

## Welcome to our local authorities pack.

So you're fed up staring at excessively mowed lawns and verges that add little colour to the landscape and offer little support for insects. You feel your local authority should be doing something about this but you don't know how to make your voice heard. Well, help is at hand.

We have been heartened to hear that many of our volunteers and supporters want to make a difference in their own areas. As Bumblebee Conservation Trust is a small charity, we do not have the ability to lobby every local authority in the UK to encourage them to manage their land in ways that support bees. As much as we would like to be able to do so, this is beyond our reach at the moment. We have however talked to local authorities across the UK about the reasons for their planting and land management decisions. The result is this pack, which has two sections:

- **Encouraging local authorities:** this guide can be used to help you ask your local authority to be more bee-friendly. It has information on who to contact, how to get support for your cause, and how to proceed with a campaign. It also has information on how you can set up a group to allow you to do some work to make your local area better for bees.
- **Bumblebees and local authorities:** this guide is designed to be read by decision makers in local authorities. It gives examples of some easy things that can be done to help bees, including case studies from areas where these have worked. Once you find out who to speak to, you can send this to them.

We would like to say at this point that changes will not take place overnight and it is important to keep this in mind. Local authorities often plan their planting and mowing regimes a year in advance so you are embarking on a long term collaboration. With that said, the sooner you get started, the sooner you will see changes appearing.

A project like this can be a hugely rewarding experience and it's great to feel part of something that brings people together, affects change (no matter how small) and inspires other communities to do the same. We would love it if you could keep in touch about any successes you have, or extra support you need. Please do so by emailing [volunteering@bumblebeeconservation.org](mailto:volunteering@bumblebeeconservation.org)

The following pages outline the steps that we advise you take before and after approaching your local authority. These should maximise the chances that your ideas are not only heard but acted upon.

Good luck and thank you for supporting Britain's bumblebees.



## Getting started

### 1. Know what you want

Your chances of being heard by your local authority will be improved if you have a clear idea about what action you would like to see taken and where. Is there really more that can be done in your area to help bees? What do you think is lacking? What problems have you noticed? By using your own observations, it will give you something to relate to, and allows you to focus your efforts on things that can be done.

Have a look at what the local authority is already doing – it may well be that they already have some schemes in place to tackle the issues you're concerned about. You may find these on their website, local plan or you may have to speak to someone to find out their plans if they haven't yet been published. Try attending a local community council meeting and talking to your local representatives there.

### 2. Get support

When you know what you want, test local feeling. Find out if anybody else feels the same way as you do, and if they'd like to help. Local authorities can be resistant to change if they think there will be opposition from local people. Your case for change will be much more effective if they can see that the cause has popular support. So, the more people behind you, the better. Input from other people can also bring new knowledge and expertise.

This step may seem daunting but start with friends and neighbours and see how things develop. Additional support can be gained through:

- **Social media** – you can set up a Facebook page to promote your cause or create a short video to upload to YouTube.
- **Local media** – contact newspapers, local radio, etc., and see if they'd be interested in highlighting your cause. This could bring a lot more supporters and influence to your campaign.
- **Petitions** – you can create petitions by collecting signatures yourself or by using websites such as [www.petitionbuzz.com](http://www.petitionbuzz.com), [www.ipetitions.com](http://www.ipetitions.com) and [www.petitiononline.com](http://www.petitiononline.com).
- **Councillors** - Much of the decision-making power in councils depends on the councillors, so you should contact any local councillors to ask their views and provide them with information about the problem. As you'll be a person who may vote for them at some stage, they'll probably be keen to talk to you!



### 3. Finding out who to approach

The next step is to find out who to speak to. Management of land in local authorities is notoriously complicated, with different agencies, sub-contractors and departments being responsible for different sites. For example, grassy areas in parks are usually under the responsibility of the local council, whereas roadside verges are often the responsibility of the highways management team.

Navigating these can be tricky, but you have to start somewhere! In general, it's best to address any initial correspondence to people managing **parks, biodiversity or environment** in the council. You should be able to find out the names of people within this group by visiting your local authority's website.

### 4. Making the approach

You are now ready to send out the second section of this pack, called 'Bumblebees and local authorities'. We recommend that you include a personalised cover letter with the pack, indicating exactly what you would like to see happen and expressing the level of support locally for your suggestion. This should at least warrant a response, so you can see how to proceed from there.

