



A to Bee Roads

Changing the management of amenity mown areas to support nature recovery in urban areas.



Why do we need nature to recover?

A Wilder Britain – The Wildlife Trusts Nature Recovery Network Handbook 2018.

[Nature recovery network final.pdf \(wildlifetrusts.org\)](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/nature-recovery-network-final.pdf)

“The UK today is a human dominated landscape. Most original habitats have gone, and natural ecosystems are fragmented. Woods, meadows, ponds and other places with lots of wild plants and animals are getting smaller, fewer, more polluted, and more cut-off from each other. Most of our plants and animals are declining. One in ten face extinction. Given the pressure on land for food, roads and housing, this is not surprising. However, our separation from nature has led to other unintended effects. We have an epidemic of chronic disease, and the worst obesity problem in Europe. Air quality limits are regularly breached. Floods are becoming more common and more destructive. Damage to farmland soils costs us around £1bn a year.

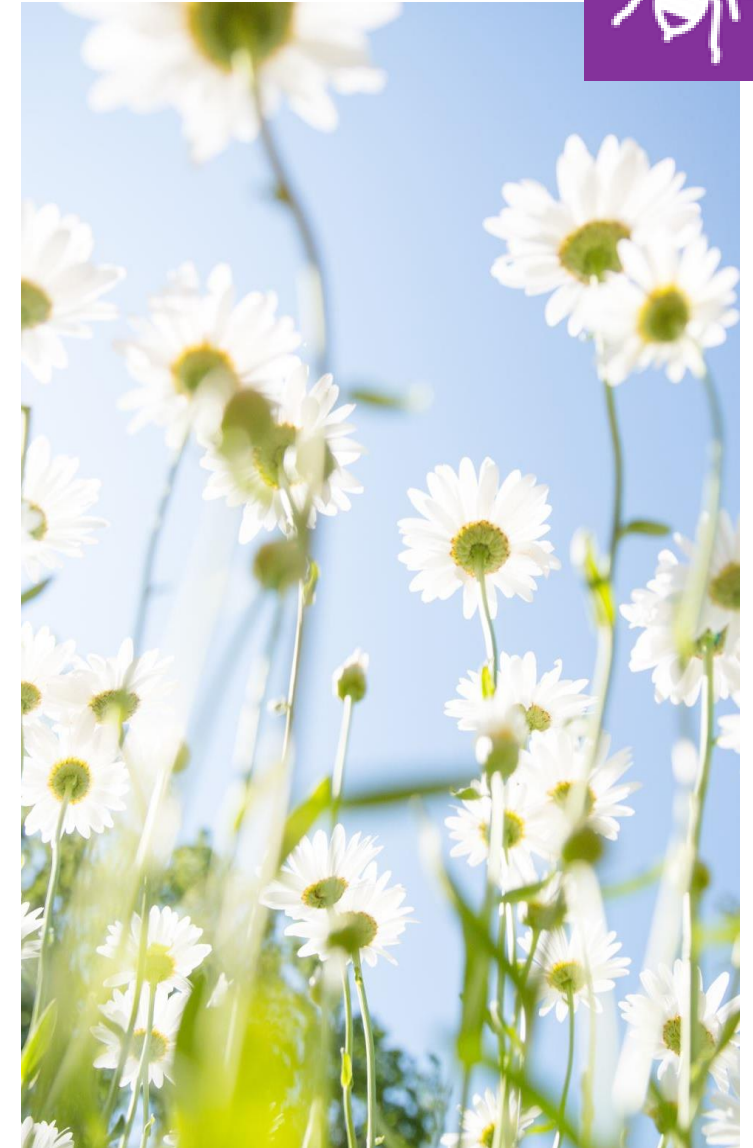
For many of us, our material standard of living is still improving. But our lifestyles are unsustainable and overlook the value of natural systems – even though they underpin everything we do. We need healthy soil to grow food in, clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and green space for exercise and relaxation. No one disputes this – yet our farming and planning systems have often taken us in the opposite direction. Sir John Lawton, who led a Government review of England’s wildlife sites, said: “There is compelling evidence that they are generally too small and too isolated. We need more space for nature.”

Conservation work by charities, farmers, community groups and individuals shows that wildlife can be brought back when the will and the space is there. Previous generations lived with clouds of butterflies, snowstorms of moths, and hedges shaking with dense flocks of farmland birds. These are biological riches denied to younger people.

We need to decide what kind of future we want – wilder, or not?

- Roads - 250,000 miles of tarmac divide our landscape, to many species they are a barrier.
- Plastics, pesticides and atmospheric pollution are causing problems for wildlife.
- Every year 36 square miles of new developments put pressure on local ecosystems.
- Nature is vital for our health, but for most our daily surroundings are artificial.

