, and benefit to the local community.

Use of Herbicides in public spaces

60. Use of Glyphosate is still widespread across the county and is the current primary herbicide. Whilst studies show it is safe for long term use, (please see the amenity forum document in the appendix 2) there is a growing concern around its use. You can see the results of Cardiff's trials of alternative herbicides in appendix 3. Through informal in-house trials we have determined that there are currently no viable cost-effective alternatives to glyphosate for herbicide in the public realm. As such, the approach to reducing dependency on glyphosate, should be to simply reduce the use of herbicide.
61. Trials were undertaken in 23/24 and 24/25 on reducing herbicide use on open spaces in select wards around the county. The trials were a success with no complaints about weeds around obstacles. As part of

MTFP 15 (subject to the financial settlement from central government), a reduction of herbicide use has been proposed to widen the above approach to the whole county.

Conclusions

62. Durham County Council continues to be pro-active in its reaction to new legislation and national policy development and collaborates with partners to protect natural assets. The Council has committed to a Climate Change Response Plan and most recently an Ecological Emergency Action Plan which ensures through decision-making, that net gains in biodiversity through the adoption of environmentally beneficial management regimes.
63. The work promotes an awareness of biodiversity and the impact of climate change on nature within County Durham.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

MTFP 15 proposals and impacts thereof will need to be considered.

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

The decline in biodiversity detailed in previous reports.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

MTFP proposals and impacts thereof will require consideration.

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable

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Parks and Countryside



Progression Highlights

Page 122

- 10 Local Wildlife Sites under positive management, ongoing delivery of Countryside Stewardship Schemes, successful assessment of SSSIs through Natural England.
- 5000 school pupils on facilitated visits, 4000 public event attendees, 600 harder to reach individuals engaged in targeted programmes.
- Programming further shaped to EEAP and CERP 3 priorities. Delivery of 100 school visits to promote EEAP consultation and nature recovery.
- 66 new volunteers recruited, over 9,400 volunteer hours delivered this financial year so far, equating to an in-kind Service contribution of over £105,900.
- Upwards of 100k of external funding secured through increased capacity for bid applications and delivery management.
- Partnership working thriving - key projects inc. Coastal Grasslands SSF and Durham City Green Corridor.
- Capital schemes under development including new play area at Hardwick Park, opening of changing places facility, extensive RP improvements.



Project Examples



Ferryhill Carrs
2019 vs 2022
➤ New investment for further works 2024/5



Low Newton Junction:
➤ Further works 2025 onwards...



Tees Valley Railway
➤ New investment potential for further access improvements 2025/26



Hardwick Park:
➤ New investment for waymarking and signage 2024/25

Ongoing Management Practices



Opportunities

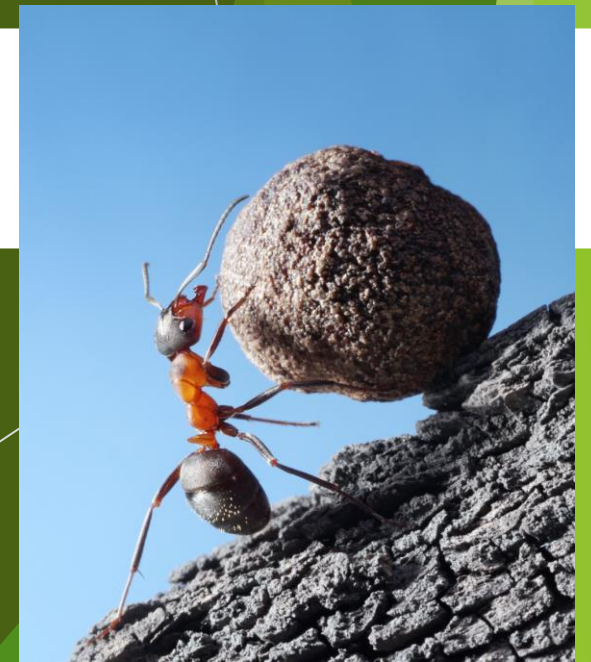
Page 124

- External Funding:
 - Species Survival Fund
 - Other - made possible from additional staff resource until 2026
 - Durham Corridor
- BNG (Habitat improvements)
- Natural History GCSE
- CERP3, progress of EEAP and LNRS
- Review of volunteering programmes

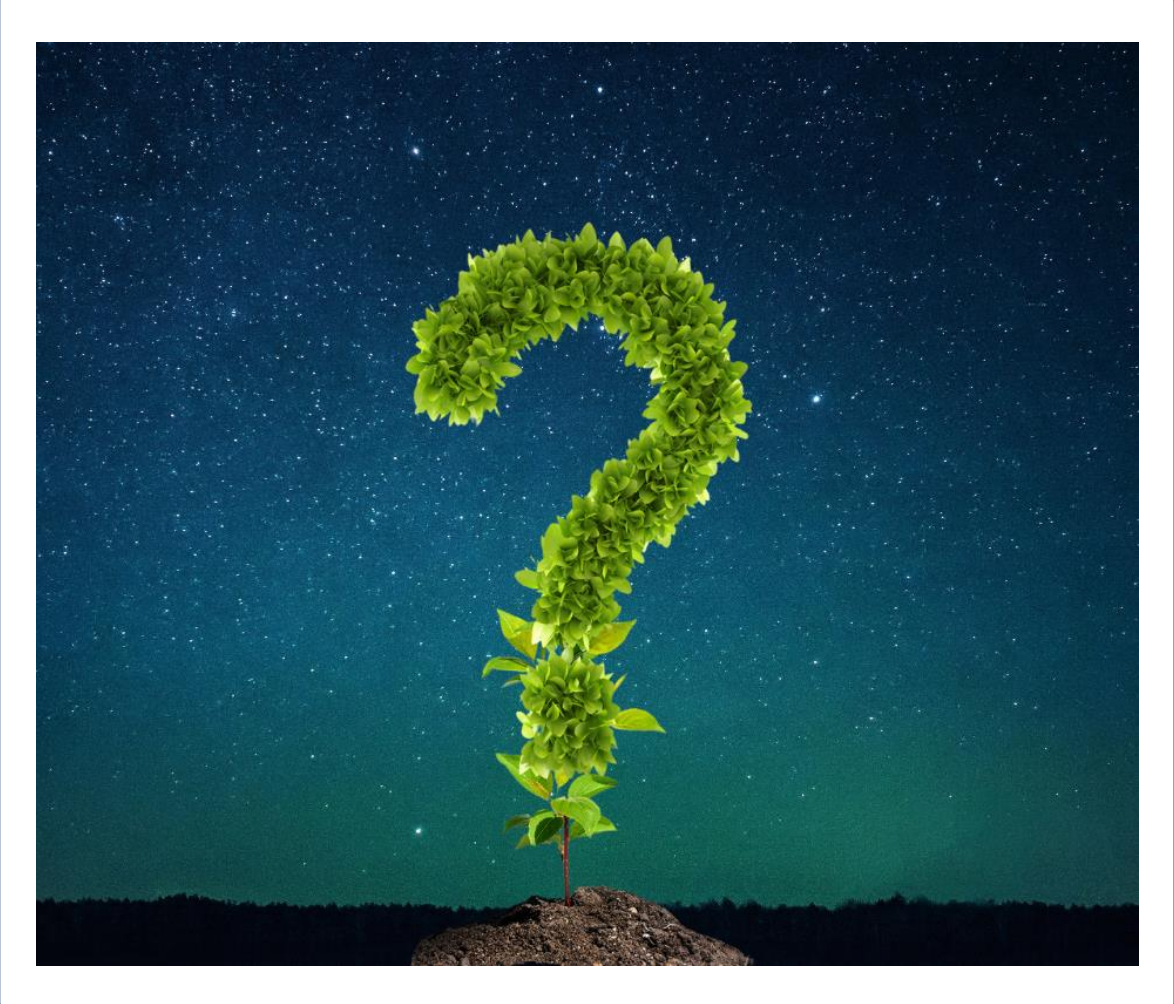


Challenges

- MTFP 15 2025/26 proposals:
 - Potential loss of staff
 - Revenue pressures



Any Questions?