Here are some useful statements that you could include within your letter:

*"As you may be aware, many of the UK's bee species are under threat. Bumblebees in particular have seen large declines in their populations, and two of our 26 native species have become extinct since the 1940s. The main reason for these declines has been the loss of habitat, especially flower-rich grasslands."*

*"I believe that my local authority, [insert name], is managing much of its land in ways that make it totally unsuitable for bumblebees and other wildlife. For example, the flower beds have plants which cannot be used by bees because they produce no pollen or nectar – the only things that bees can feed on. I am also alarmed by the number of areas where grass is mown multiple times per year. This constant mowing prevents the growth of wildflowers, which can also feed bees."*

*"I believe that the council could save money by making some simple changes. Replacing annual bedding plants every year costs quite a bit of money, whereas many of the perennial bee-friendly plants will flower year after year, and therefore cost less in the long run. Also, cutting the grass fewer times would be cheaper than having it cut the 5-12 times per year, which the council is doing at present. By encouraging wildflowers to grow in these areas the council would be adding a welcome injection of colour into the landscape."*

If the response that you receive is not the one you were hoping for, enquire about the reasoning behind the decision. This will help you to decide on your next steps. One of which may be to become more hands on....



## 5. Next steps—getting your hands dirty

Local authorities don't always have the manpower or resources to be able to undertake the bee-friendly management that we would like. You shouldn't let this put you off, and many people have taken management of council-owned land into their own hands, and produced fantastic results.

There are a number of routes you can take if you want to get involved in managing council land.

### Form a group

Forming a group can be a great way to show the council that you are serious about undertaking some work on their land. 'Friends of' groups are very popular, and they allow you to work on the land without having to have the council present - all you need is their permission.

Two useful guides to help you set up a group are:

- Making a Difference - [www.green-space.org.uk/resources/communityresources/getinvolved/](http://www.green-space.org.uk/resources/communityresources/getinvolved/)
- Community Garden Starter Pack - [www.farmgarden.org.uk/publications](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/publications)

Setting up a new group can be time consuming and will require insurance cover. Insurance for 'Friends of' groups can be obtained through organisations such as The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) for a reduced price. If the cost of this is off-putting, you could consider raising funds for your group and its work (see next page).

### Work with the local authority

There are other ways of working with councils without having to set up a formal group. For example, volunteering with the council means that you can work with them on the land. This kind of work usually requires a council staff member to be present, so you will have to ask them to provide a staff member. To increase your chances of this happening, it's best if you can offer the council as much as possible in return. For example, providing a group of people to help with the work or a supply of seeds/plants to use. These could be bought through any funds you raise.

### Work with another group

There are lots of established gardening and conservation groups who may be able to help with work on the sites you have identified. These groups have several advantages, including an existing bank of volunteers, equipment, and insurance. The biggest and most active of these groups is TCV, which exists to protect green spaces in the UK, and make them better for wildlife. Work days organised by TCV can be very productive due to the experience, equipment and manpower supplied. By joining their Community Network, your group can benefit from insurance cover, discounts on equipment and training courses, as well as access to grants to help fund materials and work.

Another organisation that may be able to offer assistance is the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.

## Fundraising ideas

Fundraising can help towards the cost of insurance, membership of organisations such as TCV, seeds, tools, the printing of public information leaflets/ posters and anything else the work needs.

There are lots of other ways to raise money, for example:

- **Sell something:** People like to buy things that contribute to a good cause. Try selling baked goods, jams, marmalade, handmade crafts, and whatever else you can make at little cost. Be sure to let people know what their money is helping—it should help sales! Another great thing to sell is plants. If you grow them from seeds, it costs almost nothing to produce dozens of plants. If you collect the seeds from your own plants, it will cost even less, so get planting!
- **Do something:** Sponsored walks, runs and cycles are popular—and easy— ways to raise funds. People will appreciate you putting in an effort to show your dedication to the cause. You'll also find that you get plenty of support (and funds) from family and friends who may sponsor you.
- **Apply for a grant:** Small environmental projects can get funding from various bodies. Projects with some level of community involvement are actually more likely to get funding, so try to make sure that you can rely on the support of others in your community.

