

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Kinross-shire Local Committee

16 November 2023

GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

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(Report No. 23/311)

1. PURPOSE

1.1 To outline the nature and extent of potential changes to the Council's Grassland maintenance operations following the report to the Climate Change and Sustainability Committee on 31 May 2023 [PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL \(cmis.uk.com\)](https://www.permits.gov.uk/cmis) The changes will be implemented from Spring 2024, subject to further approval by the same committee.

2. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 The Council undertook some initial trials reducing the area of grass being cut regularly at the end of the 2021 growing season. These were based on areas that had been successfully changed previously on steeper banks, on the margins of parks and under groups of trees. This led to a more comprehensive trial in 2022 on 42 selected sites across Perth and Kinross. The purpose of the trials was to assess the biodiversity benefits, community views and costs of different methods of maintenance to help deliver the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.
- 2.2 The trials were largely successful and demonstrated that reducing grass cutting can help reduce carbon emissions, provide more biodiverse and interesting open spaces, improve physical and mental health and wellbeing, whilst also reducing costs. Biodiversity can be increased by creating habitats for birds, insects, and small mammals, which do not exist in regularly cut grass. Communities had a mix of views from those that want no change to those that wanted to be actively involved in creating more biodiverse grassland. Community input on where changes to grassland management in their parks and open spaces should be undertaken was useful.
- 2.3 At the Council's 2023/24 budget setting meeting in March, recurring savings of £0.5m were made to the Direct Services ground maintenance grass cutting budget from 2024/25. A large piece of work has been underway since then to try and establish a level of sustainable grass cutting from 2024/25 onward within the budget available. This will mean significant changes with most parks and open spaces reverting entirely or mostly to 'no mow', with only sports

pitches and operational areas of cemeteries being cut regularly.

2.4 The modelling work is still underway and takes account of staff, machinery and routes. It has been applied to a number of different representative types and hierarchies of Council parks and open spaces and then scaled up to cover all 2,000 maintained sites. The following is a summary of the potential proposals:

- Mowing will cease on all 'Local', 'Neighbourhood' and 'Settlement' classification sites with the exception of grass margins to hard surfaces and sports pitches and operational areas of cemeteries.
- 'Regional' classification sites may retain some mown grass areas in the busiest areas such as MacRosty and Kirkgate Parks and mowing will also be retained on high amenity areas which are maintained in partnership with community groups such as Milnathort War Memorial.
- Constituted community groups may be able to get involved in managing and improving their open spaces through planting wildflowers and bulbs and using cut and lift machinery. That will be dependent on the capacity to provide coordinated support and training from the Community Greenspace Ranger service and availability of materials and equipment.
- To ensure communities are aware of the changes, a list of sites that will revert to 'no mow' would be prepared for each ward and put on the Council's webpages.
- Plans will be prepared showing the changes for typical sites within the ward area e.g., large parks, play area, amenity open spaces, local and neighbourhood parks, sports pitches and cemeteries.
- Officers from Direct Services supported by Community Greenspace will discuss the changes for each of the wards with the ward Councillors and Community Councils who will be encouraged to promote the changes locally and advise communities of the information available.
- Site signage could include plans for the large parks showing the 'no mow' areas and smaller 'no mow' signs on selected smaller parks. There would be a QR code on all signs which would provide a link to online plans for all sites. It will not be economically or environmentally sustainable to put signs on all sites as there are 2000 that the Council manage or maintain.
- A communications plan is being prepared to determine communication methods. This is likely to include wider messaging about climate change and biodiversity.

- Monitoring and review will continue on the 42 sites originally trialled and volunteers will be encouraged to undertake biodiversity monitoring. Due to the scale of the changes it will not be possible to monitor all sites. It may be possible to make minor changes to the 'no mow' areas on some sites as long as the overall areas not being cut remains the same.

2.5 The new approach to Grassland management like many new initiatives is not universally supported, therefore it is important that there is engagement with local communities about potential changes. However, the Council's Greenspace team will not have the resources to extensively engage with all stakeholders on all circa 2,000 sites therefore the support of existing forums and community councils will need to be sought. The views of the Kinross-shire Committee would be very much appreciated in this regard.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 This presentation and briefing paper outlines the forthcoming proposed changes to grassland management on Council sites in Kinross-shire and how that will be communicated to communities in advance. The proposals for the whole of Perth and Kinross will be subject to final approval at a Climate Change and Sustainability Committee in early 2024. Community engagement is key, and the Committees views on this, within Kinross-shire are requested.

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