

<b>DON'T MOW LET IT GROW</b>	<b>7<sup>th</sup> February 2017</b>
<b>To: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE</b>	
<b>FOR INFORMATION</b>	

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)</b>	
<b>Strategic Theme</b>	Protecting & Enhancing our Environments & Assets
<b>Outcome</b>	Natural assets carefully managed to generate economic and social returns without compromising their sustainability for future generations
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Gareth Doyle – Head of Estates Rachel Bain – Biodiversity Officer
<b>Cost: (If applicable)</b>	Zero to Council (£140,000 funding)

### **1.0 The purpose of this report is to provide an update in the Don't Mow Let It Grow project:**

The Don't Mow Let it Grow (DMLIG) project has had a very successful first year, with the introduction of the scheme across 24 TNI verges (180 linear km), and 18 areas within our Council parks, all of which were identified with DMLIG signage. A habitat survey was carried out at all the sites and these surveys revealed a wide range of vegetation types and quality, with some notable highlights including orchids, harebells, herb-rich displays and woodland flora. Although not all verges & Council parks were rich in biodiversity many of those surveyed showed potential for improvement through DMLIG.

A dedicated website has been set up ([www.dontmowletitgrow.com](http://www.dontmowletitgrow.com)) along with a Facebook page (don't mow let it grow), both of which have been increasing in user numbers each month. The Facebook page currently has 563 likes, having reached 7,300 people.

By 13<sup>th</sup> Oct equivalent advertising value of press coverage was £30,850 including; support from local press, full page coverage from Irish News including Minister statement, an article in Farm Week and the Minister referring to Don't Mow Let It Grow as an innovative project which is providing habitat for pollinating insects on BBC Talk Back 23 June 2016.

There has been excellent volunteer engagement, with volunteers carrying out habitat surveys, taking photos of the sites, assisting with the roadshows, promoting the project and getting involved in the practical management of the sites.

The Don't Mow Let It Grow road had interactive stand at several events over the summer including. Riverfest, Airwaves, Salmon & Whiskey Festival and the Cornfield project launch. Promotional leaflets, frisbees and windows stickers were given out. In addition the project was invited participate in many other related events including the Belfast City of Wildflowers, Pollinator Pow Wow and as part of the successful Coleraine Britain in Bloom entry.

There were a total of six training events held including Council and Transport NI staff training, background to the project, how we are proposing to manage the sites and why, invasive alien species identification and management. Two training events were also held for the volunteer surveyors on survey methodology and plant species identification.

Key information was gathered through the Public Perception Survey, which was carried out as part of the funding criteria to provide evidence to support the benefits of Don't Mow Let it Grow, which included:

- In total, 190 people participated in the survey
- Around 97% of respondents think it is important to manage areas in NI for wildlife
- 80% of respondents prefer the longer grass shown in photos to shortly mown grass
- The vast majority of respondents (~95%) felt it was important to increase public understanding of our native plants and animals
- Wildlife benefits were rated as the most important benefits of the project, followed by well-being, and monetary savings benefits respectively
- Most of the respondents (around ¾) did not live in CCG but were regular visitors, and just under 80% agreed or strongly agreed that “The quality of greenspace impacts their decision of whether or not (or how often) to visit the area.” This has particular implications for economic impacts that arise from visitors and tourism as it is strong evidence linking how the management of greenspace can increase visitor numbers and all the things that go along with it, such as visitor spending.
- 56% of respondents are not happy with the current amount and quality of greenspace in their local area
- Over 70% of respondents agree or strongly agree that:
  - Greenspace should be managed to benefit both humans and other species
  - Increasing the quality of local greenspace makes an area a more desirable place to live

The habitat survey data from year one is currently being inputted and the individual site management plans being developed.

Year two will focus on the management of existing sites, linking volunteers to individual sites and gathering information for the economic appraisal & cost benefit analysis.

Some of this year's sites were cut & lifted by a local farmer and others have taken the cut grass as fodder. More work will be done to extend this option of linking farmers to individual sites who could cut and lift these sites for fodder.

Year 1 has been very successful showing that there is an appetite for grassland management which benefits Council, wildlife and the public. It is anticipated that Years 2 & 3 will continue to build on this success.



Harebells at Ramore Head



Volunteers survey training, Riverside Park  
Orchids, buttercups & Clover,  
Drumcroone Road



Don't Mow Let It Grow in action  
Don't Mow Let It Grow Road Show  
At Airwaves 2016