Unfortunately, we cannot allow the proceeds from the sale of any Bumblebee Conservation Trust merchandise to be used to fund projects such as these. The money raised through such sales helps to pay for important national conservation activities and the development of resources such as this pack.

### Wildlife group success story: verge cutting

#### Danny Porter

A local wildlife group at Waveney carried out surveys of the flora and fauna nearby. Through this work, they identified a number of areas that could be better for wildlife, if the vegetation was managed through more effective cutting. In these places, the grass was short due to being cut many times a year. It contained almost no wildflowers—and no bees buzzing!

Following this discovery the group wrote a short report, describing what could be achieved by altering the mowing regime a little. The report recommended that grass cutting be reduced so that the grass is only cut at the end of summer, after the wildflowers have bloomed. The council has now agreed to this new management style in these areas.

Danny from the group told us that presenting the report as a group helped convince the council to change the management at this site, emphasising the importance of showing the council that your plans have public support.





## **Volunteer success story: verge cutting**

### **Richard Evans**

Another of our volunteers, Richard, has worked with his council to help with roadside verge management. While most councils have the equipment to cut grass, not all have the machinery needed to lift the cuttings, which is essential if the areas are to become better for wildflowers and pollinators. Because of this, Suffolk County Council allows local people to become voluntary wardens and help their environment by collecting grass cuttings from special road verges which are rich in wildflowers. The verges are known as Road-side Nature Reserves (RNRs), and are marked with signposts to ensure that staff cutting the verges only do so at the proper time of year. Over 19 hectares of land are managed in this way, and many of the verges contain rare wildflowers such as sulphur clover (pictured here).

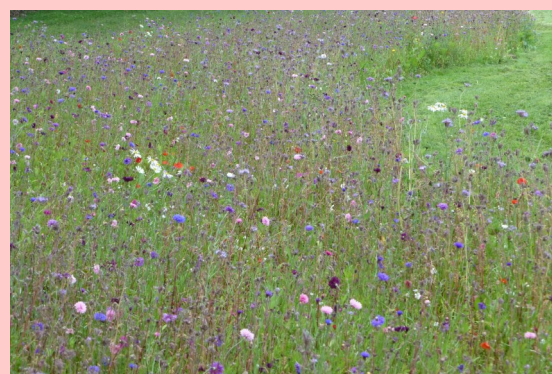


## **Gardening group success story: wildflower meadows in Banff and Macduff**

The two towns of Banff and Macduff in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, are looking much brighter thanks to the efforts of a local gardening group. In 2010, the Banff & Macduff In Bloom group decided to brighten up their town, and make the area better for bees at the same time. They viewed it as a nice way to give something back to the town, using their gardening skills. Initially 190 summer hanging baskets were installed around the two towns, but the group also took on the upkeep of some garden areas. In 2012, after seeing examples from other communities, they decided they would like to create wildflower areas.



The journey to creating the meadows started with the group approaching the Landscape Services department of Aberdeenshire Council. At this stage, they simply wanted to obtain agreement for appropriate areas of land: one area that they were already maintaining, and another which was a council maintained grass area. Luckily, the council was very keen to try wildflower areas themselves, and had already purchased the seeds to do so! The council offered to prepare the ground by rotovating it, and soon In Bloom were able to put their gardening skills to good use by preparing the sites for sowing and keeping pernicious weeds in check. Two different wildflower seed mixes were used to help test which mix would be most suited to different areas in the future.



Not much care is needed with wildflower seedlings, so there was little else to do for a while, except to wait until they bloomed. Since 2012 was the wettest year on record in the UK, they found that the flowering period was delayed, but when the blooms did come, they looked marvellous! They then waited until October, by which time the flowers had produced and dropped their seeds, before cutting the sites using traditional scythes. The cuttings were removed and composted. In Bloom and Aberdeenshire Council believe that the wildflower experiment in 2012 has been very successful, and will work together for more areas in 2013. So, it's safe to say that Banff is becoming a much better place for bees!

# Bumblebees and local authorities

## Why should you read this pack?

It is likely that this pack has come to you via local residents who are keen to support local insect populations. They feel passionately about this cause and believe that there are positive actions that can be taken by your local authority or in partnership with themselves. These actions are outlined in the following pages and if implemented could:

- Save your local authority money.
- Improve the biodiversity of the area, thus helping to achieve local biodiversity targets.
- Improve the experience of local residents using your parks and footpaths.
- Encourage greater environmental education and awareness in your schools.
- Safeguard the future of any horticultural or crop based businesses within the area—if bumblebees continue to decline in number, fruit and vegetable growers will see their production costs soar. If this sector is an important part of your economy you cannot afford to stop reading now.

