

Open Space Management Pilot Areas 2020 Report

Parks Department November 2020

1. Introduction.

As part of the Open Space Maintenance program for 2020 a trial of alternative maintenance methods including layered mowing (6 week cuts) and long flower meadows (annual cuts) were piloted on 21 sites throughout the county (Ref. Appendix 4). The All Ireland Pollinator Plan was used as guidance.



Image 1. Meadow establishing – Monread Park, Naas.



Image 2. Meadow establishing – Monread Park, Naas.

2. Communication Strategy & Success Indicators

At the start of the maintenance year the Open Space Management proposal was presented to each MD. The presentation outlined the Communication Strategy and the Success Indicators to be used.

The outcome of both are as follows.

Communication Strategy:

Action No.	Action Description	Completed	Comments
1.	Pollinators.ie - Map the sites on the webpage	Yes	
2.	Kildare County Council's Social Media	Yes	Spring online survey post reached 12,170. Highest reaching post of the year outside of Covid 19 so far.
3.	Community Stories on Facebook – Mthly updates	Yes	Well received by the public - Ref. Appendix 1.
4.	Signage on sites – Pollinators.ie poster	Yes	
5.	Public/Community Engagement – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media comments, • CRM, • Bioblitz 	Yes Yes No	98% positive comments Less than 10 queries – use of herbicides issue presented. Covid 19 prevented Bio-blitz. Encouraged people to observe & record results on pollinators.ie.
6.	Councilors Feedback and queries	Yes	On-going

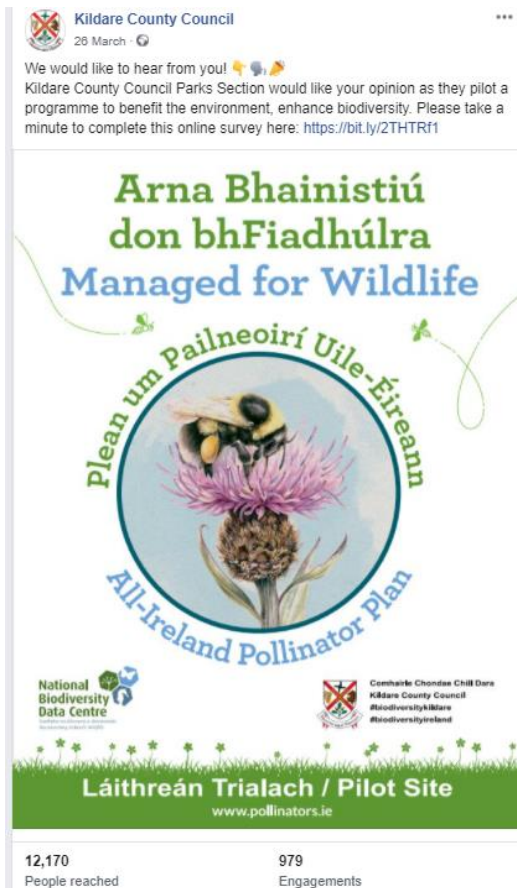


Image 3. KCC Social Media Post with largest reach of the year

Success Indicators:

Indicator No.	Indicator	Criteria	Outcome	Comments
1.	Public Awareness	No. of hits on Community Stories Monthly	52,770	11 Posts – reach of 52,770 with an average reach of 4797. Engagement of 82%. Competition held Earth Day 22 nd April prizes won with minutes of opening as response was immediate – Public enthused.
2.	Public Opinion	Surveys at start & end of maintenance period	98 % want more environmentally friendly maintenance practices (Spring Survey) Ref -Appendix 2	Spring Survey - Via PPN and KCC Consultation Portal = 649 participants. Follow up targeted survey of 580 with 242 replies (42% reply rate) – Results: 95.5 % want strimming instead of herbicide, 95.9% want more meadows (layered and long flower meadows) - Ref. Appendix 3.
3.	Cost Neutral		Yes	The cost to cut the layered meadows and annual cut and collect of long flower meadows has proven <u>cost neutral</u> . Strimming to remove herbicide usage where feasible 3 times per annum is estimated at an additional €65,000 per annum.



Image 4 & 5. Zero Grazer cutting and collecting grass at the Wonderful Barn Leixlip as trial method of harvesting long flower meadows.

3. Public Response and Mandate

The response from the public is overwhelmingly positive. The public are engaged. They want more positive biodiversity actions on the ground that will not only mitigation conditions for pollinators but also for the wider issue of Climate Action and the building of resilience. It shows the public are willing for the Council to lead the way in showcasing and maintaining the county in a proactive and sustainable manner.