Clean and Green Durham County Council

- ▶ Brief overview of updates:
 - ▶ Policy and strategy
 - ▶ Future of managed maintenance reduction informed by DU Study
 - ▶ BNG/LNRS input from team, and pausing biodiversity interventions in until these policies/mechanisms are in place
 - ▶ Duty to Consult on street trees (new legislation and process)
 - ▶ Update on Glyphosate usage
 - ▶ Projects and Systems
 - ▶ Feedback on Bessemer park project (presentation given at Hardwick visit 2024)
 - ▶ APSE LAMS inspection regime update

Policy and Strategy

- ▶ The biodiversity strategy for DCC land is still in development, and largely dependant on LNRS and BNG policies.
- ▶ Environment and Design and Clean and Green colleagues are feeding into these, and have paused new interventions until they are finalised.
- ▶ BNG is unlikely to be an income generator for DCC, but will provide funding to enable some of DCC's 'green aspirations'
- ▶ The learning from the study will be incorporated into the strategy to ensure resident buy in (as much as possible).



Policy and Strategy

- ▶ New legislation came in in late 2023 that required any trees on highway verges with a trunk diameter of 8cm or more to have consultation undertaken before removal.
 - ▶ Guidance from DEFRA, despite being promised, did not arrive, and so DCC has learned from other authorities and NGOs and developed its own system, that is similar in nature to a planning application.
- ▶ A reduction in glyphosate use has been proposed as part of MTFP 15. We previously reported success in a herbicide reduction around obstacles on green spaces around the county: it has been suggested that this approach be widened to the whole county bringing both a financial and biodiversity benefit.

Projects and Systems

Bessemer Park

- ▶ Bessemer Park Grass/flower meadow
 - ▶ The project was presented at the Hardwick Park site visit in 2024. Since then, the ground was prepared and a native flower/low growing grass seed mix was applied.
 - ▶ The meadow was a huge success when flowering, with people travelling from around the county and beyond to visit the site. It was widely shared on social media (not from original DCC channels)
 - ▶ A Local authority in Scotland got in touch to ask advice on their wildflower meadows.
 - ▶ Well received by residents when flowering
 - ▶ However - there was some learning in consultation. The sowing of the wildflower seed happened late due to weather and project delays (contaminated land surveys)
 - ▶ As such the time between initial consultation and ground prep was around 15 months.
 - ▶ A good deal of customer queries were received about the land, with residents unhappy that the green space provision was being disrupted.
 - ▶ Future projects should ensure 'reminders' across communication outputs to ensure residents are kept up to date.

Projects and Systems

Bessemer Park



Projects and Systems

Bessemer Park



Projects and Systems

APSE LAMS inspections

- ▶ Brief overview of how we inspect open spaces
 - ▶ Over 300 sites inspected bi monthly - range of designation, commercial, residential, Open space, industrial etc.
 - ▶ Dog foul graded - clear, small presence, significant, severe
 - ▶ Litter - clear, small presence, significant, severe
 - ▶ Results are inputted on site and provide only a snap shot of any given site.
 - ▶ APSE collate the data and send out reports each quarter, showing our data against other similar authorities (anonymised).

**Environment & Sustainable
Communities Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

16 January 2025



**Ecological Emergency
Update**

**Report of the Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of
Neighbourhoods and Climate Change**

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee (ESCOSC) with a progress update regarding the Ecological Emergency Action Plan (EEAP).

Executive Summary

2. A countywide ecological emergency was declared by the council on 6th April 2022. In response, officers prepared and delivered against an Ecological Emergency Action Plan (referred here on as EEAP) which identifies activities and outputs, and monitors their delivery.
3. The EEAP enables officers to review and revise the management of council land assets and put in place activities to promote and achieve best ecological practice.
4. Following on from this, members of the ESCOSC requested that regular updates on the plan's progress be provided to enable them to consider progress in relation to the actions within the key themes of the plan. This report therefore presents an overview of activity undertaken for year 2020/25 to date. A copy of the latest EEAP action log is attached as Appendix 2.

Recommendations

5. That Members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
 - i. Receive the overview of progress to date of the Ecological Emergency Response Action Plan outlined in the report to review its progress and,

- ii. Agree that a further progress update is presented to a future meeting of the committee as part of the 2025/26 work programme.

Background

6. An Ecological Emergency was declared by the council in April 2022 and in December of that year Cabinet received and agreed an initial EEAP which outlined council activities in response to the declaration. The report was referred to the ESCOSC in April 2022, where it was agreed that the committee would regularly monitor progress in relation to the plan's future development and delivery on an annual basis.

Scope of the Plan

7. The EEAP is built on a detailed review of the key services who directly impact or influence the council's impacts and interests in the natural environment. The plan identifies areas for action against relevant service leads and monitors ongoing progress which is subject to a quarterly review by a cross-service officer working group. The latest version of the EEAP is attached as Appendix 2.
8. The EEAP is focussed on what can be achieved through the agreement of objectives, policies, and delivery mechanisms to conserve and enhance biodiversity across all council activities in response to the Ecological Emergency declaration. This is part of a wider upcoming ecological strategy, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which aims to drive nature-based environmental action and investment by various landholders and stakeholders across the county. The strategy is being produced by council ecologist leads through the direction of the County Durham Partnership's Environment & Climate Change board.
9. The council is also to consider steps it can take to safeguard and enhance biodiversity as part of a 'biodiversity duty' which was introduced through the Environment Act 2021. The duty means we must:
 - a. Consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
 - b. Agree policies and specific objectives based on our consideration.
 - c. Act to deliver your policies and achieve our objectives.

The council is required to report its progress in response to this duty, and the EEAP has been recognised by lead officers as forming a sound basis to fulfil this.

10. The EEAP is comprised of 26 outputs within three key themes of 'Land Management', 'Education, Awareness and Communication' and 'Policies and Strategies'. It is important to note that in line with Cabinet wishes, the EEAP is being developed within existing resources and is primarily focussed on delivering for biodiversity by doing things differently wherever possible.
11. Outcomes from the preceding version of the EEAP were considered by this committee in November 2023 which was focussed on building

capacity and governance to deliver projects through joint delivery across services, as well as monitoring progress being taken forward.

Summary of Key Areas of Progress against the 2024/25 EEAP:

12. **In relation to the theme of land management** the current plan has identified the following areas of action and outputs:
 - a. Habitat surveys and assessments for designation of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) for Countryside-managed sites underway with 11 of 20 sites completed. Assessing sites against new LWS criteria so they can be considered for approval by North East LWS partnership when met.
 - b. Running of trials for diversifying grasslands through naturalistic management of 45 meadow areas, now being maintained and will be recorded into BNG and LNRS documents.
 - c. Running of non-herbicide trials for weed control over selected sites and no issues have been raised, meaning the regime is to be more widely rolled-out across the county.
 - d. Consolidation of entire council woodland and forestry estate taking place through legacy provisions and single management structure for all tree planting and maintenance matters now in place following closure of externally funded Woodland Revival programme.

