Amenity Grassland Management Policy

Introduction:

The University manages areas of amenity grassland to facilitate recreational activities, enhance the aesthetics of its buildings and to blend its campuses into their surrounding landscapes and local environments. In addition, these areas of amenity grassland provide habitats for a range of flora and fauna in the urban and semi-urban landscape and support biodiversity, sequester carbon and sustain soil structure and health. Therefore, the management of amenity grasslands must balance the ecosystem services they can provide with the expectations and desires of all other users. This policy outlines the principles and guidelines for managing amenity grasslands to maximise both their ecological and aesthetic value and highlights the opportunities for transforming certain areas of amenity grassland into richer habitats that can increase species richness and abundance.

Policy Statement:

The management of amenity grasslands must ensure that they are maintained in a way that balances the needs of the University, biodiversity, recreational use, and environmental sustainability.

Policy Objectives for Managing and Improving Existing Amenity Grassland:

1. Promote biodiversity: The management of amenity grasslands must promote biodiversity by creating and maintaining habitats for a range of plant and animal species.
2. Promote environmental sustainability: The management of amenity grasslands must promote environmental sustainability by reducing the carbon footprint of annual maintenance, especially emissions attributed to fuel, electricity and chemicals and minimise any other negative impacts on the environment. The management regime must also protect the soil and water resources by promoting sustainable land use practices.
3. Maintain safety: The management of amenity grasslands must ensure that they are safe for public use by managing potential hazards such as uneven terrain, dangerous plant species, and other potential risks.
4. Enhance aesthetics: The management of amenity grasslands must enhance the aesthetic appeal of the landscape, making it an attractive place for people to visit and enjoy. It must also enhance cultural heritage and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation.
5. Increase public awareness: Promote the importance of amenity grasslands and communicate changes to habitat management for the benefit of wildlife.

Key Principles of Amenity Grassland Management:

1. Habitat management: The management of amenity grasslands will consider the creation and maintenance of habitats for a range of plant and animal species. This can be achieved

through various measures, such as the planting of native wildflowers, shrubs and trees and the installing shelters and homes for wildlife.

2. Maintenance and mowing: The management of amenity grasslands must ensure that maintenance and mowing regimes are carefully planned and implemented to balance the needs of biodiversity and recreational use. This may involve managing the frequency and timing of mowing and other maintenance to sustain a range of vegetation heights in which different communities of plants, insects and wildlife can establish and flourish. This may also include leaving some areas uncut through spring and summer to provide habitats for additional species.
3. Herbicide and chemical use: The management of amenity grasslands must minimize the use of herbicides and other chemicals that may cause negative impacts on the environment. Where chemicals are necessary, they should be used in a way that minimizes harm to non-target species and the wider environment.
4. Hazard management: The management of amenity grasslands must identify and manage potential hazards to public safety, such as uneven terrain and falls, dangerous plant species, and other potential risks.
5. Access management: The management of amenity grasslands must ensure that access to the site is managed in a way that minimizes damage to the environment and maximizes safety for visitors.

Amenity Grassland Management Plan –

Overview -

Amenity grasslands can provide habitats for some plant, insect and animal species, especially those that are adapted to open, grassy environments. The University manages several types of amenity grassland across its estate, each of which contain their own unique species mix.

Mowing remains the primary tool for managing grassland vegetation across the University's estate. However, reducing the frequency of mowing in certain areas to once or twice annually allows certain plant species to flower and set seed, providing a food source for insects and other wildlife. By also controlling the timing of mowing, the University's Grounds and Landscaping team and staff at Treborth Botanic Garden can deliver a variety of vegetation heights and micro-habitats, which support different species of plants and animals throughout the year.

Collecting cut grass, or raking-off, can also be considered in suitable areas of amenity grassland, as this management practice prevents the build-up of dead vegetation, which can smother delicate plants. Collecting cut grass also leaves more exposed ground to allow seeds to grow, reduces soil fertility and slows the growth of coarse grasses which can outcompete herbs and wildflowers.

The Plan -

The Amenity Grassland Management Plan aims to improve the quality of amenity grassland and increase biodiversity across the University estate, as well as maintaining the amenity value of certain areas, including formal lawns, for the enjoyment of students, staff and the public.

The Plan consists of the following components and actions:

1. **Identify existing grassland types**

    a. Identify the different types of grasslands on the University estate, including meadows, lawns, and recreational areas.

    - Amenity grassland areas will be surveyed and classified using the Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) or other comparable methodology.
    - NVC - Phase 2 Habitat Survey can be used in targeted areas to provide more detailed information concerning species mixture and abundance.
    - Ensure adequate budget to fund external ecologist contractors for the above surveying.
    - Surveying will also be carried out by qualified staff and students

    b. Create a map of amenity grassland on campus

    - Use ArcGIS Pro or equivalent

2. **Define current amenity grassland management practices**

    a. Develop **specific management plans** for each grassland type based on their characteristics and purpose

    - Create a plan for every amenity grassland/site

    b. Determine the **frequency of mowing** to maintain the desired height of grasses and control invasive species (e.g. annual cut, 2-3 cuts per season, once in autumn, etc.)

