# West Lothian council adopts new grassland strategy to boost urban biodiversity



West Lothian's commitment to enhancing its green spaces is underscored by a newly approved five-year biodiversity initiative which sees a strategic shift in grassland management. This plan, backed by the council’s Executive, aims to benefit both the local environment and the community by ultimately reducing the frequency of grass cuts across the area. This departure from traditional maintenance practices reflects a growing recognition of the importance of biodiversity in urban and suburban environments.

The revised approach, which includes a postponed start to the grass-cutting season, aligns with local efforts to adapt to fluctuating weather patterns that have become increasingly unpredictable. Councillor Sally Pattle, an advocate for the initiative, has voiced her approval, describing it as “fantastic.” Her earlier promotion of “No Mow May,” a grassroots campaign encouraging residents to refrain from mowing their lawns during May to support local wildlife, has found traction within the council’s strategy. The initiative aims to increase the visibility of wildflowers, thereby bolstering habitats for various pollinators and contributing to the ecological health of the region.

While this strategy also sees an increase in cuts to areas such as roadside verges and roundabouts—now set to be maintained twice per season—the overall frequency of grass cuts in natural areas will be reduced to just one cut annually. This alteration intends to foster greater biodiversity, leading to a more vibrant ecosystem. Callum McLaren, the council's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer, has detailed these updates in a comprehensive report which underscores the necessity of balancing public space usability with ecological sustainability. "Areas will be carefully selected to ensure they are appropriate," he noted during discussions, highlighting that the initiative aims to ensure an effective mix of managed and unmanaged landscapes.

The council is also working to bolster community involvement in these decisions. During discussions, Councillor Danny Logue raised pertinent questions regarding the management of grassland in residential areas, advocating for a nuanced approach that accommodates the preferences of local residents. NETS manager Andy Johnston confirmed that consultation with community members would be integral to the management methods, implying that a one-size-fits-all model would not be applicable.

Furthermore, discussions have also touched upon cemetery maintenance, where standard cutting practices will remain unchanged. However, there is potential for incorporating biodiversity-enhancing grass seed mixes in burial ground areas, signalling a holistic approach to landscape management that integrates ecological principles even in traditionally maintained spaces.

With public sentiment increasingly leaning towards supportive environmental efforts, as demonstrated by comprehensive feedback indicating a preference for less frequent cutting to bolster local habitats, the council is poised to continue advocating for biodiversity. Councillor Pauline Stafford echoed this sentiment, emphasising the importance of education and community engagement in fostering understanding around environmental decisions made by the council.

The burgeoning success of initiatives like “No Mow May,” which has been embraced beyond the borders of West Lothian, reflects a wider movement throughout the UK. Councils across the country are encouraging similar practices, recognising their vital role in supporting local ecosystems. As these initiatives gain traction, they present a valuable opportunity for communities to actively participate in the maintenance and revitalisation of their local environments while playing a part in combating the challenges posed by climate change.

In this evolving narrative of urban ecological management, West Lothian stands at the forefront, demonstrating how local governance can adapt and innovate in ways that promote both community and the environment.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
2. Paragraphs 1, 2, 5
3. Paragraphs 2, 4, 5
4. Paragraphs 2, 5, 8
5. Paragraph 7
6. Paragraph 8
7. Paragraph 8

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

## Bibliography

* <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/local-news/fewer-cuts-west-lothian-grassland-35226287> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/68794/Operational-Services-Grounds-Maintenance> - West Lothian Council's Operational Services page outlines the grounds maintenance services provided, including grass cutting, maintenance of roadside verges and roundabouts, and the promotion of wildflower meadows and summer bedding. The council emphasizes a flexible approach to grass cutting, allowing for natural growth in certain areas to improve biodiversity. Feedback from over 1,000 participants indicates a preference for less frequent grass cutting to support wildlife habitats.
* <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/groundsmaintenanceservice> - The Grounds Maintenance Service Standards page details the council's grass cutting schedules across various zones, including town centers, residential areas, sports fields, and open spaces. It specifies the frequency of cuts and additional maintenance tasks like weed spraying and hedge cutting. The standards aim to balance aesthetic considerations with environmental sustainability, ensuring that grass cutting practices support both community needs and biodiversity.
* <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/campaigns/your-no-mow-may-lawn-guide/> - Plantlife's 'No Mow May' guide provides practical advice for individuals looking to participate in the campaign to support biodiversity. It offers tips on starting the initiative, maintaining different grass lengths, and the benefits of allowing wildflowers to grow. The guide emphasizes the importance of varied grass lengths to support a wide range of species and encourages participants to let their lawns grow during May to benefit pollinators and other wildlife.
* <https://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/info/20855/biodiversity/1946/no_mow_may> - Warwick District Council's 'No Mow May' initiative suspends grass cutting in parts of the district during May to support biodiversity. The campaign aims to provide vital nectar sources for insects, enhance habitats, and support pollinators like bees and butterflies. The council outlines the areas where grass cutting will be suspended and emphasizes the importance of this initiative in promoting local biodiversity and environmental sustainability.
* <https://www.gwct.org.uk/blogs/news/2024/may/celebrating-no-mow-may/> - The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust celebrates 'No Mow May' by highlighting the benefits of allowing grass and wildflowers to grow without mowing. The article discusses how this practice supports pollinators, provides habitats for various species, and contributes to biodiversity. It also suggests extending the 'no mow' mentality to hedges and other areas to further support wildlife and promote ecological balance.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/may/03/no-mow-may-councils-urge-britons-put-away-lawnmowers> - An article from The Guardian discusses the 'No Mow May' campaign, where councils across the UK encourage residents to refrain from mowing their lawns to support biodiversity. The initiative aims to provide habitats and food sources for pollinators and other wildlife. The article highlights the participation of various local authorities and the environmental benefits of allowing grass and wildflowers to grow freely during May.