

EDINBURGH LIVING LANDSCAPES

REVIEW

2014 – 2018



Typical annual meadow – Sighthill Park

Launched in 2014 by the Minister for Local Government and Planning, the Edinburgh Living Landscape is a long-term vision to ensure that nature is at the heart of the city's future. It demonstrates that investment in the natural environment makes economic sense as well as increasing biodiversity and creating healthier urban ecosystems for residents and visitors.

Led by a partnership including the [Scottish Wildlife Trust](#), [City of Edinburgh Council](#), [Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh](#), [Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust](#), and [The University of Edinburgh](#), the Edinburgh Living Landscape will reinforce and expand existing green networks and reconnect the people of Edinburgh to their natural environment, so that the city is one of the most sustainable in Europe by 2050. More information can be found at <https://edinburghlivinglandscape.org.uk/>

The Edinburgh Living Landscape partnership is delivering projects across the city. One of its flagship projects is being led by the Council's Parks, Greenspace & Cemeteries Service ... to transform underused and species poor amenity grassland into biodiversity rich and attractive grassland through reduced mowing frequency and the addition of wildflowers from seeds and bulbs. This report reviews progress to date and clarifies the next steps in the creation of this *living landscape*.

Phase 1 - 2015

The Council's outdoor estate was GIS mapped, and from this data it was estimated that up to 25% of standard amenity grassland (i.e. grass cut between 14-18 times per year) could be maintained as *living landscape* (i.e. one or two grass cuts per year).

An extensive communication and engagement exercise took place in 2015, which included discussions and training with staff, community and Councillor briefings, posters, and signage, as well as web pages and a presence on the Council's Edinburgh Outdoors social media platform via Twitter and Facebook.

At the end of Phase 1 some 4% of amenity grassland had been transformed into living landscape. 64 colourful annual and perennial sown floral meadows proved to be very popular. Although those grasslands receiving a reduced frequency of grass cut also benefited from naturalisation by flowering plants, these were often considered to be too unkempt by some residents, notably those nearby houses.

As the living landscape programme represented a new approach to managing our own greenspace it was agreed that a review should take place at the end of each season. Recommendations included:

- Further staff training and support on meadow preparation and design
- All bankings/steep slopes, underneath tree copses and bulb-planted areas should become naturalised grass sites
- Review operations and invest in appropriate machinery
- Increased site monitoring
- Continued consultations with dissatisfied users to ameliorate concerns.

Phase 2 – 2016

By implementing the Phase 1 recommendations and identifying further areas to naturalise approximately 13% of the grassland estate was transformed into living landscape (LL).

During this phase further guidance was given to staff to supplement their initial training, including support materials – to increase knowledge and skills about LL; fact sheets – to help answer public queries; and maps of LL locations in their Locality.

Some redesign of meadow sites took place, often involving communities, with an emphasis on increasing site size and integration with other living landscape features, such as naturalised grass, shrubs and trees.

Phase 2 also saw the introduction of 10 new perennial meadows across the city, and more robust monitoring of sites highlighted as having visual issues, such as invasive thistles and dockens.

Additional recommendations made included: continued staff training and support, continued Councillor and community briefings, and publication of an online map of LL sites, available on the council's website.

Phase 3 - 2017

The online interactive map was published in January and invitations to discuss Edinburgh Living Landscape were issued to all political groups by March.

The programme was promoted to the wider public at each Locality Improvement Plan event, including a total of 18 meetings with Community Councils, Friends Groups, Residents Associations and schools.

An emphasis was put on ensuring that existing sites were being managed efficiently and improved where possible rather than further expansion.

In total there were 47 annual meadows and 36 perennial meadows created city-wide. Annual meadows were slow in establishing in 2017 due to a dry Spring and it became clear that around 12 of these were being dominated by Corn Marigold seed from previous seasons. This has highlighted seed provenance issues, with suppliers not being able to give a completely accurate species list when purchasing. This will be addressed in 2018.

As mentioned, naturalised grass areas were not increased in size but had an emphasis on improvement through better maintenance and the introduction of yellow rattle and bulb planting on certain sites– including *Allium* and *Camassia* species.



Typical naturalised grass – Pilrig Park

Despite there still being a mixed response to some of these sites, the Living Landscape team only received 40 complaints throughout the entire season. Recommendations for Phase 4 include: further emphasis on improving existing sites; a wider communication strategy for Phase 4; continued staff training and development; introducing an improved, more detailed interactive map of sites; and a review of seed suppliers and the creation of our own 'custom' seed mix at the Inch Nursery for several sites.

Phase 4 - 2018

2018 will see additional areas adopted into the living landscape programme, including Little France Park, some former-EDI maintained land and sites along the tram route that will now be managed by CEC.

New living landscape features will also be created as part of the development of Active Travel routes in the city. Initial work and costings have centred around two sites – Lower Granton Road and in Stenhouse. Engagement with the team involved has looked at incorporating a more natural landscape with bulbs or meadows following reinstatement works.

Over the winter months of 2017/18 further work will be carried out to refine meadow sites and 1000 trees will be planted in suitable locations.

Briefings will be offered to elected members and the wider community and will be supplemented by further engagement with Locality staff. A number of Friends of Parks groups are already carrying out their own LL work, including extensive bulb planting in naturalised grass areas.



Bulb planting day at Gyle Park

Phase 4 of the programme will continue to identify sites that are receiving negative feedback, with a view to target these areas for improvement, whether it be through bulb planting or seeding. Bulb species include Camassia, Alliums, Bluebells, Crocosmia and Daffodils - with a balance of early flowering and summer bulbs being introduced, which will make sites more visually interesting and also benefit biodiversity



Camassia in naturalised grass



Allium in naturalised grass

Summary

As with Phase 3, a consolidation exercise is underway, ensuring that existing living landscape features are increasingly visually attractive to people and beneficial to biodiversity. This will be achieved through better site definition (cut edges and footpaths), colour addition (including over 500,000 flowering bulbs and nearly 90 floral meadows) and avoidance of well-used recreational spaces.

Continued engagement with users and nearby residents will also be key to the success of living landscapes. We will continue to listen to and meet with those with either an interest or concern.

For further information contact: parks@edinburgh.gov.uk

