

LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

PLAYING FIELDS AND SPORTS FIELDS

(Line Drawing of Habitat)

Summary

Making up a large proportion of open green spaces within urban areas playing fields and sports fields are defined by closely mown improved grassland. All are managed to some degree for amenity purpose, allowing people to gain closer contact with wildlife through recreational activities. Comprising 1.9% of the county area they can be important reservoirs for wildlife in urban settings.

Factors affecting this habitat include over-intensive mowing regimes, loss of habitat to development and use of fertilizers and pesticides.

Action Plan Aim

To maintain, enhance and raise awareness of the biodiversity potential of playing fields, amenity greenspace and sports fields.

Habitat Description

Playing fields and sports fields are defined by closely mown improved grassland of some value to a limited number of invertebrate species with a small proportion of trees and shrubs, usually adjacent to the perimeter. They make up a large proportion of open green space within urban areas. These areas are all managed to some degree for their sporting or amenity purpose. However, they can still be important reservoirs for wildlife in urban settings. These have varying roles in providing places where people can gain closer contact with wildlife through recreational activities. In addition, they provide green breaks in development and contribute to the health and well-being of local people. Their proximity to schools and housing makes them an ideal resource for learning about the natural world.

Closely mown areas, e.g. bowling greens, can be important floristically, particularly on the coast. However, the almost unique flora is often no more than 2 – 3mm high (Greenwood, E., pers. comm. 2004).

In addition to the grassland that dominates these sites, remnants of a diverse range of semi-natural habitats are often found within their boundaries or next to them. These may have been in existence for many years - providing well-established

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continuity of biodiversity. They can also act as sanctuaries for biodiversity as outside of the managed areas they often receive relatively little human interference.

National Status

Government is attaching greater importance to improving human quality of life in urban situations through the provision of urban greenspaces and contact with biodiversity – see Planning Policy Guidance note 17: *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation* and DTLR publication “*Green Spaces, Better Places*” (2002).

Regional Status

Unknown

Local Status

The Lancashire Phase 1 Habitat Survey (Kelly and Harwood, 1993) mapped 5,890 ha of amenity grassland between 1988 and 1992 (including golf courses), which amounts to 1.9% of the county area. This is a considerable amount of open space, which is rarely formally recognised as contributing to biodiversity. In most of the 14 districts the total area of amenity grassland far exceeded that of semi-natural grassland. In some districts, the total area of amenity grassland was almost as great as that of the total area of *all* semi-natural vegetation types.

Current factors affecting the habitat

- Loss of urban greenspace to development
- Misapprehension that sports and playing fields are brownfield sites
- Over-intensive mowing regimes
- Nutrient enrichment of grasslands and other habitats, particularly through leaving grass cuttings (arisings) where they are cut or disposing of them in semi-natural habitats nearby; or from dog fouling.
- Use of fertilisers and pesticides, particularly in areas where this is not necessary, e.g. neighbouring semi-natural habitats.
- Lack of awareness of the value of a variety of semi-natural habitats on the site and how to incorporate their management to benefit biodiversity into current amenity and sportsfield management practices. This can in fact reduce costs, improve the aesthetics of urban greenspace and provide greater opportunities for a wider range of biodiversity to exist in urban areas
- General perception that urban green spaces should be “tidied” or “gardened”, promoting over-management

Important Sites

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Blackburn with Darwen Borough

BHS 62NE01, Pleasington Playing Fields (South); Pleasington/Livesey;
BHS 62NE02, Pleasington Playing Fields (North), Witton Woods and Tongue Hill; Pleasington;
BHS 62NE04, Fenniscliffe Playing Field; Blackburn

Fylde Borough

BHS 32NW05, King Edward VII and Queen Mary School Playing Field Margins, Lytham St Annes

Current Action / Mechanisms

- Planning Policy Guidance note 17: *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation* () requires local authorities to take account of access to open spaces and areas for recreation within the planning framework. It recognises that “*Green spaces in urban areas perform vital functions as areas for nature conservation and biodiversity*”. It also recognised the multi-functionality of open spaces, including as “*havens and habitats for flora and fauna*”, and states that “*sites may also have potential to be corridors or stepping stones from one habitat to another and may contribute towards achieving objectives set out in local biodiversity action plans*”.
- Planning Policy Guidance note 9: *Nature Conservation* (1994) requires local authorities to “*conserve non-statutory sites together with countryside features which provide wildlife corridors, links or stepping stones, from one habitat to another*”. Urban greenspace provides a large proportion of land that can be useful in maintaining such connections.
- DTLR publication “*Green Spaces, Better Places*” (2002) encourages the consideration of developing diverse green spaces and networks and enhancing existing greenspace to benefit the community and promote urban renewal.
- *Site Safeguard*

St Winifred's School BHS (site reference and district to be determined)

- *Land Management*

None known.

- *Advisory*

None known.

- *Research and Monitoring*

None known.

- *Public Relations*

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None known.

Indicators of Habitat Quality

For conservation a purpose, amenity greenspace is developing towards favourable condition when:

- “Out-of-play” areas exhibit a range of semi-natural habitats appropriate to the local area,
- The “out-of-play” areas exhibit a graded edge of semi-naturalness (*i.e.*: a gradual lessening of management away from the “in-play” areas),
- “Out-of-play” areas are managed to benefit the conservation of biodiversity,
- Consideration of semi-natural habitats’ management to enhance biodiversity is incorporated into site management.

Proposed Action

Action (priority: H, M, L)	Area	Measure / Milestone	Partners	Timescale
Research and monitoring				
Collate surveys or conduct survey of relevant sites to establish biodiversity interest (H)		Survey 50% of amenity greenspace and sportsfields	TWT, LCC, Local Authorities	By 2015
Establish a definitive database of all amenity greenspace to include estimates of total area and associated habitats (H)		Habitat database established	LCC, TWT, NE	By 2015
Policy and legislation				
Develop a process for including biodiversity requirements in management contracts		100% of local authorities to include biodiversity requirements in management contracts	LAs	2010
Habitat protection and management				
Achieve sympathetic management of amenity greenspace and sports fields		30% 100%	Las, LCC	2010 2015

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Advisory				
Incorporate ecological management into existing land management practices and programmes to ensure work programmes / practices do not unnecessarily affect habitats and species in 'out of play' areas to the detriment of biodiversity (M)		100% grounds staff trained in habitat management practises beneficial to biodiversity	LCC, Local Authorities	2012
Publicity				
Raise awareness of the value of habitats and species associated with relevant amenity greenspace and sports fields to land owners / managers (H)		90% of land owners identified and provided with guidance about wildlife benefits of amenity greenspace	LAs, NE, TWT	2012
Identify one demonstration site in each district that exhibits good practice in biodiversity management (M)		Identification of one demonstration site by each district	LAs, NE, TWT	2010
Hold one event per year raising awareness of biodiversity and public green spaces aimed at contract management practitioners		Annual awareness day implemented	TWT, LAs, LCC	2010

Related Action Plans

Lancashire BAP

Species-rich neutral grassland
 Calcareous grassland
 Broadleaved and mixed woodland
 Rivers
 Song thrush
 Great crested newt
 Water vole
 Bats

References and additional reading

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