- **Biodiversity and climate change - local authorities should lead by example on this.**

- Enhances public space, education for community regarding natural season change, chance to see natural Flora/fawna etc
- For Biodiversity. I don't understand why main is required at all on some of these. If it must be done then strim rather than weedkiller is a brilliant idea.
- Please stop spending money on sprays that are dangerous to us, wildlife and earth. It is a climate and biodiversity emergency. KCC could take this opportunity to be a leader in this area
- Biodiversity and also it's a waste of KCCs time and energy fighting against nature.. especially when it's actually damaging to the environment & our food chain. So cut back sight lines but leave the rest to heal & put time into other better things than spraying.
- This was not just very welcome as the array of colour and wildlife was beautiful but also VERY necessary. We face a biodiversity crisis as well as climate crisis with species disappearing at an alarming rate. This pilot needs to become the norm.
- People less lightly to pick up dog foul in the wild areas
- cut grass need to be collected to foster growth of pollinator plants
- Nature is not tidy. We have to choose whether we want a functional or ornamental environment.



Gerry Walsh @bullbars · May 23

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Delighted to see this happening in #Kildare , fair play @KildareCoCo
#Biodiversitykildare



Image 6. Selection of public comments from Surveys and Social Media during 2020.

4. Next Stages

The Parks Department will now expand the program to more sites throughout the county. Should the budget be made available strimming will replace herbicide use in the open space areas. Ornamental areas such as planted roundabouts will still require use of herbicides but at a reduced rate.

Our ambitions are over the short to long term:

- To maintain Public Open Spaces herbicide free by or during 2022 (except for ornamental areas).
- Continue to work with contractors to keep maintaining spaces in a cost effective and sustainable manner and increase the areas maintained as meadows to max capacity by the end of 2024. It is envisaged up to 40 additional sites will be considered for 2021 subject to budgetary considerations.
- Continue to advance scientific research opportunities into alternative management systems for the temperate zone with the assistance of Maynooth University and Teagasc as soon as possible (impacted by Covid 19).
- Continue to look at opportunities to dispose of grass cuttings in a sustainable manner.
- Continue to support the educational and awareness opportunities such as webinars, talks, demonstrations, video content, CAT, stakeholders' requests and the use of signage on sites and social media which has proven very successful to date.
- Encourage public support to educate those around them as they have shown they are doing on Community Stories Facebook Page.

- Work on interdepartmental opportunities to collaborate on projects for example Climate Action Team (CAT) mitigation actions and adaptation works and build contacts with other local authorities, Governmental Departments, NGO's and others to advance knowledge and capacity building.
- Work with land developers to create sustainable landscape proposals for public open spaces in new developments.

All of the above require time, expertise, commitment and resources to be fully realised. Existing budgets and resources are being used effectively to make changes. Further resources will be required to enable the ambitions above to be met along with the opportunities that will arise.

5. Conclusion

The overwhelming support and buy in of stakeholders has given us a mandate to move the maintenance of public open spaces in a proactive manner for pollinators, biodiversity, climate action and for the public by the used of layered and long flower meadows as appropriate. It is important that amenity spaces are also available for recreation and sports and features such a play spaces, water etc.

Practical issues arise about litter and dog fouling. The support of the community wardens and the education of the public through the Biodiversity Officer, Environmental Awareness Officers, CAT and other avenues is required to combat issues and raise awareness through education and example.

The research element is proving slower than expected to advance however MU, Teagasc and KCC are working through the issues and seeking out opportunities as they become available.

Public commitment and engagement will be paramount and given the high public interest levels it is time to advance the proposal on the ground, to lead by example and inspire others.



Image 8. Signage to promote awareness on pilot sites.

Appendix 1. Community Stories Overview and Data:

Kildare Community Stories on Facebook



Kildare Community Stories 2020



Social media showcase for work carried out and supported by the Community & Cultural Section of Kildare County Council.

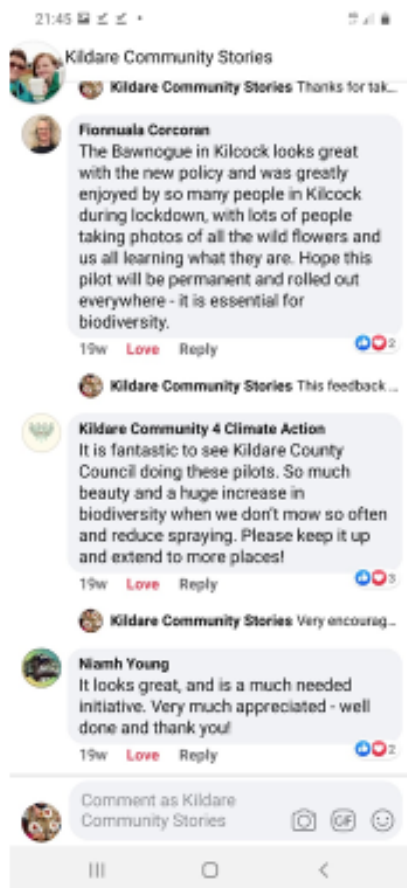
2020 Commitment

- Post Open Space Management Pilot Project content at least once a month from March 2020.
- Post general biodiversity content throughout the same period – Earth Day, National Biodiversity Week, World Bee Day etc.
- Use hashtags #BiodiversityIreland, #BiodiversityKildare and custom links for tracking.