    - Create matrix for mowing
    - Grounds and Landscape and Treborth Botanic Garden to collaborate and share expertise and knowledge concerning mowing techniques where appropriate

    c. Ensure that grasslands are regularly **monitored** for changes in species mix and habitat quality

    - Create matrix for monitoring
    - Connect with student societies and clubs for monitoring support

    d. **Manage nutrients** in newly planted areas adjacent amenity grasslands (mulching and applying in-house produced compost to newly planted shrubs and trees)

- Species and areas designated for planting to be included in each amenity grassland management plan

e. **Manage invasive species-** Invasive species and noxious weeds can outcompete native plants and reduce biodiversity within grasslands. Managing invasive species through a combination of physical removal and by planting other native species to compete for the same habitat, can help to maintain or restore biodiversity within amenity grasslands.

- Any invasive species identified will be included in each amenity grassland site's management plan, as well as a programme for control or elimination of the invasive species.

3. **Identify new management practices to enhance biodiversity in amenity grasslands-** Transforming amenity grasslands into richer habitats for wildlife can be achieved by implementing a range of measures that aim to create diverse habitats, increase connectivity between habitats, and reduce disturbance:

a. **Encourage the development of diverse grassland structure**- Grasslands can have a diverse structure, including short grasses, tall grasses, and patches of bare ground, which provide a range of habitats for different plant and animal species.
   - Indicate areas in each grassland plan where structure can be established or improved

b. **Create specific micro-habitats within or adjacent to amenity grassland** - Planting hedges, shrubs and trees and creating boggy areas within or on the edges of amenity grassland can provide additional habitats.
   - Indicate areas in each grassland plan where micro-habitats can be established or improved

c. **Reduce disturbance from recreational activities** - Reducing the impact of activities such as dog-walking or cycling can help maintain the biodiversity of amenity grasslands. This can be achieved through designated paths, fencing, and signage.
   - Define and indicate where disturbance can be reduced

d. **Designate new areas of grassland** in early spring and allow to grow through the summer
   - Scope new areas in the individual site management plans

e. **Manage current grassland to include marginal habitats** - introduce suitable native species to the periphery of grassland areas and manage the grassland sensitively to encourage a diverse marginal sward.
   - Scope areas for planting in the individual site management plans

4. **Creating new habitats to benefit wildlife**

a. Create wildflower-rich habitats and meadows

Many grasslands have become dominated by a few species of grasses or other plants, which can result in a decline in biodiversity. Promoting the establishment of wildflower-rich

habitats can increase plant diversity and provide important habitats for pollinators and other insects.

Sowing annual wildflower seed can increase the diversity of plant species within amenity grasslands. Wildflowers can provide food and habitat for pollinators, and they can also enhance the visual appeal of these ecosystems. Wildflowers can be sown in designated areas or in a mix with the grasses.

Improved grassland can also be managed to increase species diversity by scarifying and stripping turf to reduce fertility (essential for creating meadows). This land can then be seeded using green hay.

- Indicate on map which areas are targeted for meadow creation
- Utilise species-rich green hay from Treborth Botanic Garden perennial meadows where appropriate

b. **Provide nesting and shelter opportunities:** Many grassland species, such as birds and small mammals, require nesting and shelter opportunities. Providing nest boxes, log piles, dry stone walls and other habitat features can help to increase biodiversity within amenity grasslands.
    - Indicate on map where shelters and homes can be installed

c. **Promote connectivity**: Fragmentation of grassland habitats can limit the movement of plant and animal species and reduce biodiversity. Promoting connectivity through the creation of corridors or pockets of suitable habitats can help to maintain or restore biodiversity within amenity grasslands.
    - Indicate on map where and how connectivity can be improved
    - Liase with relevant student societies and clubs for priority corridor creation sites

5. Communicate the function and importance of amenity grassland management and involving the wider community

a. Engage with local stakeholders to identify their needs and desires for amenity grasslands
    - Identify and contact stakeholders

b. Encourage participation in the management of the grasslands, such as community events or volunteer planting schemes
    - Plan events and advertise events

c. Volunteers can help with habitat creation, invasive species control, and monitoring of plant and animal species.
    - Recruit and organise volunteers

d. Educate the University community about the importance of grasslands for biodiversity and recreation

- Organise events, publications and communications

e. Establish an interpretation plan for signage – information boards, pop-up mowing/pollinator signs to ensure positive communication with our local communities.

6. Monitor and Evaluate

a. Conduct **biodiversity assessments** - identify the species that are currently present in the grassland and highlight areas of high ecological value. This information can be used to guide management decisions and identify areas where specific actions are needed.

- Schedule regular biodiversity surveys (baseline and seasonal)

b. **Monitor** the health and quality of improved amenity grasslands at regular intervals using indicator species, soil properties and other methods.

- Develop suitable indicators and sampling regime

c. **Evaluate** the success of management practices in meeting the policy objectives.

- Schedule the annual review and evaluation method for management practices

d. **Adapt** management practices based on monitoring and evaluation data

- Alter management practices after the evaluation of management practices
- Update individual site management plans.

7. Resources

a. Ensure that adequate resources such as funding, equipment and training for staff are available for the effective management of the grasslands.

- Explore available grants and evaluate funding opportunities
- Review funding requirements for equipment and staff training

b. Consider alternative funding sources such as sponsorships, donations and collaborations.

- Compile a list of funding sources
- Submit applications for existing funding and prepare bids for future funding opportunities

(End of document)

Approved by:  **Date:** 18 April, 2024

Wayne Jones, Head of Estates Management

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