13. **In relation to the theme of education, awareness and communication** the current plan is achieving progress in:
 - a. Effective stakeholder and partnership building across a range of landscape scale projects including the National Trust, inter-authority delivery of Seascapes, key contributions to the Brightwater partnership for the River Skerne.
 - b. Agreement to inclusion of ecological implications in all decision making reports as part of a current full corporate implications review by Democratic Services.
 - c. Baseline surveys and assessments carried out with a Spatial Policy lead to enable nutrient neutrality mitigation measures on council and developer's land to be identified, with similar modelling underway for managing sites to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on appropriate council sites.
 - d. Ensuring that eco-emergency priorities are aligned to and are part of those in the current Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP3) including embedding this within the CERP website.
 - e. Engagement with 47 schools on issues identified in the LNRS with findings feeding into the consultation process and promoted and administered take DfE biodiversity improvement grants for over 40 schools.

- f. Delivery of natural environment activities across the Parks and Countryside estate including volunteering days, health and leisure walks and activities for young people. This includes continuation of X3 temporary engagement co-ordinator posts now funded to April 2026.
14. **In relation to the theme of policies and strategies** the current plan identifies progress in:
- a. Recognising and embedding ecological impacts as part of the existing social impacts scoring that apply to all procurement contracts (Themes Opportunities and Measures).
 - b. Ongoing preparation of the countywide LNRS through engagement with regional leads and consultation with landowners and wider stakeholders. Evidence gathering by Opportunity Mapping completed and Measures in response to this are currently being finalised ahead of a final consultation round.
 - c. Completion of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to guide developers in process of making biodiversity contributions and working on formula for sale of biodiversity credits through use of council land to this end.
 - d. Continued development and effectiveness of corporate officer working group to consider all opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity alongside other related outcomes such as low carbon installations.
 - e. Strategy under development for naturalistic land management regimes on amenity grasslands.
 - f. Corporate Environmental Statement reviewed and revised to include responding to Ecological Emergency declaration as a corporate priority.

Conclusion

15. The report highlights progress being made to promote the adoption of ecologically based practices across the council estate and related services in response to the declaration of the Ecological Emergency. Most of these are progressing through policies and changing practices out-with new dedicated resource.
16. A key driver for the continued development and strengthening of the EEAP lies in its emerging role as the council's response and reporting mechanism for the biodiversity duty under the Environment Act. In particular the opportunity for linking up to and feeding into the priorities of the LNRS.
17. The EEAP will therefore continue to evolve as more policies and programmes come on stream, and further updates shall follow.

Background papers

- [Ecological Emergency: Outline Strategy and Action Plan Cabinet 14 December 2022](#)

Authors

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Consultation is taking place throughout plan development, aligned to internal comms plans and community engagement activity.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

All EEAP activity is strongly aligned to tackling climate change, primarily through mitigation provisions but also through adapting to the adverse effects of climate change.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

All procurement provisions are being reviewed to include ecological impacts within contract assessment processes.

Appendix 2: EEAP Action Log of 31.12.24 attached under separate cover

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Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2024/25

Theme areas:

Education and Awareness theme.

Policies and Strategies theme.

Land Management theme

	Issue / Decision / Action required	Responsibility	Review Period	Due Date	Outputs	Status
1	Commit to the continuous development and engagement with partners and stakeholders in the delivery of landscape scale programmes.	Environmental Services; Environment & Design	01/03/2024	ongoing	<p>Working with National Trust on Durham City Green Corridor Project and consulting other landowners in the area. Currently signing of Partnership Agreement, to give clarity of roles and relationships including land holding opportunities.</p> <p>Seascapes programme successfully ended December 2024 and council now engaged with legacy provisions, continuation of legacy board to oversee project commitments.</p> <p>Heritage Coast successful in being awarded £975k of NLHF Species Survival Fund and now appointed team of 3 to lead in restoration of grassland habitats from Blackhall to Noses Point.</p> <p>Skerne Wetlands Landscape Recovery (Great North Fen) is a key outcome of Brightwater project and central to legacy provisions being delivered following project wrap up in March 2025.</p>	Progressing
2	Development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy with the County Durham Partnership	Environmental Services; Ecology	01/03/2024	on-going	<p>Webpage active. First consultation process completed including landowner workshops. Regional; Ecological Records Centre (ERIC) is producing LNRS mapping. Schools engagement with CYPS and OASES completed. Sub-Groups have been working up the Priorities and Measures for the LNRS, most of the Priorities are complete and work on the Measures progressing, almost complete. Ongoing regional meetings between the 4 NE LNRS groupings and regular update meetings with Natural England are being undertaken.</p> <p>Completion deadline now pushed back to March 2025.</p> <p>First draft of the template for the Statement of Priorities complete (with Natural England for comment)</p> <p>First draft of National Character Area descriptions complete (with Natural England for comment)</p> <p>ERIC working on the models to determine connectivity / buffer zones around baseline priority areas. Two models being put forward for use.</p> <p>Meeting between Woodland Sub-Group and ERIC held in order that ERIC can produce draft opportunity mapping for discussion. Further meeting with sub-groups for other habitats to be confirmed.</p>	Progressing
3	Produce a Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), concentrating on delivery of biodiversity within urban and industrial developments.	Environmental Services; Ecology & Planning and Housing; Spatial Policy	01/03/2024	01-Sep-23	<p>All relevant legislation and guidance now in place and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) now mandatory for major developments. Work has now been completed on draft Biodiversity SPD and agreed by Cabinet on 13th November. Second and final round of consultation going out till January 2025 and then looking at Spring 2025 for adoption.</p>	Progressing
4	Investigate a model that enables developer contributions for BNG to be delivered, where appropriate, on currently available Council land.	Environmental Services; Ecology & CPaL; Asset Strategy	01/03/2024	01-Mar-24	<p>Ecology/Countryside and Clean and Green, working on a draft model for those sites which they have management responsibility for. A draft model and discussion document has been circulated by Ecology for decision by senior management in December '24 that highlights the key work areas needing to be addressed in order to fully develop a system to sell biodiversity units.</p> <p>Climate Change needs to be factored into BNG. Implementation of sites following identification.</p>	Progressing

