

## *Grassland Management Policy*

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As with all our Estates work, the primary objectives for managing grassland and our mission are to protect biodiversity and deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), demonstrating to all interested parties (LPAs, residents, professional institutes, etc.) that this is being achieved and maintained. We do this through application of our Grassland Policy *via* our Grassland Management Prescription *q.v.* We maintain a focus on conserving Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital, both in terms of Critical Natural Capital (CNC) and Constant Natural Assets (CNA).

There are some forty main communities of native grasslands in Britain, depending on altitude, soil pH, drainage, salinity, exposure, past land-use and other factors. We consider grassland in three broad grassland types on our sites which may be small or large expanses: short grass, parkland grass and meadow. Note that we do not use herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers on any grassland. **We do not mulch mow** as this depresses botanical diversity by smothering forbs (non-grass species), some of which, such as eyebrights and yellow-rattle, we use to suppress over-vigorous grass swards. Although it would be good to have our own grassland grazing stock, it is not practical for us to have sheep, for example, at this time. We also place much emphasis on maintaining the soils in good condition, conserving the fungal microbiome as well as a healthy community of edaphic micro-organisms generally.

### **SHORT GRASS**

This is usually the dominant type on amenity areas, that is the edges of paths, paths themselves that are mown, play areas and roadside verges not adopted by the local Council (although sometimes verges may be of a taller sward). There are two categories:

On areas with even ground, usually landscaped (sown/turfed) by the developer as lawn or play areas, grass is cut once per fortnight in the growing season to a height of 25mm. The exception is that there can usefully be a mowing break of four to five weeks in May/June to allow more species to flower.

On ground that is not so even, such as grass paths, verges, the edges of hard-surfaced paths and similar, mower blades are set somewhat higher to avoid scalping the sward.

Arisings, as with all our grassed areas, must always be removed for composting.

A standard pedestrian or ride-on lawn mower will be ideal for this short grass regimen. Electric machines are coming onto the market, and these are preferred as long as the required performance is guaranteed.

## PARKLAND GRASS

This is grassland where a sward height is cut less frequently than the short grass to about 70mm to 150mm. It is a good solution for areas for picnics, informal play and moderate recreational use. The cutting regime is applied at two-monthly intervals in April, June, August and October. As with all cutting, arisings must be removed for composting. Shorter-mown paths may be made through parkland grass.

Many standard lawnmowers will not tackle this sward height or collect arisings. Care is therefore needed in selection. Since some of our parkland areas are large, a ride-on with suitable power and cutting height will be required. Smaller areas may be able to be cut with a powerful cut-and-collect pedestrian, machine but it must be able to tackle longer grass and cut to 70mm. For smaller areas, strimming **plus raking** is an option.

## MEADOW

This is our preferred grassland type as it provides the highest botanical diversity and consequently is most favoured by wildlife, especially pollinators and other invertebrates but also birds, herpetofauna and small mammals.

Meadow grassland falls into two broad types: spring and summer, and we should aim to have representation of both within our grassland estate. Spring meadows are traditionally used to yield a hay crop in late June, and they encourage vernal flowers which can set seed before the hay is cut. The hay cut is the first cut. It is made to 50mm sward height and is mid to late June to take the hay. If the hay is not sold or donated, it may have to go to a specialist site for recycling/ composting. The meadow is then cut approximately monthly to 100mm until October, with arisings composted.

Summer meadows (for summer flowers) require regular cutting to a 50mm sward height with a powerful ride-on or tractor-towed cut-and-collect mower from March to early June. From then on there is no cutting until the hay is taken after summer flowers have set and shed seed, usually September or even later. This regime also aids in reducing aggressive coarse grasses.

Meadows require a farmer/contractor with hay cutting, turning and baling equipment for the hay, then a powerful cut-and-collect ride-on for the rest of the season.