Wilder areas of amenity grassland could increase benefits for wildlife and people. “



City of Nature Plan: Over the next 25 years we want to see Birmingham recognised as a city of nature where its parks and green spaces are sustainably managed and funded



In February 2022 Birmingham adopted the City of Nature 25-year plan. The plan has five themes with aims for each theme. One theme is about the living green parts of our city - the plants and the habitats they form that make life possible:

A Green City

Where nature is recognised as integral to wider decision and plan making; and where green spaces, nature and the environment are protected, maintained, and sustainably managed.

Under a green city this Delivery Plan will address one of the themes prioritised in the 25 Year Environment Plan:

“Support the delivery of the national Nature Recovery Network, with its focus on enhancing landscapes; improving connectivity between wildlife rich places; climate resilience; protection of existing natural environments and supporting access to nature for health and well-being.”

Green City outcomes

To do this we need:

- A complete change in how we build all our public realm, providing improved connectivity and supporting the restoration and viability of urban areas (G1).
- Green corridors that are easier to find and use, helping citizens to use them for active travel and so improve air quality (G2).

- An enhanced network of green space and green infrastructure that are safe, clean, sustainably managed and meet the Birmingham Fair Parks Standard (G3).
- The restoration of green spaces, nature, and the environment (G4).
- Greener development bringing natural landscapes or features into every place and neighbourhood (G5).
- Opportunities to help citizens make better use of green space outside of their home for food growing or communal gardens (G6).
- The Nature Recovery Network, stretching right across the city and linking with all our West Midlands neighbours, forming part of the West Midlands National Park (G7).
- An increase to the tree canopy coverage across the city to 25%, through the Birmingham Urban Forest Master Plan (G8).
- A change to the city's governance structures that oversee the city's natural environment across the full 25 year term (G9).



Birmingham
City Council



RESET



RESHAPE



RESTART

Nature Recovery strategy in Birmingham



The actions set out in the City of Nature Plan align with BCC's Climate Adaptation plans, our Biophilic City status and several statutory requirements for nature recovery for example:

The Environment Act 2021 brought in several statutory duties/ requirements that Local Authorities must act on.

These are:

- Devise a comprehensive Nature Recovery Network
- Manage/ oversee Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) - through the Planning system
- Consider existing plans and policies, Make changes and action, and Report on actions taken to support biodiversity and Nature Recovery as a statutory requirement of the extended general biodiversity duty within S40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

The Governments [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP23\)](#), published in January 2023, sets out plans for significantly improving the natural environment.

By 2030, the government has committed to:

- halt the decline in species abundance.
- protect 30% of UK land.

By 2042, the government has committed to:

- increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels.
- restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats.
- reduce the risk of species extinction.
- restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.

Local Nature Recovery Network (LNRN)

NRN Core Habitat Zone: These are the areas that contain the most valuable habitat.

The strategic objectives for these areas are Protection, Restoration, Enhancement

NRN Core Expansion Zones: The purpose of these areas is to make the core areas bigger and better connected. Within this category, two zones are identified as follows:

Core Expansion Zone 1: Comprises those land parcels that are of lower ecological value than those in the Core Habitat Zone but due to inherent value or location have the most potential to contribute to a coherent ecological network.

Core Expansion Zone 2: Comprises all areas of green space that do not meet the criteria for inclusion in Zone 1. These provide an opportunity for the restoration and creation of new habitats but investment in these areas is a lower ecological priority than those areas in Zone 1 but may be higher priority from an environmental justice point of view.