5	Examine the need to develop or change systems and policies so that the system for identifying and allocating land for biodiversity purposes is optimised.	CPaL; Asset Strategy	01/03/2024		<p>Cross service Land Use Change Working Group now in operation to review land use change opportunities and identify and resolve any potential issues with proposed uses.</p> <p>Established with GIS team, a Land Use Change layer on the intramap which allow officers to review changes that have been agreed and are under consideration e.g. identification of BNG sites and tree planting sites and report to Corporate Property Board (February) which agreed in principle the development of model facilitating sale of BNG units: policies and systems to be developed to establish procedures to facilitate the sale of BNG units.</p> <p>Initial enquiries have been made to DCC project teams to begin to establish the scale of BNG units that may be required internally for upcoming projects.</p> <p>Property management liaising with IT to upload a layer which will identify all land use change proposal's agreed including BNG.</p>	Progressing
7	Examine the potential to include ecological impact implications alongside those for climate and sustainability in committee and Council reports.	Resources; Democratic Services	01/03/2024	01/09/2023	<p>Democratic Services agreed to update reporting guidance and provide outline guidance on Ecological Emergency implications following briefings to Exec Support and Extended Management teams.</p> <p>Process is to be part of wider review of corporate implications in all decision-making reports.</p> <p>Aim for web posting and guidance for managers to be in place by Spring 2025.</p>	Progressing
9	Produce a strategy document to define the approach to biodiversity interventions on public open spaces managed by Clean & Green and identify constraints to delivery as the programme continues to be rolled out across the county.	Environmental Services; Ecology & Technical Services	01/03/2024	01-Jun-23	<p>Production of a strategic green space document to define council approach to rolling out biodiversity enhancements of open space underway (as a Measure in the LNRS). Early work has been done on this action by Ecology and Clean & Green, but no further work is proposed until LNRS is completed (to determine whether this action has a spatial element within the LNRS).</p>	Progressing
10	Engage with partners, especially Natural England, to assist in developing a strategic solution for Nutrient Neutrality. Investigate possibilities of delivering a strategic mitigation approach to NN on DCC land	Housing and Development; Spatial Policy	01/03/2024	ongoing	<p>Natural England (NE) delivering a mitigation scheme (based on land use change/selling credits to developers) in partnership with Durham Wildlife Trust. Round 4 of NE's credit bidding round was launched in February 2024.</p> <p>The role of DCC in delivering mitigation for either our own development or private development is being considered alongside delivery of BNG on DCC land – pending Corporate Property Board decision.</p> <p>Spatial Policy organised baseline surveys on CPaL owned land using grant funding to understand the potential to deliver Nutrient Neutrality mitigation and BNG. The assessments have been completed and checked by Ecology (September 2025) and the information provided to CPaL for consideration.</p> <p>Support funding acquired to buy credits on 3 sites, but all have issues and challenges such as illegal grazing. Land Use Change Group to assess these.</p>	Progressing
11	Undertake condition assessments of designated sites (i.e., Local Wildlife Sites) within the estate.	Environmental Services; Countryside Service	01/03/2024	Ongoing	<p>Countryside Team leading on identification of 20 LWS (Local Wildlife Sites) sites within the Countryside Estate, located previous citations and will look to carry out condition assessments against all 20 over the next few years. Having confirmed the 20 sites, we will carry out assessments reviewing current condition against original citation. This is currently ongoing, with target to review and assess 11 sites this year (2024). Sites have been assessed and the habitats found are broadly in accord with the habitats within the citation. Criteria for assessing whole LWS yet to be agreed at regional level through the LWS partnership (NE Councils plus third sector). Once agreed, we can assess against agreed criteria, aim: Spring (2025).</p> <p>Subject to Ecology Team resource being available to carry out full assessments during spring/summer 2025 and results reviewed, updated management prescriptions to deliver agreed outcomes aiming to be in place by Winter 2025. We will then balance available resource with requirements and prioritise accordingly.</p>	Progressing

12a	Run trials on reduced cutting regimes on amenity grassland with a view to reducing cutting and encouraging a greater floral diversity on sites where ceasing management or a single annual cut is not a viable option.	Environmental Services; Clean & Green Service	01/03/2024	ongoing	Clean and Green Service now maintaining 45 areas of meadow and wildflowers across the county (excluding the countryside estate). No new areas are currently planned until the biodiversity strategy is in place for the service. When this is complete, a more strategic and outcome-based approach can be taken in the selection of new sites. This will also partner with the LNRS and BNG policies.	Progressing
12b	Run trials on non-herbicide use in conjunction with Councillors who have expressed an interest in this subject.	Environmental Services; Clean & Green Service	01/04/2024	ongoing	Trials undertaken in 23/24 and 24/25 on reducing herbicide use on open spaces in select wards around the county. The trials were a success with no complaints about weeds around obstacles. As part of MTFP 15 (subject to the financial settlement from central government), a reduction of herbicide use was agreed. As such the above approach will be undertaken around the county	Progressing
12c	Develop standard site signage to use when undertaking biodiversity interventions on public open space	Environmental Services; Clean & Green Service	01/04/2024	ongoing	Underway, Technical Support team leading – biodiversity management across the county being informed by BNG strategy and fledging LNRS strategies. No new biodiversity sites planned on amenity land until these two are published, signage will be postponed until then to ensure that it is inclusive of those priorities. New study undertaken by Durham University around residents' perceptions of green space will be used to help how we communicate our biodiversity aims in the future including signage. The study is to be announced at January's ESCOSC meeting.	Progressing
13	Consolidate and build on current activity to ensure Council woodlands assets are managed and maintained through current project development with a view to robust legacy and renewal provisions being in place following existing projects	Environmental Services; Environment & Design	01/04/2024	ongoing	Legacy provisions now Durham Woodland Revival has ended. Woodland Management Plans in place. Prioritisation of 18-month extension to Durham Woodland Revival Project - Woodland Community Volunteers, to deliver community volunteering in woodland projects. North East Community Forest is progressing; expecting to plant 17.22 ha of new woodland from drawdown of approx.. £250k.(Previous year saw planting of 16.37 ha with £210k from NECF.	Progressing
14	Introduce and promote the Ecological Emergency within the CERP Marketing Plan under the theme Nature, Adaptation and Land. Determine the extent to which relevant articles relating to the Ecological Emergency can be hosted on the Climate Change website Investigate the potential to include an Ecological Emergency icon and relevant links within the Intranet page.	Env Services; Net Zero team	01/04/2024	ongoing	Progressing opportunities for linkages between Climate and Ecological Emergencies through publicity, promotion and awareness raising e.g. Members CERP event included links to LNRS site development. Launch event for CERP3 was held on 17 th October 2024. Low Carbon Team identified elements that contribute to ecological emergency priorities. Development of phase 2 of CERP website incorporating eco-emergency and habitat impacts. Now live. Needs to be linked to corporate County Durham website.	Progressing