## Why do bumblebees need your help?

Britain's bumblebees are starving due to a shortage of flowers. Changes in agricultural techniques have meant that there are far fewer wildflowers in the landscape and this has caused a dramatic decline in populations of many bumblebee species. Two species in the UK have already become extinct in the past 100 years, showing that something needs to be done.

The most important thing that can be done to help conserve bumblebees is to provide more flowers for them to feed upon. This may involve restoring habitats to conditions that allow more wildflowers to grow. Alternatively, it could involve having plants in your parks and gardens that can be used by bumblebees for food.



At the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, we are concerned that much of the land being managed by local authorities is unknowingly managed in a way that makes it unsuitable for bumblebees. Many of the plants used in bedding displays cannot be used by bees for food because they produce no pollen or nectar. Also, areas covered by grass are no good for bumblebees because they are cut many times a year, which prevents the growth of any wildflowers which would provide a source of food for bumblebees.

In this guide we present affordable alternatives to the current management. We believe that these alternatives are realistic, cost-effective, easy to implement, and will go some way to supporting bumblebee populations in your local area. We can say this because other local authorities have tried them and the following pages contain testimonials to that effect.



## How can your local authority help bumblebees?

### 1. Grassy areas

Much of the land managed by local authorities is grassy. This includes grass verges and amenity grassland, such as that found in parks, around public buildings and graveyards.

A lot of this land has very little benefit to wildlife, as it is dominated by grass which grows vigorously. These areas also tend to be cut quite frequently in spring and summer, and the cuttings are often left on the grass. Leaving the cuttings on the grass blocks the growth of wildflowers, and as the grass rots, it adds nutrients to the soil, which favours the growth of yet more grass.

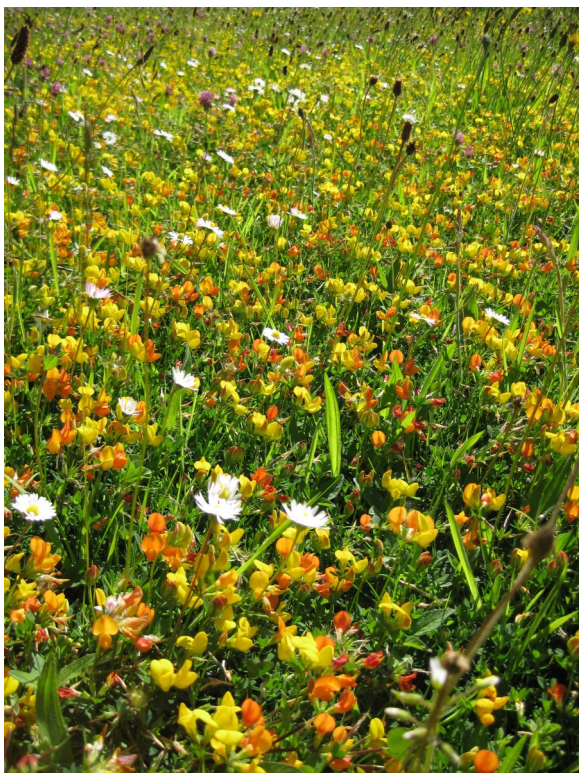
However, if managed differently, these grassy areas can become important habitats for pollinators. In particular, roadside verges are regarded as being potentially very important, as they can provide strongholds for scarce plants.

### Grass cutting regimes

The simplest way to help bumblebees in grassy areas is to change the cutting regime. As cutting by local authorities typically takes place 5-10 times throughout the summer, wildflowers are cut before they have a chance to bloom and provide food for insects. By reducing cutting, and timing the cutting more effectively, wildflowers will have a chance to grow, and to provide food for bees.

*BBCT recommends that, where possible, grass should be cut only once per year, in autumn.*

Cutting in autumn means that most bees have entered hibernation and wildflowers have finished blooming. The cuttings should ideally be removed from the site, to allow light to reach the wildflowers that are still growing.