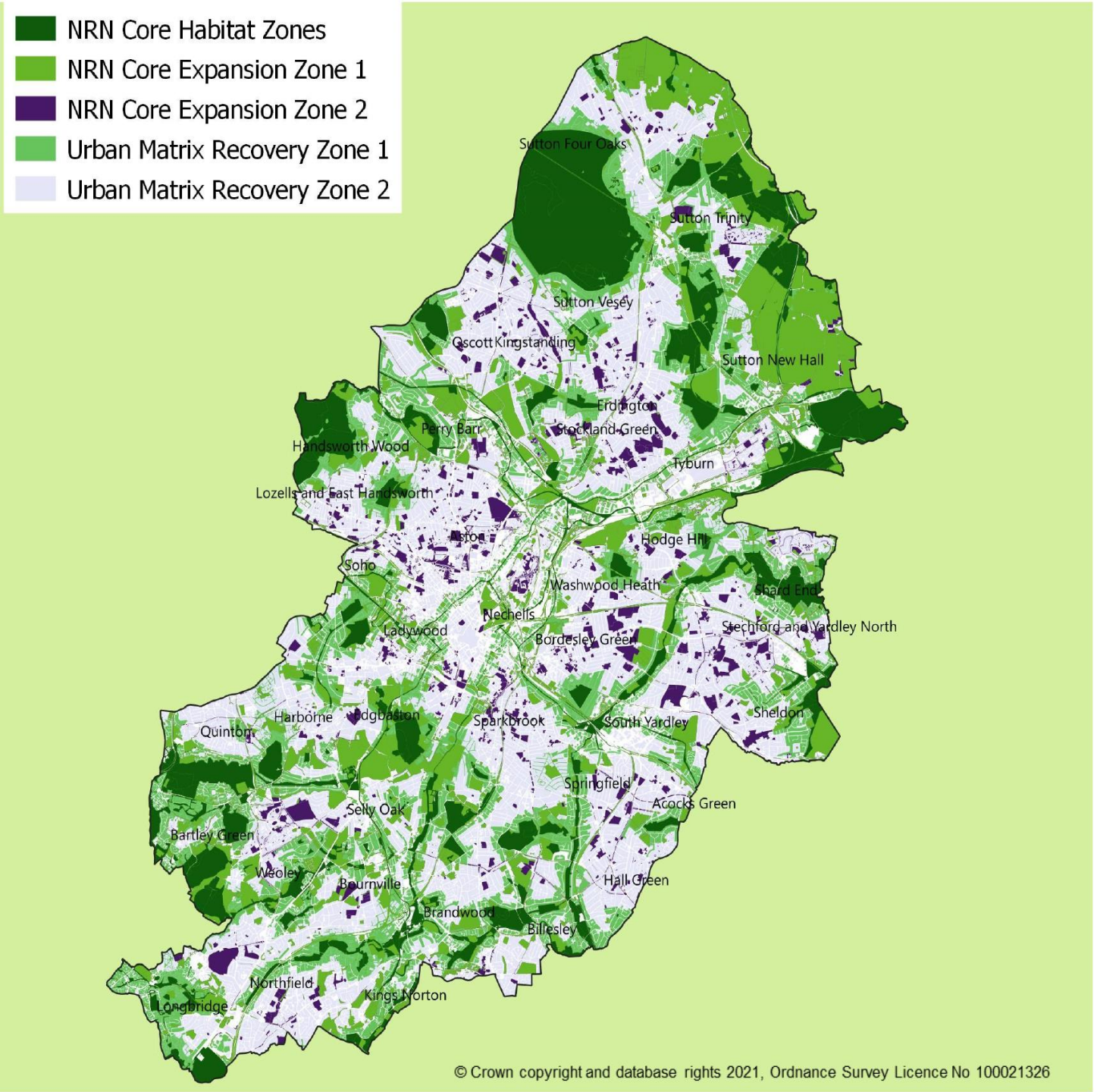
The strategic objectives for these areas are Restoration, Enhancement, Creation

NRN Urban Matrix Recovery Zones: The remaining areas of the Urban Landscape Matrix form part of this category. Within this category, two zones were identified as follows:

Urban Matrix Recovery Zone 1: Comprises all features of the built environment within 100 meters of the Core Habitat Zones and may include residential and commercial properties, gardens, road verges, street trees and minor water courses.

The protection, enhancement, and creation of green infrastructure within these areas is a priority.

Urban Matrix Recovery Zone 2: Comprises all features of the built environment outside of Zone 1. These areas provide an opportunity for the protection, enhancement, and creation of green infrastructure.



Changing the management of grass areas



Starting with “No Mow May”

The No Mow May Movement is a campaign of **Plantlife** a UK charity whose aims are to promote awareness of the decline in flora species and encourage more appropriate consideration of management of garden spaces and grasslands. They say – “We’ve lost approximately 97% of flower-rich meadows since the 1930’s and with them gone are vital food needed by pollinators, like bees and butterflies. But your lawn can help! A healthy lawn with some long grass and wildflowers benefits wildlife, tackles pollution and can even lock away carbon below ground. With over 20 million gardens in the UK, even the smallest grassy patches add up to a significant proportion of our land which, if managed properly, can deliver enormous gains for nature, communities and the climate.” This is why since 2019 Plantlife calls for people to get involved with No Mow May every year. Awareness of this campaign has been growing especially within the wider public and requests for local authorities to commit to this campaign have been growing.

Birmingham’s No Mow May Trial

In 2023 a trial of No Mow May was run in four wards in Birmingham. Blanket cessation of mowing occurred during the month of May with a return to mowing in June. Appropriateness of the location and the nature of the grass sward was not taken into consideration leading to very mixed results. Public engagement was limited so although there was some support there were an increased number of complaints from residents in the trial wards.

The No Mow May campaign is simple to understand and apply however, there are several issues with such a simple message and approach in urban amenity areas:

- The campaign was primarily aimed at domestic gardens and rural local authorities where highway verges are likely to be relicts of former meadow.
- The standard approach is not well suited to more urban environments – especially as urban verges tend to be floristically poor.
- It is an oversimplification and not generally ecologically desirable to cut areas of long grass in June that have been allowed to grow in May as it is a key food source for a range of invertebrates (this is now recognised by Plantlife who recommend leaving cutting for as long as possible).
- There are some grassland habitat types that only thrive because mowing simulates the constant grazing of herbivores, like sheep and cows, so stopping mowing these areas would ecologically degrade them.

To promote nature recovery in the city we will need to consider and change how our grassed areas are managed however a more considered approach and longer-term view is needed if this is to be successful and accepted by the wider population.