15a	Identify ecological improvement opportunities for County Durham schools and settings through the Department for Education Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy	Childrens & Young People; Specialist Advice; Sustainability	01/04/2024	ongoing	<p>In discussion with Ecology regarding schools and young people consultation on LNRS working with OASES.</p> <p>Outreach LNRS contract agreed with OASES, 47 schools (primary and secondary) to be engaged across county. Recruitment has begun with activity taking place summer and Autumn terms 2024 for targeted schools across the County.</p> <p>Initial feedback highlighting some disconnect between pupils and their understanding of nature/ species/ habitats. Further consultation will take place when the draft strategy is produced.</p> <p>Working with OASES, an LNRS consultation target of forty-seven schools has now been agreed. 36 schools involved to date.</p>	Progressing
15b	Monitor available funding opportunities with a view to taking advantage of any new funding streams that become available.	Childrens & Young People; Specialist Advice; Sustainability	01/04/2024	ongoing	<p>Biodiversity improvement grants announced Up to £10k per setting, to be spent on biodiversity improvements and outdoor learning equipment. All eligible schools have been contacted by CYPS lead and RHS supporting bids.</p> <p>Approx 40 schools taking up funding, progress being monitored and reviewed with further support offered to increase uptake and encourage interest. Two network sessions have been held to encourage schools to apply.</p> <p>Teacher sessions with eligible schools completed with lead RHS Officers, with further engagement with RHS team. Awaiting final take up numbers.</p> <p>Awaiting new round of funding to be announced. Eligible schools that didn't apply can apply again for the £10k and successful schools from first round can apply for an additional £2k for future work. Decision to be made soon on whether additional schools will be added to eligible list from Department Further Education.</p>	Progressing
16	Corporate Environmental Statement – to be revised and approved by Cabinet. Investors in Env Green Awards	Environmental Services; Environment & Design	01/04/2024	on-going	<p>Reference to Ecological Emergency actions starting to be referred to as national measure through the 'Investors in the Environment' (IiE) audit process.</p> <p>Ecological Emergency now integral strand of corporate Environmental Statement as agreed by Net Zero Board.</p> <p>September: 2024 Audit completed with retention of top level of accreditation (green standard) achieved.</p>	Progressing
17	Delivery of Park and Countryside Awareness (new investment)	Environmental Services; Countryside Service	01/04/2024	ongoing	<p>Active promotion of volunteering is being undertaken through a new comms plan, with volunteer numbers still rising, particularly from corporate volunteering, includes uptake from Amazon, Northumbrian Water, Home Office, Siemens, and Northern Power Grid.</p> <p>The volunteer guided walks programme completed: 26 walks held to end of August, with new autumn/winter season of walks now in progress. Community engagement work prioritised around Shotton and NCN1, e.g. regular community clean ups and targeted projects – including with Shotton Youth Group, Shotton Primary School, and Shotton Cree Group (older members of the community).</p> <p>Waldridge Fell targeted activities with Dog's Trust, fire service and community to tackle anti-social behaviour, activities spanning butterfly counts, bioblitz events and local poetry events.</p> <p>Work continuing with Durham City Youth Project and Durham Action Against Crime at Pity Me and Wharton Park.</p> <p>Summer photography competition held for children and young people across the countryside estate until September. X2 temp posts now extended to April 2026, with a potential to be permanent subject to further budget discussions.</p> <p>Programme delivery; recently secured NWL funding for wetland improvements at Ferryhill Carrs. Volunteering provision continues to be strong with 3385 hours delivered over Q2 = 140 vols signed up.</p> <p>Building on legacy of env project working with Sedgfield Community College for a whole year with yr7 SEND group. Associated with LNRS work, continued work with several schools delivering workshops around climate change, sustainability and environmental conservation. Aligned with this are student surveys assessing how much they understand about the environment. School workshops continue to be popular with most sessions booked into the new year.</p>	Progressing

19	Another visit of overview and scrutiny next year - DC.	Environmental Services; Countryside Service	01.03.24		<p>Visit carried out at Hardwick Park for ESCOSC saw myriad of ways to manage more formal areas for the benefit of biodiversity in more formal settings. Visit, presentations and follow-up meeting was well received; including letter of support by committee for the retention of the P&C temporary staff.</p> <p>Next presentation is 16th January with Countryside and Tech Services leads to co-present; follow-up review of work since last report - no site visits proposed.</p>	Progressing
20	State of Nature report as a valuable learning tool.	Childrens & Young People ; Specialist Advice; Sustainability (R Hurst)	01.03.24		Useful learning tool. Aim to ensure any new information is considered. Already responding as far as we are able.	Progressing

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Ecological Emergency Action Plan

Update : 16th January 2025



Context

- ❑ Ecological Emergency; Declared April 2022.
- ❑ Ecological Emergency Action Plan (EEAP); to respond to the issue – applies to council land and practices.
- ❑ Monitor & review the management of council land assets through intro activities to promote and achieve best ecological practice.
- ❑ Plan contents; areas for action, service leads, resource implications and associated targets as possible.

Key Considerations

- ❑ Link to LNRS; a strategic approach for nature-based environmental action and investment across the county.
- ❑ EEAP; no dedicated internal resource . Focussed on actions & doing things within current resources, or external commitments where possible.
- ❑ 26 action areas /outputs under 4 themes: 'Land Management', 'Education, Awareness and Communication', 'Policies and Strategies'.

Land Management

- ❑ Habitat surveys and assessments for designation of Local Wildlife Sites for Countryside-managed sites underway; 11 of 24 sites completed. Assessing against new LWS criteria for approval by North East LWS partnership when met.
- ❑ Trials for diversifying grasslands through naturalistic management of 45 meadow areas, now being maintained and will be recorded into BNG and LNRS documents.
- ❑ Non-herbicide trials for weed control over selected sites; no issues raised so regime to be widely rolled-out across the county.
- ❑ Consolidation of council woodland and forestry estate into single management structure for all tree planting and maintenance matters; meets legacy needs from Woodland Revival programme closedown.

Education, Awareness and Communication

- ❑ Partnership based delivery over landscape-scale projects e.g. National Trust, delivery of Seascapes, key contributions to Brightwater partnership (River Skerne).
- ❑ Agreement of ecological implications in all decision-making reports in process of corporate review by Democratic Services.
- ❑ Baseline surveys and assessments carried out to enable nutrient neutrality mitigation measures on council and developer's land completed and similar modelling for managing delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on DCC sites underway.

Education, Awareness and Communication

- ❑ Eco-emergency priorities aligned to & embedded into CERP3, including website.
- ❑ Engagement with 47 schools on biodiversity issues with findings feeding into LNRS consultation. Promoting delivery of DfE biodiversity improvement grants for 40 schools.
- ❑ Delivering nat. environment activities across Parks & Countryside estate including volunteering days, health/ leisure walks young people projects. Continuation of X3 temp. engagement co-ordinator posts - funded to April '26.

Policies and Strategies

- ❑ Fully embedded ecological impacts into procurement alongside social impact scoring for all procurement contracts (Themes Opportunities and Measures).
- ❑ Ongoing prep of LNRS through wide consultation and engagement with landowners and wider stakeholders. Opportunity Mapping completed, Measures in response to this being finalised ahead of final consultation round.
- ❑ Completion of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for guiding developers in making biodiversity contributions. Similar formula for sale of use of DCC land in sale of biodiversity credits being progressed.

Policies and Strategies

- ❑ Cont. development of corporate officer working group to consider all opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity alongside other strategic options.
- ❑ Strategy under development for naturalistic land management regimes on amenity grasslands.
- ❑ Corporate Environmental Statement reviewed and revised to include responding to Ecological Emergency declaration as a corporate priority.

Overview

- ❑ Good progress to date despite no dedicated resource.
- ❑ 14 areas of action being progressed across services
- ❑ Continually evolving as more programmes come on stream
- ❑ Key driver for continued development = emerging role as DC response and reporting mech. for Biodiversity Duty under the Environment Act & opportunities for link-up and feeding into LNRS
- ❑ Further updates to follow.

Points for Discussion?

**Environment & Sustainable
Communities Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



16 January 2025

**Neighbourhoods & Climate Change –
Quarter 2: Forecast of Revenue and
Capital Outturn 2024/25**

Joint Report of Corporate Directors

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

**Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director Neighbourhoods & Climate
Change**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide details of the forecast outturn budget for this service area highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget, based on the position to the end of Quarter 2 (30 September 2024).

