

B-LINES CASE STUDY

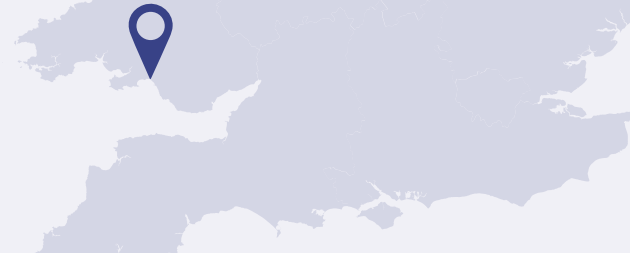
Ysbryd y Môr in Port Talbot, South Wales

Enhancing verges & green spaces for pollinators with natural regeneration



The site

Ysbryd y Môr in Port Talbot, South Wales is community housing including a 0.6 ha green space owned and managed by Coastal Housing, close to the beach.



What happened

Buglife Cymru met with Coastal Housing as part of the Neath Port Talbot B-Lines project. Following a site visit, advice and National Lottery Heritage funding was offered to support Coastal Housing in enhancing the site for pollinators.

Site survey

Surveys showed that the grassland, which is located very close to the beach and areas of sand dune, had very similar, nutrient poor sandy soils, ideal for wildflowers. Although regular cutting to keep the area tidy meant very few flowers were visible, the leaves of a small number of wildflowers species were seen. Based on these observations it was concluded that this site was ideal for enhancement through natural regeneration by simply changing management practices.



Common Blue Butterfly (*Polyommatus icarus*) on Bee Orchid © Emily Shaw

Consultation

Buglife Cymru delivered a presentation and consultation session with Coastal Housing maintenance staff and residents, covering how grassland management could be altered to allow plants to flower. Together it was decided to:

- Allow grass and flowers to grow from April to September
- Cut in September and remove cuttings
- Cut a meandering path through grassland for local residents
- Cut path and edges regularly so the area looks cared for
- Add native plug plants to formal garden areas

Buglife Cymru provided plug plants and ad hoc training to grounds staff on plant species identification and management needs. Coastal Housing built planters made from recycled hard wood cladding.



BEFORE



© Tom Bucher-Flynn

Before changes in management

The grassland was cut every 10 days with grass cuttings left in situ. This ensured a short tidy lawn but very few plants could flower and during dry spells the grass turned quite brown. Cuttings were left on site to rot down, putting nutrients back into the soil which favours the growth of grasses but not wildflowers.

Plants in flower before changes in management:

- White Clover
- Common Daisy
- Dandelion

Plants visible from leaves but not in flower:

- Bee Orchid
- Yarrow
- Cat's Ear

AFTER



© Emily Shaw

After changes in management

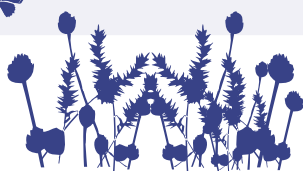
The area is cut 1 or 2 times a year, with a late September cut and an early spring cut if needed. Cuttings are removed by the cutting machine and a rake is then used to ensure no cuttings are left on site. Borders and paths are cut regularly.

Plants in flower after changes in management:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| • Bee Orchid | • Cuckoo Flower |
| • Kidney Vetch | • White Clover |
| • Hogweed | • Dandelion |
| • Yarrow | • Dune Pansy |
| • Red Clover | • Black Medick |
| • Fescue Grass | • Self-heal |
| • Cat's Ear | • Common Daisy |
| • Common Mouse-ear | • Broomrape |
| • Knapweed | • Pyramidal Orchid |
| • Ribwort Plantain | • Wild Carrot |
| • Common Eyebright | • Bird's-foot Trefoil |



NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN FLORAL DIVERSITY. 19 MORE PLANT SPECIES FLOWERING IN 1 YEAR.





“ There has been a very positive response from local residents, to the greener, more flower-rich grass verges. Many now choose to walk down the mown path rather than using the pavement. ”

© Emily Shaw

Benefits from management changes

Increased biodiversity

Wildflower-rich grasslands are one of our most important and biodiverse habitats in the UK. Species-rich grasslands can support a huge range of wildlife including wildflowers, fungi, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, bats and birds. A fifth of all priority species for conservation in the UK are associated with grassland habitats. Creating and managing native wildflower-rich grassland on B-Lines is contributing to the creation of a UK-wide network of connected flower-rich habitats, allowing species to move across landscapes.

Wellbeing

Access to nature on your doorstep is linked to cognitive benefits and improvements in mental and physical wellbeing. Evidence has shown that looking at a wildflower meadow for just six seconds can lower your blood pressure and make you feel happier! Find out more [here](#).

Nature therapy is becoming more frequent in healthcare and residential settings and the benefits are invaluable for patients and visitors. Creating flower-rich grasslands around housing is a great opportunity to use nature as part of the care and rehabilitation of patients.

The Mental Health Foundation found that going for walks outside was one of our top coping strategies in the pandemic and 45% of us reported that being in dynamic green space had been vital for our mental health. Walking in nature, including flower-rich grasslands, no matter how big or small can improve mental health through reductions in stress, anxiety and depression as well as reducing risk of physical illnesses such as cardiovascular diseases.

Ecosystem services

Pollinators are vital for pollinating our wildflowers and food crops. Pollinators and other invertebrates also offer other key services such as natural pest control and the soils of healthy grasslands act as large carbon sinks, helping to mitigate climate change and boost other ecosystem services. Healthier soils, those with diverse plant communities, also hold more rain water helping to reduce flooding.

Costs

There may be an initial cost involved with purchasing cut and collect machinery if you don't have any, but this soon pays for itself and funding may be available for support with this. Small areas may be managed by hand. The reduction in cutting frequency will result in reduced fuel costs and staff time. Staff time can then be better used in other areas of work.

Becoming a greener organization

Coastal Housing are demonstrating how green spaces can be managed for both people and nature, adopting nature and carbon-friendly policies.

Lessons learnt

- 1 Ensure all grounds staff are aware of the management plan and have a central known place for staff to refer to it.** Often with a new project or management change there can be a single enthusiastic staff member who leads on change and inspires others. If that person moves on or is unwell for a time, unless the plan has been explained and made available to others who are also onboard, progress can be lost when that individual is absent.
- 2 Have more than one contact as a back up.**
- 3 When working with residents to improve a local green space, offer a variety of engagement activities to cater for all and encourage buy-in.**
- 4 Manage expectations in terms of what can be delivered in a short time period.** Try not to overcommit regarding what can be achieved in a short time period. Many grasslands can take 3-5 years to become more diverse through natural regeneration. Natural regeneration is less likely to be successful on more nutrient-rich sites.