Biodiversity of grass areas

Not all public grassed areas will deliver significant Biodiversity benefits (supporting the LNRN) if just left unmown or have a reduced mowing regime implemented.

Some areas will need to be retained as regularly mown for amenity reasons or for safety implications such as highway visibility.

Many areas would need some form of intervention to increase floristic diversity while other areas, due to their high nutrient level or small size may never produce much floristic diversity through just a change in mowing but could be enhanced with spring or autumn bulb planting - for example.

There are however several co-benefits of reduced mowing even on areas of low floristic diversity.

- Increased carbon capture.
- Decrease in the carbon footprint of mowing operations
- Reduced operations by heavy plant equipment will reduce soil compaction leading to:
 - Greater number of soil dwelling invertebrates – better soil health
 - Increased aeration of soils
 - Increased infiltration rates of storm water
 - Increased canopy growth of trees (supported by the above) – which in turn support the Urban Forest Master Plan
 - Decreased damage to trees caused by mowers and other equipment (supporting the UFMP)
 - Decreased/ slowed surface water run off during storm events.

**We need to promote all these aspects when implementing the changes in management
This must be a long-term sustainable change.**



Further considerations

There are several further considerations that must be given to successfully roll out a change in management these include:

- Adopting a clear and robust process for decision making on what will be implemented where in order to minimize future complaints but also deliver maximum biodiversity benefits.
- Using extensive publicity on the changes to be made – this includes the reasons for the changes and how this will be delivered.
- Using on site signage to promote our work
- Taking a strategic city-wide approach to roll out – not ward by ward but by considering where biggest Nature Recovery Network benefits could be delivered quickly and easily with minimal impacts on residents.
- Review machinery purchase and use, as existing machinery may not be sufficient or effective/ efficient enough to deliver the required management objectives. Change of over time in line with expansion of change of management.
- Training required for staff to be able to identify and implement changes and explain this to residents as informal enquiries occur.
- Plan to engage citizens and special interest groups in identifying potential locations and monitoring of the results.

We want this well managed look



Not this neglected look



A to Bee Roads



The proposal for 2024 was to roll out of an initiative called A to Bee Roads. This will provide a strategic approach to start the wider roll out of a systematic change in mowing regimes focusing on key transport corridors typically A roads. This would start with cessation or reduction of mowing on central reservations aiming to have the least impact on residents while still delivering a highly visible and successful initiative.

A review across the 10 Constituencies indicated that by just considering central reservations alone this provides the potential for approx. 100 Km of grass verges. These verges (aside from mow strips may only require an annual flail cut where growth is limited or cut and collect in areas of higher growth or floristic diversity.

Cut and collect as an operation at present is around the same cost as the annual frequent mowing revenue sums. Changes in equipment over time may reduce that cost.

This shouldn't be seen as a cost saving exercise (although it may produce some longer term) but a change of practices in light of climate change and biodiversity.

Short term savings (within year) should be reinvested in delivering biodiversity enhancements in those less floristically diverse verges.