Executive summary

- 2 This report provides an overview of the updated forecast of outturn, based on the position at Quarter 2 for 2024/25. It provides an analysis of the budgets and forecast outturn for the service areas falling under the remit of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee (including Culture, Sport & Tourism which is in Regeneration rather than NCC) and complements the reports considered and agreed by Cabinet on a quarterly basis.
- 3 The updated position is that there is a forecast cash limit overspend of £0.415 million against a revised budget of £117.461 million for NCC. Culture, Sport & Tourism is forecasting an overspend of £1.356 million.

- 4 The revised NCC capital budget is £69.864 million with expenditure to 30 September of £17.137 million. Culture & Sport's revised capital budget is £24.975 million with expenditure of £6.740million
- 5 Details of the reasons for under and overspending against relevant budget heads are disclosed in the report.

Recommendation(s)

- 6 Environment & Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to note the contents of this report.

Background

- 7 County Council approved the Revenue and Capital budgets for 2024/25 at its meeting on 28 February 2024. These budgets have subsequently been revised to account for changes in grant (additions/reductions), budget transfers between service groupings and budget re-profiling between years (in terms of capital). This report covers the financial position for the following budgets of the services within the scope of this committee;
 - (a) NCC Revenue Budget - £117.461 million
 - (b) NCC Capital Budget – £69.864 million
 - (c) Culture, Sport & Tourism Revenue Budget – £16.619 million
 - (d) Culture, Sport & Tourism Capital Budget - £24.975 million
- 8 The summary financial statements contained in the report cover the financial year 2024/25 and show: -
 - (a) The approved annual budget;
 - (b) The forecast income and expenditure as recorded in the Council's financial management system;
 - (c) The variance between the annual budget and the forecast outturn;
 - (d) For the revenue budget, adjustments for items outside of the cash limit (outside of the Service's control) to take into account such items as capital charges and use of / or contributions to earmarked reserves.

Forecast Revenue Outturn 2024/25

- 9 The service is reporting a cash limit overspend of **£0.415 million** against a revised budget of **£117.461 million**.
- 10 The table below compares the forecast outturn with the budget by Head of Service. A further table is shown at Appendix 2 analysing the position by Subjective Analysis (i.e. type of expense), and further variance explanations are shown in Appendix 4.

Analysis by Head of Service £'000

Head of Service	Revised Annual Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Items Outside Cash Limit	Earmarked Reserves	Inflation adjustment	Cash Limit Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Culture, Sport & Tourism	16,619	19,507	2,888	(187)	(1,345)	0	1,356
NCC							
Environmental Services	63,509	65,855	2,346	(1,244)	(148)	(96)	859
Highways	11,129	10,567	(563)	418	0	0	(145)
Community Protection	6,848	6,828	(20)	(288)	0	(3)	(311)
NCC Central Costs	35,975	36,309	334	(32)	(290)	0	12
NCC Total	117,461	119,559	2,098	(1,146)	(437)	(98)	415

- 11 The NCC cash limit overspend of £0.415 million takes into account adjustments for sums outside the cash limit such as redundancy costs that are met from corporate reserves and use of / contributions to earmarked reserves.
- 12 The forecast outturn overspend is based on the following factors:
- Environmental Services is forecast to be £0.859 million overspent. This is mainly due to overspends of £0.237 million on waste disposal contracts, £2.096 million on transport and supplies and services (with fuel and spot hire of vehicles being the most significant areas of overspend) and £0.417 million underachieved car parking income at Noses Point and Crimdon due to delays in implementation and lower than projected usage. These overspends are partly offset by over-achieved income of £1.890 million in relation to fees and charges and contributions.
 - Highways is forecast to be underspent by £0.145 million. There is an expected underspend of £0.569 million due to early achievement of staff savings in lieu of future MTFP savings, and

overachievement of income on enforcement and inspections, including defect inspections and fixed penalty notices. Trading areas are also expected to overachieve by £0.192 million due to higher levels of activity, but this is offset by a forecast overspend of £0.616 million on highways maintenance work, mainly on gully emptying cyclic works, drainage, and bridge works.

- (c) Community Protection is forecast to be underspent by £0.311 million. This is due to vacancies not yet filled and difficulties recruiting into roles arising from leavers, along with an overachieved MTFP 13 saving. There is also funding within the base budget to accommodate future increment increases associated with career grades, which isn't required this year.
- (d) Culture, Sport and Tourism is forecast to overspend by £1.356 million against budget. The main reasons are:
 - (i) Unrealised MTFP savings of £0.423 million relating to Culture for Clayport Library restructure and remodel (£0.200 million), Sevenhills recharge to CYPS (£75,000), Library Transformation co-location opportunities (£0.105 million), dynamic ticketing on theatres (£30,000) and asset transfer of Blackhill Park Lodge (£13,000).
 - (ii) A £0.255 million overspend relating to unachieved theatre income and overspends at library facilities relating to employee costs, contract cleaning and unachieved income for fines and fees.
 - (iii) A £0.475 million anticipated overspend at the two completed leisure transformation sites (Abbey and Peterlee) and the three sites expected to complete in year (Spennymoor, Louisa and Teesdale) due to cost and income pressures not being in line with the levels anticipated / forecast as part of the Leisure Transformation programme.
 - (iv) A £0.102 million overspend within Leisure & Wellbeing because of unachieved staff turnover savings.
 - (v) An overspend of £0.102 million relating to a previous service restructure relating to staff working in Theatres and Durham Town Hall.

- 13 A net £1.146 million relating to movement to and from reserves has also been excluded from the outturn. The major items being:
- (a) £1.245 million drawdown relating to Clean & Green, Low Carbon and environmental issues;
 - (b) £0.458 million contribution to Highways Permits and Adoption Reserve;
 - (c) £0.200 million contribution to the Community Protection ICT Reserve;
 - (d) £0.394 million drawdown from the Horden Together Reserve;
 - (e) £0.188 million drawdown from the Community Protection Workforce Reserve.
- 14 The forecast Cash Limit Reserve position for NCC at 31 March 2024 is £0.155 million after taking the latest outturn position into account.

Capital Programme

- 15 The Neighbourhoods & Climate Change capital programme was revised at year-end for budget re-phased from 2023/24. This increased the 2024/25 original budget to a level of £77.763 million. Since then, reports to the MOWG have detailed further revisions, for grant additions/reductions, budget transfers and budget re-profiling into later years. The revised budget now stands at £69.864 million.
- 16 Summary financial performance for 2024/25 is shown below.

Service	Revised Budget 2024/25 £000	Actual Spend to 30 Sept £000	Remaining Budget 2024/25 £000
Culture, Sport & Tourism	24,975	6,740	18,235
NCC			
Community Protection	712	216	496
Environmental Services	21,929	1,973	19,956
Highways	47,223	14,948	32,275
NCC Total	69,864	17,137	52,727

- 17 Officers continue to carefully monitor capital expenditure on a monthly basis. Actual spend for the first 6 months amounts to **£17.137 million**.

Appendix 3 provides a more detailed breakdown of spend across the major projects contained within the capital programme.

- 18 The key areas of spend during the year to date are on Strategic Highways (£14.591 million) and Low Carbon (£0.974 million). Other areas of the programme are profiled to be implemented during the remainder of the year and at year end the actual outturn performance will be compared against the revised budgets and service and project managers will need to account for any budget variance.