Results 11/03/2020 – 05/11/2020

	Number of Posts	Reach *	Number of Comments	Video Views
Pilot Project Content	11	52,770	78	970
General Biodiversity Content	21	52,045	201	3,583
Totals	32	104,815	279	4,523
Positive Comments			98%	
Negative Comments			2%	

* Reach is the number of times this content was seen online.



Learning

- Timing of pilot project was significant with onset of COVID-19 pandemic. New appreciation for natural beauty in the local environment.
- High reach + high engagement = high level of public interest.
- Overwhelmingly positive feedback. Negative comments around potential for rats, ragwort, areas looking unkempt etc. were swiftly challenged, often by other page followers.
- Informal community emerging around these posts with followers sharing ideas, photos, links to relevant articles etc. Highly unusual online behavior in the public sector context.
- Kildare Community Stories will continue to present engaging content on biodiversity themes based on clear and pressing public demand.

Date	Kildare Community Stories FB Post	Category	Reach	Comments	Engagement
11/03/2020	Pilot Project Introduction	OSMPP	12,816	23	7%
12/03/2020	List of Pilot Sites	OSMPP	1,418	0	5%
09/04/2020	Tour of Pilot Sites	OSMPP	2,670	0	3%
22/04/2020	Pilot Project Survey	OSMPP	6,056	9	7%
15/05/2020	Pilot Project Survey Results	OSMPP	5,703	0	4%
27/07/2020	Athy MD	OSMPP	2,559	6	9%
28/07/2020	Celbridge-Leixlip MD	OSMPP	8,482	3	7%
29/07/2020	Clane-Maynooth MD	OSMPP	1,194	0	5%
30/07/2020	Kildare-Newbridge MD	OSMPP	3,578	16	14%
31/07/2020	Naas MD	OSMPP	2,971	11	4%
05/11/2020	Meadow Management - Wonderful Barn	OSMPP	5,323	10	17%
	Total		52,770	78	82%
	Average		4,797	7	7.45%

Appendix 2. Survey Results – Spring Survey (attached separately)

Appendix 3. Survey Results – Targeted End of Season Survey (attached separately)

Appendix 4. Trial Sites Piloted – 21 No.

MD	Site Ref	Existing Maintenance	Proposed Maintenance	Approx. % Area under Proposed Maintenance
Celbridge Leixlip	Crodaun Forest Park Entrance, Celbridge	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50%
	Maynooth Road, Leixlip	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50% (top & back of banks)
	Grass at Library, Captains Hill, Leixlip	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50%
	Celbridge Road (at Barnhall) , Leixlip	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	15% (verges adjacent roundabout)
	Wonderful Barn, Leixlip	8 Cuts, 3 Sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum around the house & allotments, annual cutting of meadows.	100%
	Willowbrook, Celbridge	16 Cuts, 3 Sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum and annual cutting of meadows.	90%
Clane Maynooth	Pound Park , Maynooth	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50%
	Meadowbrook link road (Grass Area), Maynooth	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50% (site lines to be mown and narrow verges)
	Clane Ring Road, Clane	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	40-50% Cut sight lines and ever second verge (16 cuts)
	Bawnogues, Kilcock	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	80-90% excluding playing pitches
Naas	Monread Park, Naas	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum, trial meadow 1 cut	40-50% excluding playing pitches
	Famine Cemetery on Craddockstown Road, Naas	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50%
	Grass at M7 interchange at The Ball, Naas	16 cuts, 3 sprays, 1 Flail	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50% exclude flail area
	Millennium Link Road (Newbridge Roundabout at LIDL to Irish Commercials) Naas	16 cuts, 3 sprays, 1 Flail inner and outer verge	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum – outer verge. Flail inner verge x 2 per annum	100%
Kildare Newbridge	New Road from Graveyard to Station Road, through Dunmurray Rise, Kildare	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	40-50% Cut sight lines and ever second verge x 16
	Hopkin's Haven Green Area, Monasterevin	16 cuts, 3 sprays	16 cuts outer verge and meadow in centre flail once	50%
	Moorefield Park, Newbridge	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50%
	Green Road, Newbridge	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50%
Athy	People's Park, Athy	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50%
	Woodstock Industrial Estate, Athy	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	50%
	N78 Verges at Roundabout, Athy	16 cuts, 3 sprays	6 cuts, 3 x strim per annum	33%