Birmingham 2024 - A to Bee Roads					
Constituency	Route	Verge type	Distance -	Notes:	
Edgbaston	Hagley road west: Quinton to Bearwood	Central reservation	2.6	Poss Sandwell management	
Edgbaston	Stoney Lane - Ridge Acre road - Court Oak Road	Central reservation	2.5		
Edgbaston	Barnes Hill - West Blvrd - Wlvhampton Rd Sth to Hagley Road	Central reservation	3.2		
Edgbaston	Quinton Road west	Central reservation	0.5		
Edgbaston	Harborne Park Road	Central reservation	0.8		
Edgbaston	Jiggins Lane	Central reservation	0.6	Seperates service road	
Edgbaston	Pebble Mill Road	Central reservation	0.3		
Edgbaston	Bristol Road :Selly Oak to Pebble Mill Road	Central reservation	1.1	Has cycleway	
Edgbaston	Quinton Expressway	Central reservation	1.6		
Erdington	Kings Road	Central reservation	1.3	Also in Perry Barr and SC	Sutton Col
Erdington	Colledge road: Chester road to Warren Rd Junc	Central reservation	2.2		Yardley
Erdington	Chester road:Suttin Road to Spitfire Island	Central reservation	3.4		Perry Barr
Erdington	Tyburn Road: Spagetti Junc to Kendrick Drive (eachelhurst rd)	Central reservation	4.5		
Hall Green	Robin Hood Lane: Marion Way to Stratfird Road	Central reservation	1.5		
Hall Green	Highfield Road: Cole Vally Road to Stratford Road	Central reservation	1.3		
Hall Green	Fox Hollis Road: Stratford Road to York Road	Central reservation	1.1		
Hall Green	Stratford road: To Green Hill Way	Central reservation	1.5		
Hall Green	Howard Road - Wheelers Lane to Brook Lane	Central reservation	1.2	Seperates service road	
Hodge Hill	Bordesley Green - Bordesley Green East	Central reservation	0.8		
Hodge Hill	Burney Lane	Central reservation	0.5		
Hodge Hill	Bromford Lane - Stechford Lane	Central reservation	1.7		
Hodge Hill	Washwood Heath Road: Foley Road - Stechford Lane	Central reservation	0.5		
Ladywood	Five ways island to Alston Street plus roundabout	Central reservation	0.4		
Ladywood	Alston Street to Spring Hill/ Summer Hill Road	Central reservation	1		
Ladywood	Spring Hill to Heaton Street	Central reservation	0.8		
Ladywood	Wells Street Roundabout to Saummr Lane	Central reservation	0.7		
Ladywood	Lancaster Circus Queensway on to New Town Row	Central reservation	0.1		
Ladywood	NewtownRow (Manchester Street) to Park Lane	Central reservation	0.9		
Ladywood	Dartmouth Circus to Curzon Street Roundabout	Central reservation	1.1		
Ladywood	Jennens Road- James Watt Queens way to Lawley Middleway	Central reservation	0.4		
Ladywood	Nechells Parkway - Lawley middleway to Melvina Road	Central reservation	1.1		
Ladywood	Waterlinks Boulevard/ Victoria Road	Central reservation	0.4		
Ladywood	Belgrave Middleway - Longmore street to Haden Circus	Central reservation	0.4		
Ladywood	Bristol Street - Belgrave middleway to Horsefair	Central reservation	0.7		
Ladywood	Highgate Middleway - Bordesley Middleway - Watery Lane Mdly	central reservation	2		
Northfield	A38 Bristol Road Rubery to Northfeild/ Great stone road	Central reservation	3.6		
Northfield	Lickey Road - Leach green lane to Bristol Road	Central reservation	1.5		
Northfield	Groveley Lane - Nuthurst Rd Inc to Longbridge Lane	Central reservation	0.9	Seperates service road	
Northfield	Cofton Road/ Lilley Lane - Longebridge lane to Redhill Road	Central reservation	0.7	Seperates service road	
Northfield	Longbridge Lane - Station to Reditch Road	Central reservation	1.8	Seperates service road	
Northfield	Alvechurch Road - Reditch Road to Cofton Lane	Central reservation	0.7	Service rd plus some side verge	
Northfield	Alvechurch Road / West Heath Road - The Fordrough to The Morelands	Central reservation	0.4	Seperates service road	
Northfield	Bell Hill- Herbert Austin Way to Longmynd road	Central reservation	1.2	Plus side verge between service road	
Northfield	Shenley Lane / Barnes Hill - Longmynd road to	Central reservation	1.3		
Northfield	Shenley Fields Road - Shenley Lane to Middle Park road	Central reservation	1.2	Seperates service road	
Northfield	Sheneley Fields Road - Witherford Road to Weoley Park Road	Central reservation	0.3		
Northfield	Sir herbert Austin Way - Frankley Beeches road to St Laurence Road	Central reservation	1		
Northfield	A38 - St Laurence Road to Hole Lane	Central reservation	0.8		
Northfield	Redditch Road - The Crest to Redhill Road	Central reservation	0.4	Seperates service road	
Northfield	Redditch Road - Redhill Road to Portage Road	Central reservation	1		
Selly Oak	Priory Road - Slade Lane to School Road	Central reservation	0.9		
Selly Oak	Trittiford Road	Broad side verges	1.1		
Selly Oak	Yardley Wood Road - Brook Lane to Warstock Lane	Central reservation	2	Service rd plus some side verge	
Selly Oak	Warstock Road - Alcster road to Prince of Wales Lane	Central reservation	1.2		
Selly Oak	Broad Lane	Central reservation	0.4	seperates service road	
Selly Oak	Cartland road	Central reservation	0.7	Seperates service road	
Selly Oak	Bristol Road- Weoley road to Lodge Hill Road	Central reservation	0.5		
Selly Oak	Bristol Road - Hole Lane to Weoley Road	Central reservation	1.5		

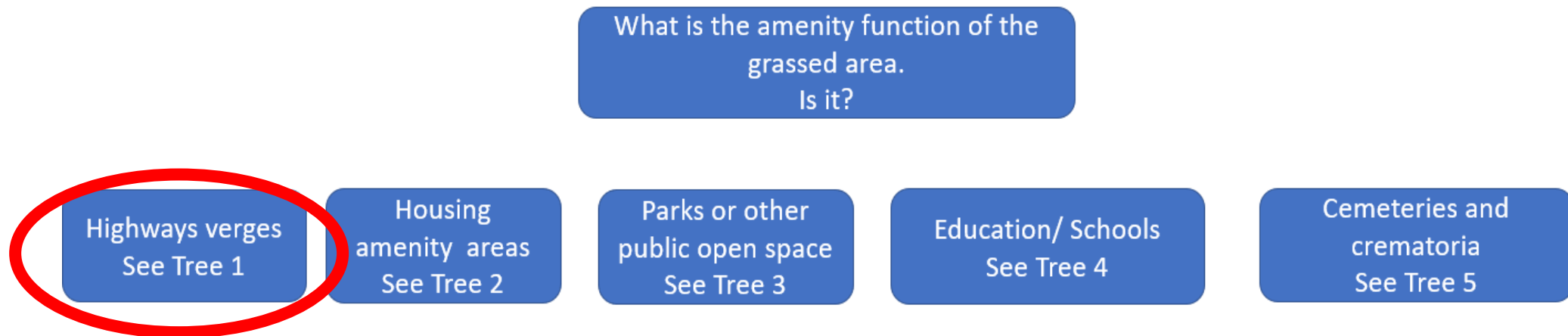
Deciding where can we change the management of grass habitats