Background papers

- County Council Report (28 February 2024) - [Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2027/28 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2024/25 - Report of Cabinet](#)
- [Cabinet Report \(18 September 2024\) – Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2024/25 – Period to 30 June 2024.](#)
- [Cabinet Report \(4 December 2024\) - Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2024/25 – Period to 30 September 2024](#)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The consideration of regular budgetary control reports is a key component of the Council's Corporate and Financial Governance arrangements. This report shows the forecast spend against budgets agreed by the Council in February 2024 in relation to the 2024/25 financial year.

Finance

Financial implications are detailed throughout the report which provides an analysis of the revenue and capital outturn position alongside details of balance sheet items such as earmarked reserves held by the service grouping to support its priorities.

Consultation

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable.

Climate Change

Not applicable.

Human Rights

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable.

Staffing

Not applicable.

Accommodation

Not applicable.

Risk

The consideration of regular budgetary control reports is a key component of the Councils Corporate and Financial Governance arrangements.

Procurement

The outcome of procurement activity is factored into the financial projections included in the report

**Appendix 2: NEIGHBOURHOODS & CLIMATE CHANGE Forecast
Outturn at Q2 – Subjective Analysis**

NCC Subjective Analysis	Revised Annual Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Items Outside Cash Limit	Earmarked Reserves	Net Inflation adjustment	NCC Cash Limit Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Employees	68,947	66,967	(1,980)	0	0	0	(1,980)
Premises	8,899	9,499	600	(95)	(95)	(290)	215
Transport	21,814	22,989	1,175	0	0	0	1,175
Supplies & Services	19,570	28,001	8,431	0	0	0	8,431
Third Party Payments	55,341	54,394	(947)	0	0	0	(947)
Capital	25,393	25,393	0	0	0	0	0
Central Costs	11,283	11,724	441	(1)	(1,147)	0	(706)
DRF	0	709	709	0	0	0	709
Gross Expenditure	211,247	219,676	8,429	(96)	(1,242)	(290)	6,897
Grant	2,151	2,456	(305)	0	0	0	(305)
Contributions	1,121	2,414	(1,293)	0	0	0	(1,293)
Sales	729	710	19	0	0	0	19
Charges	15,763	16,383	(620)	0	0	(148)	(768)
Rents	106	107	(1)	0	0	0	(1)
Recharges	72,624	76,743	(4,119)	(3)	(3)	0	(4,122)
Other Income	1,292	1,304	(12)	0	0	0	(12)
Gross Income	93,786	100,117	(6,331)	(3)	(3)	(148)	(6,482)
Total	117,461	119,559	2,098	(99)	(1,245)	(438)	415

Appendix 3: NCC & Culture, Sport & Tourism Capital 2024/25

NCC	Revised Annual Budget 2024/25 £000	Actual Spend 30/09/24 £000	Remaining Budget £000
Community Protection			
Comm Protection	658	190	468
AAP Schemes-Community Protection	54	26	28
Community Protection Total	712	216	496
Environmental Services			
Strategic Waste	1,049	370	679
Fleet	3,403	15	3,388
Clean & Green	856	135	721
Refuse & Recycling	1,750	-	1,750
Environment & Design	1,583	350	1,233
Depots	988	125	863
Low Carbon	11,782	974	10,808
Neighbourhood Protection	423	4	419
North Pennines Partnership	95	-	95
Environmental Services Total	21,929	1,973	19,956
Highways			
Strategic Highways - Cap Maintenance	29,812	9,606	20,206
Strategic Highways - Bridges	9,248	3,068	6,180
Strategic Highways - Street Lighting	4,569	1,357	3,212
Strategic Highways - Drainage	2,867	560	2,307
Highways Operations	727	357	370
Highways Total	47,223	14,948	32,275
NCC Total	69,864	17,137	52,727
Culture and Sport			
Culture & Museums	12,910	2,449	10,461
Leisure	12,014	4,239	7,775
Outdoor Sports & Leisure Facilities	51	52	(1)
Culture and Sport Total	24,975	6,740	18,235

Appendix 4: Heads Of Service Analysis – Environment - Variances

	Variance	Comments
Head of Environment	(21)	(£21k) underspend on Salaries and Supplies & Services
Refuse & Recycling	31	(£99k) underspend on Staffing due to sickness levels improving and a vacant apprentice post £25k overspend on Supplies & Services, mainly due to software, and costs of Weighbridges £264k overspend on Transport mainly due to Dayworks and Fuel (£159) overachieved income mainly due to trade waste and bulky waste
Strategic Waste	293	(£83k) underspend on staffing due to vacancies and turnover £46k overspend on premises due to rents for compounds at Frosterley & Middleton in Teesdale, site accommodation and general repairs £139k overspend on supplies & services - Garden Waste postages, Environmental Monitoring software installation and licences, skip hire, Misc equipment in Composting (£170k) overachievement of Income - Compost sales/BIFFA/Trade Waste Disposal £361k Waste Contracts overspend - specifically £237k across main waste contracts, £23k Leachate and £69k Power Generation Maintenance £148k under achieved Joint Stocks Power Generation income which is outside the cash limit
Clean & Green	242	£184k overspend in Countryside - £49k underspend on salaries offset by some minor overspends, but specifically £178k underachievement of parking income at Noses Point (£26k) net underspend on staffing vacancies - new posts not appointed to, but increased agency costs £33k overspend on Premises (£67k site accommodation) £420k overspend on Transport - mainly daywork repairs, vehicle hires and fuel £140k overspend on Supplies and Services - £52k machinery hire, £32k Other hired & contracted - reactive tree works and standpipe hire £16k overspend on payments to contractors (£525k) drawdown from reserves and over achieved income on shop sales/SLA Other Housing Providers/AAP work
Neighbourhood Protection	(26)	£30k overspend in staffing due to the staff turnover savings budget £22k overspend on premises mainly due to council tax charge within bereavement £66k overspend on transport - due to daywork recharges within Pest Control and Wardens, and spot hire £51k overspend on Supplies and Services - £25k on the new Plotbox system within Bereavement, fencing charge in Wardens which is covered from reserve (£39k) drawdown from reserves (£11k fencing, £6k Wardens overtime, £22k - post in Bereavement) £35k Debt written off and £15k DRF to fund a new vehicle (£206k) overachieved income due increased FPN works, trailblazer income for overtime in wardens, and increased fees and charges within default work
Fleet	20	(£72k) projected underspend on staffing due to vacant posts which are all now occupied. This underspend covers the additional spend on subcontractors £15k overspend on Equipment hire £45k overspend on subcontractors mainly due to vacant posts within Fleet £32k projected underachieved income on External Works mainly private repairs
Depots	316	(£21k) underspend on staffing but partially covers overspend on security costs £115k overspend on general repairs £51k overspend on rent for Beechburn Depot £13k overspend on refuse collection, mainly at Meadowfield Depot £136k overspend on security costs £22k overspend on equipment hire
Low Carbon	(155)	(£90k) underspend on the management cost centre due to vacancies and delays in filling posts in the ongoing restructure £15k overspend on Sustainability cost centre, mainly due to consultant fees (£80k) over achieved income on Biomass Boilers due to Renewable Heat Incentive for Rivergreen
Environment & Design	159	(£88k) underspend on Tech & Service Development due to vacancies and over achievement on income. Overspend on supplies & services offset by reserve contributions £35k overspend on Landscape - caused by under achievement of timber income on Forest Estate £203k overspend on Heritage Coast due to underachievement of parking income at Crimdon £16k overspend on Archaeology. Mainly due to large overspend on Binchester premises and supplies (£6k) underspend on Ecology due to over achievement on income contributions
TOTAL	859	

