# No Mow May sparks rethinking of green space management across UK councils



In recent years, the "No Mow May" initiative has gained traction across the UK, with the aim of allowing grass to grow wild in public green spaces throughout the month of May. This initiative was launched in 2019 by the conservation organisation Plantlife, which sought to encourage the nation's approximately 20 million gardeners to refrain from mowing their lawns during spring. The timing was intentional, designed to provide an early bloom of daisies, buttercups, dandelions, and other wildflowers that support pollinators emerging after winter.

The campaign’s name hinges on catchy alliteration, but its intentions lie deeper. It addresses concerns about biodiversity, particularly the decline of flying insects, an issue highlighted in a 2021 report by Buglife and a wildlife trust that documented up to a 60% fall in insect populations in the UK over two decades. Urbanisation and intensive land management are considered contributing factors. Public green spaces, encompassing around 85,000 hectares under council control according to Nature 2030, have been identified as critical for creating interconnected "nature corridors" which could facilitate ecological recovery.

Lambeth borough in London is among 55 local councils that have adopted the No Mow May approach, as remarked upon by a participant in the scheme who noted the unexpected beauty of wildflowers such as red clover blossoming near residential tower blocks. However, this enthusiasm is tempered by practical realities. As the month ends, councils typically resume mowing, a move some critics suggest undermines the initiative’s long-term benefits. Warwick District Council, for instance, reported a £29,000 overspend last year due to the need to hire specialist equipment to cut the now longer grass.

Further scrutiny has also touched on the wider claims associated with No Mow May. A notable 2020 US study previously cited in support of the campaign was later critiqued for containing errors, leading to the withdrawal of an article in the New York Times. Additionally, financial arguments concerning council tax savings and carbon reductions are under debate, revealing complexities in balancing ecological goals with budgetary constraints.

Ecological research underlines the diverse benefits of longer grass verges, which now cover 1.2% of UK land and support nearly half of the nation’s wildflower species, including rarities like the harebell, tower mustard, spiked rampion, and 29 varieties of orchid. These verge habitats produce abundant nectar critical to pollinators, with each flower-rich mile estimated to support millions of insects.

However, the management practices following No Mow May have implications. A report from ecological newsletter Inkcap suggested that mowing less frequently or later requires alternative methods to manage grass clippings, as leaving them to mulch can enrich soil and discourage wildflower growth. The financial costs of frequent mowing are also significant; for example, Tower Hamlets council spent £10,000 annually mowing just 0.12 miles of verge every fortnight during the growing season.

Mark Schofield of Plantlife emphasises that the goal of the No Mow May campaign extends beyond a single month to fostering a shift in how public spaces are valued and managed for wildlife. The campaign encourages the creation of wildflower margins in areas such as sports fields, potentially transforming large swathes of land into valuable habitats. Dorset council claims to have nearly halved its grass-cutting expenses over seven years by adopting these ecological mowing practices.

Some councils are experimenting with pushing mowing schedules even further. Ealing borough, for example, has introduced a follow-up campaign, "Let It Bloom June," intending to delay mowing beyond May. The aspirational vision is that late summer will see urban landscapes teeming with life, where children might observe swallows skimming over wild grasslands near their homes.

No Mow May thereby reflects a broader ongoing dialogue about urban green space management, biodiversity conservation, and changing public perceptions of what constitutes a “well-kept” landscape. It seeks to challenge conventional aesthetic norms and promote spaces that support ecological resilience in towns and cities. The Financial Times is reporting on the evolving impact and reception of this environmental initiative across local authorities in the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.ft.com/content/83299d51-e17a-478f-b917-0f6d6c36b1c3> - This article discusses the origins of the 'No Mow May' initiative, launched in 2019 by Plantlife, aiming to encourage gardeners to let their lawns grow wild during May to support pollinators.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/83299d51-e17a-478f-b917-0f6d6c36b1c3> - The piece highlights the campaign's focus on addressing biodiversity concerns, particularly the decline of flying insects, with a 2021 report by Buglife and a wildlife trust documenting up to a 60% fall in insect populations in the UK over two decades.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/83299d51-e17a-478f-b917-0f6d6c36b1c3> - The article mentions that urbanization and intensive land management are considered contributing factors to the decline in insect populations, as highlighted in the 2019 State of Nature Report.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/83299d51-e17a-478f-b917-0f6d6c36b1c3> - It notes that public green spaces, encompassing around 85,000 hectares under council control, have been identified as critical for creating interconnected 'nature corridors' to facilitate ecological recovery.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/83299d51-e17a-478f-b917-0f6d6c36b1c3> - The article provides an example of Lambeth borough in London, among 55 local councils that have adopted the No Mow May approach, with a participant noting the unexpected beauty of wildflowers like red clover blossoming near residential tower blocks.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/83299d51-e17a-478f-b917-0f6d6c36b1c3> - It discusses the financial implications of the initiative, citing that Warwick District Council reported a £29,000 overspend due to the need to hire specialist equipment to cut the now longer grass after May.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/83299d51-e17a-478f-b917-0f6d6c36b1c3> - Please view link - unable to able to access data