We needed to develop a clear and robust process for decision making on what management changes will be implemented where. We wanted to try and balance to retaining as much amenity use as possible, but also delivering maximum biodiversity and environmental benefits.

Highways and highways green spaces form a network through out the city. They can be seen by most people living in and visiting the city, but their green spaces have some of the least physical access of all the council owned grass assets.

This made highways a good place to start looking at changes in grass management.

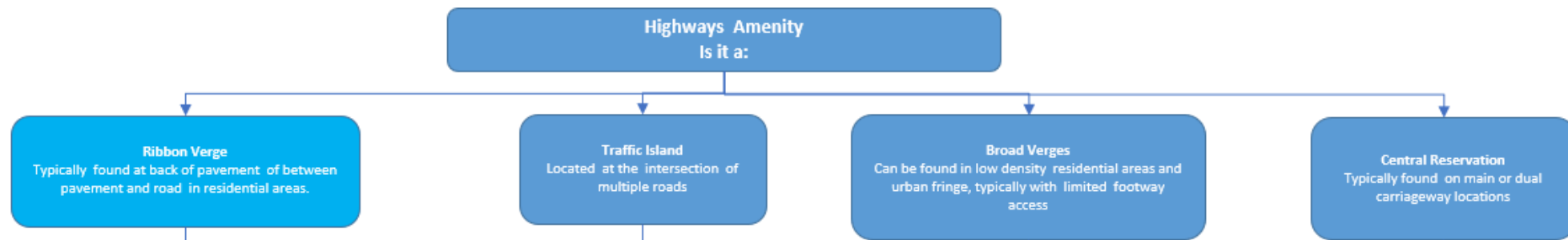


Reducing impacts on amenity use

There are generally four different kinds of Highways asset type that are used in different ways:

- Ribbon Verges – Typically found at the back of pedestrian pavements or between the pedestrian pavement / footway and the carriageway in residential areas.
- Traffic islands / roundabouts – Located at the intersection of multiple roads, typically have no pedestrian pavements.
- Broad Verges – Typically found in low density residential areas and urban fringe, typically have little footways across them.
- Central reservations – Typically found on main or dual carriageways, typically have no or little footways.

You can see typical examples of these types of grass assets on the next two slides.