There may be some concerns that grass which is cut less will reduce visibility on roads. This will be true in some cases, but a careful review of verges managed by the local authority would undoubtedly reveal a selection of verges that could be cut less without compromising road safety.

*Altering grass cutting regimes can also be a cost-effective measure.*

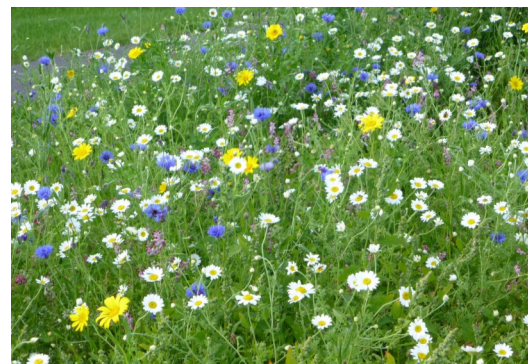
As grassy areas are typically cut between 5-10 times per year, reducing this to a single cut means that cutting costs will be lowered. There may be an additional cost incurred from having the grass cuttings removed, but this is usually more than offset by the savings. Some councils have engaged with local community groups, where residents have been involved in collecting the grass cuttings, thus making further savings.

**To see how this has been done effectively, read our case study on Conwy County Borough Council.**



## 2. Encouraging wildflowers

Reduced cutting of grassy areas should allow wildflowers that are already present to flower. However, it may be necessary to sow some wildflower seeds if the seed bank in the existing soil is poor. The great thing about wildflower areas is that they can take any shape. Local authorities that we have spoken to have used wildflower meadows in a variety of open non-recreational areas. This means that there is no reduction in the amount of space used for leisure and recreation.



**Read our case study on Midlothian council to find out how they proceeded.**

### Sourcing seeds and plants

We recommend that when planting wildflowers, especially in natural or semi-natural areas, only native plants and seeds should be used. Where possible these should be of local origin. Indeed, planting non-native plants in some un-managed areas can contravene regulations, such as the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act. There are a number of suppliers of local, native seeds and turf. These businesses are also able to offer advice on which seed mixes to use, and can often tailor the mix for different soil and other environmental conditions.

Alternatively, visit the Grasslands Trust or Flora Locale websites for more information on creating wildflower habitats. They have case studies encompassing a wide variety of habitat types, and Flora Locale maintains a list of plant suppliers who use plants of native and local origin.

### Tips for creating a wildflower area

Creating wildflower areas by sowing seeds will require work to prepare the ground for the seeds. If the area is already grassy, it's likely that this grass would choke out any seedlings before they have a chance to develop. There are various ways to prepare the soil for wildflower seeds and remove grass, however, the most effective is to apply a glyphosate herbicide to all of the grassy area. This will kill off the grass and any weeds which would compete with the wildflowers for space and nutrients. Glyphosates break down quickly in the soil, so will not kill any plants that grow after their application. When the grass has died, you can apply the wildflower seeds by sowing them onto the surface, rather than digging them into the soil.

Cutting a meadow in autumn and removing the clippings is an important part of meadow management. The aim is to retain low nutrient levels in the soil, and to suppress coarse grasses which would otherwise out-compete the wildflowers.

To maximise public support for wildflower areas, consider adding information boards beside the meadows which provide information on the wildlife benefits of the change in approach. An example poster is provided at the back of this pack.



### 3. Beautiful bedding

Formal bedding plant arrangements can look spectacular and bringing a dash of colour and interest to public areas. However, many of the plants used produce no nectar or pollen or have complicated flowers that block the bumblebee's access.

Examples of these **bumblebee-unfriendly** plants include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Geranium (Pelargonium)</li><li>• Pansy</li><li>• Begonia</li><li>• Busy Lizzie (Impatiens)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Livingstone daisy (Mesembryanthemum)</li><li>• Petunia</li><li>• Scarlet salvia / Salvia splendens</li></ul>
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These plants are used because they are easy to grow and maintain, they come in a rich variety of colours, and their flowers last for a long time. However, many other plants also fit this specification and are more useful for bees and other wildlife. You will find a full list of plants that are good for bumblebees overleaf.

Using perennial plants also has the advantage that the plants don't need to be re-purchased every year. The cost of buying annual plants, planting them, and then removing them every year can be quite high. In contrast, perennial plants can be purchased once, will flower year after year, and the only management required is some cutting back in autumn.