Highways Outturn 2024/25 - Reasons for Variances - Quarter 2

Service	Over / (Under) £000s	Reason for Variance
Head of Highways	0	
Highways Services Trading	(185)	Trading Underspend (£185k) - Street Lighting £25k Overspend - Materials spend & Sub-contractors, Commercial Group (£70k) underspend mainly on staffing - vacancies not filled , Countywide (£140k) underspend mainly due to staffing costs - £40k included for Clean & Protect.
Highways Services Non-Trading	609	Highways Revenue Maintenance - Overspend of £616k. Overspend of £3k on employees. Overspend of £6k on premises due to car park utility charges. Overspend of £25k on Transport and Supplies £10k over Overspend of £442k on Agency. Overspends including cyclic works gully emptying £264k, Drainage £243k, PATs - Capitalisation of £1.8 million. Under achievement of Income £132k. Management & Admin Underspend of £25k - Driven by underspend on General office repairs (£4k). Large underspend on staffing travelling (£38k) and underspend in Supplies and Services (£10k), overspend in Agency £24k plus no income contribution expected £3k Stores Overspend of £18k, Underspend in staffing (£12k), overspend in Transport £11k & Supplies £19k. Winter Maintenance - Currently as budget
Strategic Highways	(569)	Street Lighting - Underspend of (£34k) Underspend of (£26k) on employees - Staff vacancies Street Lighting electricity budget - Covered from central finance, net nil. Underspend of (£15k) on S&S mainly due to consultancy coming under budget Underachievement of income on fees received £7k
		Highways Permit Scheme (£115k) - Underspend covered due to over achievement of income - transferred to reserves
		Technical Team - Underspend of (£248k) Underspend of (£8k) on employees Overspend of £8k on Transport Overspend of £2k on debt written off. Over achieved Income of (£338k) - Mainly Emergency Road Closures (£143k), TRO's (£135k) and recharge off staff to permit scheme (£95k) offsets £88k Supplies overspend. Other income down such as Street Naming and Numbering £11k and Section 50 licencing £18k.
		Asset Management - Overspend of £90k Underspend of (£44k) on employees - Vacancies in team. Underspend of (£20k) on premises due to reduced rates. Overspend £9k in transport, underpsepend in supplies services (£4k) Overspend of £1k on agency. Overspend £40k due to Commercial Group officer recharge Under achieved Income of £108k - £62k due to Licensing of Highway space
		Drainage & Coast Protection - On budget Underspend of (£34k) on employees - Reduction in hours across a few of the team. Overspend on transport of £7k - Mainly short term spot hire of vehicle for full year. Overspend on agency of £28k - Drainage contract payments Income (£1k) underspend
		Structures - Overspend of £21k Overspend of £6k on employees due to unbudgeted degree apprentice Underspend of £1k on Transport for unbudgeted short term hire of vehicle (recharged in income). Under income of £16k.
		Public Right of Way - Overspend of £20k Overspend of £2k on employees . Overspends in Supplies £11k, Transport £1k. Under achievement of income £6k.
		Enforcement & Inspections - Underspend of (£366k) Overspend of £7k on employees - Minor Variance offset by underspend of (£21k) on Transport - Fuel, fleet management and car allowances. Overspend of £111k on S&S Over achieved Income of (£464k) - Over-recovered income Fixed Penalty notices, default inspections and Section74 over-runs (£303k). Also includes part of salaries recharged for Highways Permit work (£170k).
		Highways Adoptions - Underspend of (£52k) - £342k moved to reserves. Underspends on employees (£57k), overspend supplies & services £3k, under achievement of income £3k
GRAND TOTAL	(145)	

Community Protection 2024/25 Q2 Outturn - Reasons for Variances

Service	Over / (Under) £000s	Reason for Variance
Head of Community Protection	246	Contribution to reserve of £300k unspent growth allocated - £100k back to Workforce Development Reserve and £200k to ICT Capital Reserve. Offset by overachievement of MTFP Savings (£73k) . £17k on supplies and services. £2k on staff travelling
Business Compliance	(297)	Business Compliance Management £54k - £50k unallocated MTFP saving for Fees and £4k minor overspend on staffing due to not meeting staff turnover efficiency budget. Consumer Safety (£150k) - (£123k) under in staffing due to vacant posts in year and career graded posts, (£3k) under on premises due to market rates revaluations, (£6k) staff travelling, (£7k) supplies and services, (£32k) over achievement on fees income mainly due to Animal Licences. Health Protection (£156k) - (£126k) in staffing due to vacancies, moderated posts and reduced hours, Also new post SEHO, likely to be vacant till early next year. (£7k) under on staff travelling, (£19k) under on supplies and services mainly due to additional budget for Natasha's Law, and (£5k)over achievement on income. Enviroment Protection (£65k) - (£72k) under in staffing due to vacancy and moderated posts, £2k over on staff travelling, (£23k) under on Supplies and Services, £8k over on Private Water Testing fees . Income under achieved by 19k, actually over achieving on most, but won't be receiving full 140k from planning as no person in the additional post yet Primary Authority Functions - £22k over due to employee leaving, and budget utilised elsewhere, £23k over on employees , (£1k) fees and charges Better Business For all (BBFA) - (1k)
Licensing	118	(£51k) under spend in staffing due to moderated posts, offset by overspend on taxi related costs of £40k and £124k under achievement within licencing income mainly taxi licencing and gaming and lotteries. £5k on payments to sub contractors
Strategic Regulation	(96)	Stategic Regulation Management £5k - £4k over in staffing plus overspend in Supplies and Services £1k mainly relating to training costs. Civil Contingencies Unit (£70k) - (£34k) under in staffing due to vacancy, (£17k) under in supplies and services (£19k) Additional income above budget for CCU Darlington contract CP Professional Development £134K over in staffing due to reserve funded posts funded from the service underspend.(£97k) from WD reserve, £2k in supplies and services GRT (£28k) - £5k on staffing , (£10k) on supplies and services, (£24k) drawn down from CORP reserve Information & Intelligence £4k - (£6k) on staffing, 9k on supplies and services . Special Investigations (£22k) - (£42k) staffing underspend due to obsolesion of one post from June. £20k over in supplies and services and offset by (£7k) income contributions towards illicit tobacco projects. Plus minor overspends in Transport and Subcontractor payments £6k. Regulatory Systems (£23k) - (£33k) under in staffing due to vacancies in year and career graded posts plus underspends in transport of (£4k) . £14k under on capital funding for posts due to reorganisation within team leaving one post instead of two.
NEPPP	(0)	Income funded area, difference of net costs are put to reserves at yearend.
Safer Places	(282)	Safer Places Management (£34k) - mainly due to vacancy during first quarter. ASB Interventions (£100k) - (£100k) under in staffing due to vacancies, minor underspends in supplies (£1k) offset by £1k trail blazer income Safer Communities (£30k) - (£10k) underspend on staffing, trasnport under by (£2k), (£16k) on payments to subcontractors. Nuisance Action Team (£66k) - Underspend (£63k) across staffing, supplies and transport (£5k) plus £2k under achievement on income. Community Action Team (£35k) - (£29k) under in staffing due to moderated posts plus underspend in transport and supplies (£5k). Housing Action Team (£17k) - (£41k) under in staffing due to vacancies, £98k underspend to horden reserve (£75k) income
GRAND TOTAL	(311)	

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