Ribbon verge examples



Wide verge examples



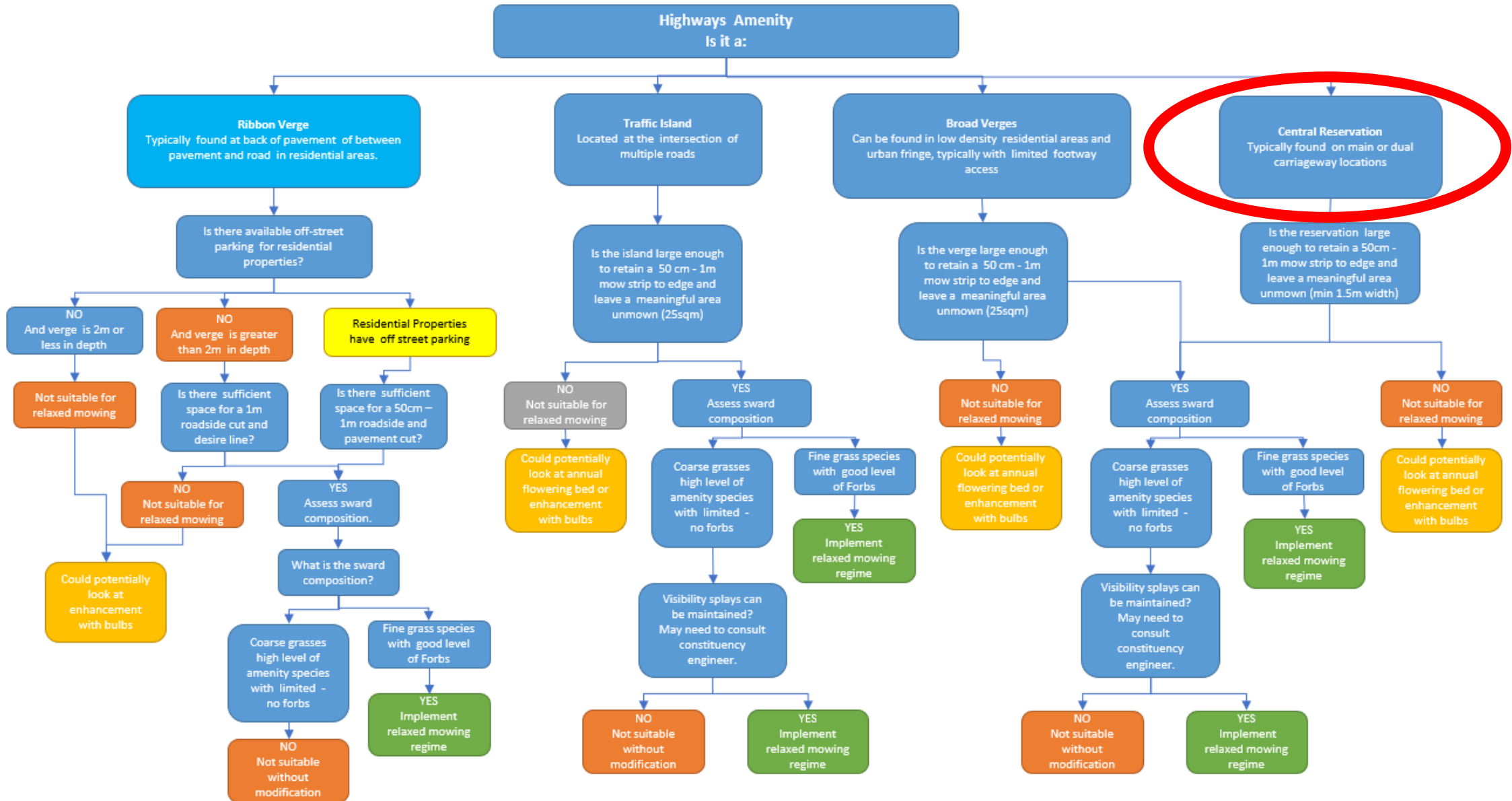
Roundabout - potentially no visibility issues.



Central reservation – any visibility issues managed.



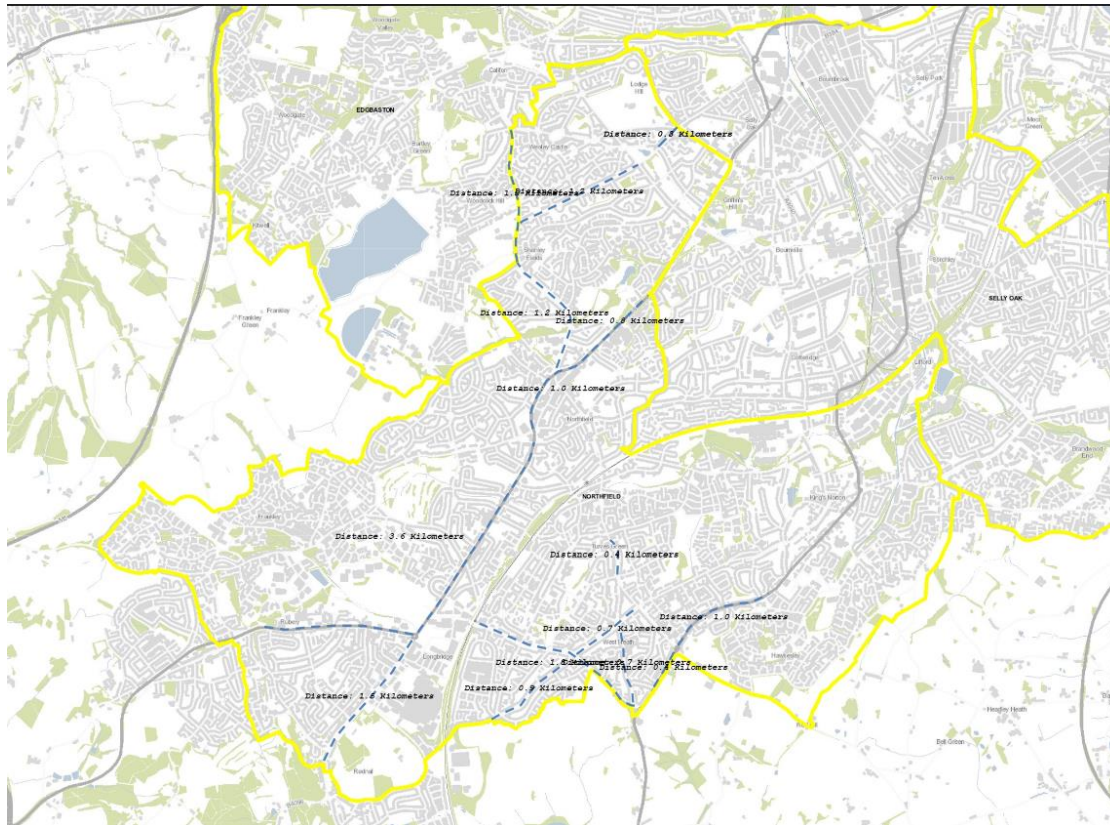
Highways green space decision tree



Example - Northfield Constituency – Central Reservations

Potential to deliver:

- 17km of habitat intervention on central reservation areas with currently around 10 cuts per annum – (this would be reduced just to the edge cuts, anything required for visibility and to retain a managed look)
- Create key ecological connectivity between core habitat areas identified with the local LNRS



Webpage and onsite signage

A to Bee Roads – reducing mowing and helping the city's ecology



Published: Wednesday, 6th March 2024

A new initiative to increase biodiversity, reduce the council's carbon footprint and help mitigate elements of climate change is set to be implemented during the 2024 grass growing season.

The pilot programme, entitled A to Bee Roads, will change the frequency of mowing on around 100km of central reservations and will act as a long-term, more strategic approach [following the trial of No Mow May](#).

Cllr Majid Mahmood, cabinet member for environment said: "This is a great project that supports the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Network by promoting ecological connections between existing high-value sites.

"It also supports the city's Net Zero ambitions as changing the mowing regime of selected areas will reduce the overall need for fuel by reducing the total operating hours and mileage of each machine, and aligns with our ongoing plan to reduce and ultimately phase out the use of pesticides in our parks and open spaces.

"Although No Mow May has grown in popularity, the ecological value of ceasing mowing for four weeks alone is negligible. Ceasing all mowing of all previously mown grass is also not desirable as some flora communities only survive as the repeated cutting replicates grazing by herbivores.

"So, we have to be strategic which is why we have designed the A to Bee Roads pilot for this year, which will cover 51 wards, compared to just four wards covered by our No Mow May experiment. And those wards not covered already have a number of sites that are of value for urban wildlife including pollinators, have areas of high ecological value or will see trials in open green space as part of an emerging 'Birmingham's Buzzing Parks' project."

Signage showing places where the scheme will be implemented will be placed on the central reservations.

To ensure the safety of all road users and pedestrians, edge cuts and visibility – giving road users a clear view of oncoming traffic – will be retained.

BIRMINGHAM'S A TO BEE ROADS

WE ARE CHANGING THE MANAGEMENT OF THIS GRASS VERGE.



By doing this we will:

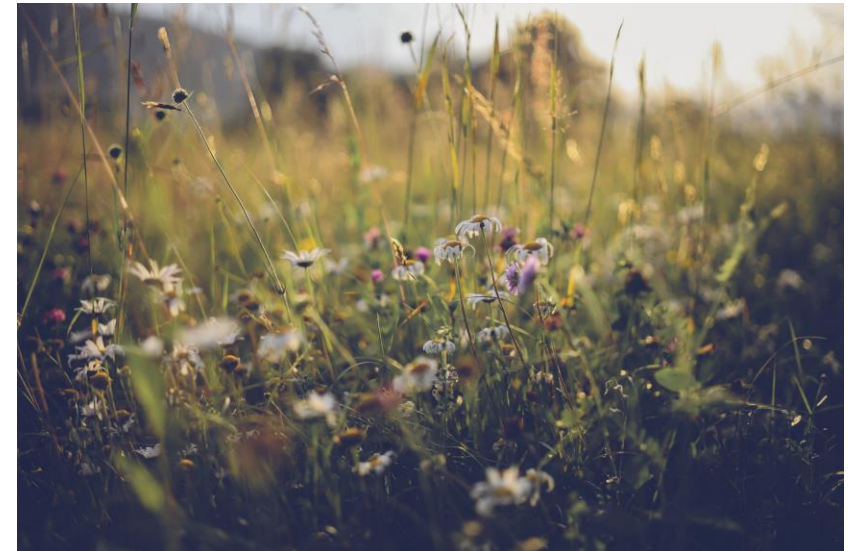
- Support pollinators by allowing plants to flower and provide a food source for their young
- Aid the delivery of our Local Nature Recovery Network
- Retain more storm water, slow the flow and reduce flood risk
- Capture more carbon and reduce our carbon footprint



Potential for further roll out over the next five years

What we want to do next:

- Review machinery purchase and use, as existing machinery may not be sufficient or effective/ efficient enough to deliver the required management objectives.
- Training required for staff to be able to identify and implement changes and explain this to residents as informal enquiries occur.
- Review comments and complaints received this year.
- Engage citizens and special interest groups in identifying potential new locations.
- Engage citizens in monitoring results and developing the roll out of Birmingham's nature recovery network
- Consider creating "Birmingham's Buzzing Parks."





Presentation by:

Simon Needle – BCC City of Nature
Programme Lead

To get involved or for more information you can email:

Cityofnature@Birmingham.gov.uk

Or visit the webpage: [A to Bee Roads – reducing mowing and helping the city's ecology | Birmingham City Council](#)



RESET

RESHAPE

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