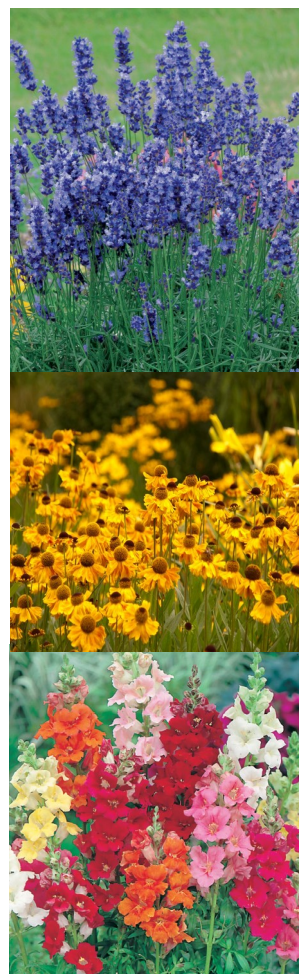
**Read our case study from Leicester City Council, where they have shown how bee-friendly plants can be used to produce beautiful displays.**

#### Formal bedding suggestions

**Lavender** is a wonderfully useful plant in formal bedding arrangements. Its profuse flowering, pleasing scent, and tolerance of a wide range of conditions make it ideal for public areas. It comes in dozens of varieties with different flower colours and shapes. It is a perennial plant, needing only to be cut back and re-shaped at the end of summer. It would work very well planted in long rows in the centre of flower beds, but also does well in containers. Because it is native to southern Europe, it is very tolerant of drought conditions.

**Sneezeweed/ Helenium** can give a burst of yellow or orange to borders in mid- to late-summer. They are available in different varieties of height and colour, so are quite versatile. Helenium are perennial plants that will return year after year, and are not prone to diseases. They will need to be cut down to the ground in winter, and clumps of plants separated every 2-3 years. Tall varieties may need staked.

**Snapdragons** are well-suited for bedding arrangements because they are compact, flower for a long time, and come in a variety of eye-catching colours. The small varieties are especially useful for the borders of flower beds, and can be used to create designs, whereas the taller varieties produce spikes of colourful flowers that look good anywhere in the flower bed. Snapdragons are perennials, but flower best in their first two years. After their first year of growth, leave the plants in the soil over winter. In early spring, the old material can be trimmed away to leave the new growth, which will produce flowers.





Spring flower planting ideas			
Plant	Annual/perennial	Flowering period	Colours
Aubrieta	Perennial	March-May	Purple, pink
Bluebell	Perennial	April-May	Blue
Crocus	Perennial bulb	March-April	Purple, white, yellow
Grape hyacinth	Perennial	March, April, May (check variety)	Blue
Hellebore	Perennial	February—March	White, yellow, pink, purple
Lungwort	Perennial	March—May	Blue, pink white
Pieris	Perennial	March – May	White flowers, but colourful foliage
Primula vulgaris—native primrose	Perennial	December– March	Yellow
Winter Heather - Erica carnea	Perennial	Very long – check variety	Pink, white

Summer flower planting ideas			
Plant	Annual/perennial	Flowering period	Colours
Allium	Perennial	Very long— check variety	Many
Aster	Annual or perennial	May - September	Many
Campanula	Perennial	June - August	Blue, white
Borage	Annual	June - September	Blue, white
Candytuft	Annual	May - September	White, pink, violet, purple
Dahlia	Perennial	July - October	Many
Fuchsia	Annual or perennial	July - October	Red, pink, white
Gaillardia	Perennial	June - September	Yellow, red, orange
Globe thistle	Perennial	July - September	Blue
Heather - Erica	Perennial	Very long – check variety	Pink, white
Heather - Calluna	Perennial	July – November, but check variety	Pink, white
Hollyhock	Annual or Perennial	June - August	Great variety
Jacob's ladder	Perennial	June - August	Blue, white, lilac
Lavender	Perennial	June - September	Blue, purple, lilac
Lupin	Annual or Perennial	June - September	Many – check variety
Rudbeckia	Annual	July-October	Yellow, orange
Scabious	Annual or Perennial	June—October	Purple, lavender
Sea Holly	Perennial	July—September	Blue
Sneezeweed/ Helenium	Perennial	July—September	Yellow, red, orange
Stonecrop	Perennial	August—October	Red, pink
Snapdragon	Perennial	July—September	Many
Thrift	Perennial	May—July	Pink, red
Wallflower	Perennial	April—June	Many
Yarrow / Achillea	Perennial	July—September	Many

## Case study: Grassland management with biodiversity benefits

Conwy County Borough Council, North Wales.

Conwy County Borough Council has taken the management of grassy areas to a new level by tailoring their cutting regimes to benefit biodiversity. At the heart of all of their practises is the simple principle of controlling the frequency and timing of grass cutting. Now, more than 10% of what was in the past regularly mown by the Parks sections, is managed as a meadow and cut just once a year.

For example, in areas where the council wants to help butterflies, they leave the grass cutting until late in the year. This means that caterpillars have a chance to feed and make cocoons before the grass disappears.

**The results:** The biodiversity benefits varied greatly between sites, with the best results at sites that were already low in nutrients. In particular, well-draining sites and those on banks showed remarkable improvement in biodiversity.

One highlight following the changes is that five species of orchid, including the scarce Bee orchid (pictured), are now found at a single site in the area. In the past, the continuous cutting regime prevented these orchids from growing, however, altering the regime has allowed the species to bloom again and provide food for a whole host of invertebrates.

This particular site is now quoted as an example in DEFRA's Guidance for Public Authorities on implementing the Biodiversity Duty 2007. It has also been used as an example by Flora Locale, who held workshops on meadow management there.

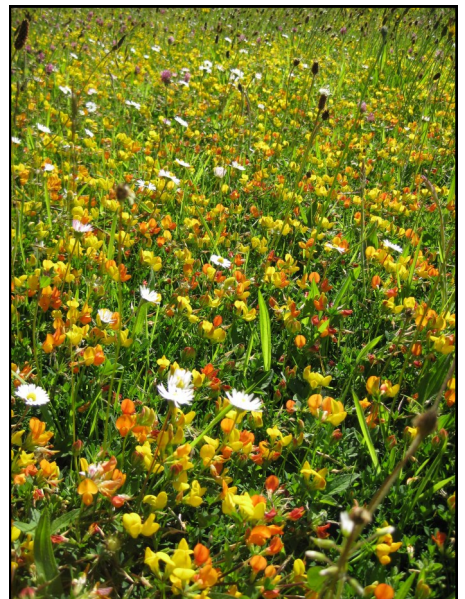
**Challenges:** In some areas the council found that the soil was so rich in nutrients that only vigorous, dominating grasses would grow. In these locations, they started the management with two grass cuts in one year, taking care to remove any cuttings from the site. This multiple cutting and waste removal reduces the nutrients available to grasses there, and favours the growth of less dominant wildflowers.

When the management regime was first changed, there were some complaints from the public, with some people saying that the site looked untidy. However, efforts to raise awareness of the wildlife value of the site were very successful, and the site is now well-regarded, with several public events having been held there.

**The future:** The team behind this management is hoping to double the amount of land managed for biodiversity within the next year.



*Photo above and below: Anne Butler,  
Conwy County Borough Council*





## Case Study: Community involvement in wildflower meadow creation

Midlothian Council, Scotland

By the end of 2012, Midlothian Council had transformed three hectares of amenity grassland at 11 sites into meadows full of flowers. In April of the first year, the ground was prepared by applying weedkiller to remove the vigorous grasses that prevent wildflowers from growing. A month later, the soil was harrowed and, with the help of the local community (mostly school groups, Scout troops and the local Rotary Club), the sites were sown with seeds of local provenance to Scotland.



The seeds were then left to grow, and weedkiller was applied periodically throughout the summer to weeds such as dock and thistle. Left to grow, these weeds could have quickly overwhelmed the site, reducing the space in which wildflower could grow.

Grassy areas surrounding the meadows were cut in August while the wildflower areas were allowed to grow and bloom. As a result, late summer saw a great display of the annual plants.



As it was the first year of the planting and many of the perennial plants were yet to flower, the meadows were not cut at the end of summer. This gave the young perennial plants a chance to grow, so they would be stronger the following year. In year two the wildflower areas were cut in February, to remove dead material and provide the wildflowers with greater exposure to sunlight. Weedkiller was applied around the perimeter of the wildflower patches, to show the council's grass cutters the perimeter between the wildflowers and the normal grassy areas. This helped to prevent accidental cutting of the wildflowers.

The wildflower patches bloomed through the summer, and the perennial plants in the mix began to flower. After flowering, the patches were cut in October and the cuttings were removed.

**The results:** Despite initial scepticism from some Councillors, feedback on the meadows has been very positive, with some Councillors now approaching the Council with suggestions and groups that they would like to work with. The public reaction has also been very positive, and there has been a lot of local media coverage of the project. This has benefitted the departments involved, the Council and local politicians.

The original driver for the project was to improve areas for biodiversity and rangers have reported significant increases in insects at the sites. The initial results from the project indicate that financial savings will exceed £10,000 therefore future plans are being driven forward on this basis.

**Challenges:** Progress over the three years has been slower than hoped, due to initial scepticism during the community consultation process. It is hoped that this will be less of an issue in future.

**The future:** In 2013 the council plans to create a further 30ha of wildflower meadows on their land. This equates to 20% of the large open spaces within the council area.

## Case Study: Using bee-friendly plants in flower beds

Leicester City Council

Leicester City Council is leading the way in providing food for pollinators. It has planted wildflower meadows and bee-friendly spring-flowering bulbs, but it was their work to make their flower beds more bee-friendly that caught our attention.

For several years, the council has been planting most of their beds with pollinator-friendly plants. Motivated by their awareness of the declines in pollinating insects, the Parks team decided to aim for year-on-year increases in the percentage of pollinator-friendly plants that are used. The result is that the over 90% of the plants used in 2013 will be pollinator-friendly. These will include ageratum, alyssum, antirrhinum, cosmos (pictured), dahlia (pictured), gaillardia, lavatera, lobelia, marigold, nicotiana, penstemon, rudbeckia (pictured), salvia, tagetes, verbena (pictured), and zinnia.

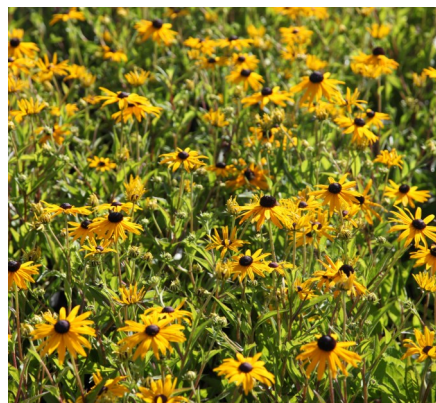
With the exception of dahlia, all of the plants listed are annual plants. The dahlia are retained every year - the tubers can be lifted in autumn and stored through the winter.

**The results:** The aim to increase the percentage of bee-friendly bedding plants every year has resulted in an increase from around 70% to over 90% in just three years. This represents much more food for bumblebees and other pollinators. Formal surveys of pollinators have not been carried out, but this work will have helped local bumblebee populations.

An important point to note is that this shift in the plant species used has not been accompanied by an increase in costs. In some cases the costs have actually decreased due to carefully choosing traditional species rather than more expensive, highly bred hybrid varieties.

**Challenges:** At first there was a little resistance from traditional horticulturalists who preferred the usual garden varieties that we are so used to seeing. However, the Parks team has won this group over by using a combination of traditional and bee-friendly bedding plants to good effect. The response from Green Flag judges and the 'It's your Neighbourhood' competition (organised by Britain in Bloom) has been both positive and encouraging.

**The future:** The Parks team from Leicester City Council intends to continue with this style of management. It has been able to show that this way of planting benefits pollinators, is cost-effective, and is well-received by the public. The balance between beautiful displays and helping pollinators will continue to be maintained.





# This land is being managed to help bumblebees!

Bumblebees are under threat and need our help! Two of our 26 species have become extinct in recent times, and many other species are in danger.

The best thing that we can do to help bumblebees is to provide them with more food, in the form of flowers.



Not all flowers are suitable for bumblebees, but we have worked with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust to ensure that the plants here are good for bees. In some cases, this involves leaving the grass to grow a bit longer than normal, and cutting it less frequently. This allows beautiful wildflowers to bloom, and provides more food for bumblebees. We have taken all precautions necessary, and can reassure you that this type of management will not encourage vermin to nest here.

If you would like to know more about bumblebees and how you can help, visit [www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org)

