

LIVING LANDSCAPES IN EDINBURGH



Addressed SDGs:



> OBJECTIVES

The Edinburgh Living Landscape is a nature network that works to benefit both local people and wildlife and make the city of Edinburgh one of the most sustainable cities in Europe by 2050. The network's goal is to introduce nature across the city neighbourhoods and demonstrate that investment in natural capital makes economic sense while increases biodiversity and creates healthier urban ecosystems.

> DESCRIPTION

To achieve the above mentioned goal, Edinburgh Living Landscape aims to establish attractive, bio-rich meadows, shrub beds, and woodlands across the city, thus reinforcing and expanding existing green networks and reconnecting the people of Edinburgh to their natural environment. This project comprises a group of organisations, such as the following: Scottish Wildlife Trust, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust, University Of Edinburgh, NatureScot, Butterfly Conservation Trust, and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland, which work together to create a multi-scale network of green spaces.

The project made use of Geographic Information Systems to identify suitable areas in which to act. During the mapping process, potential locations for more naturalised grasslands were identified, always trying to get a spatial

balance across the city. The project involves interventions with the existing green estate through a mixture of seeding, bulb planting and relaxed grass cutting regimes. The majority of the locations are situated on aggressively managed grassland areas with strong cutting regimes every few weeks. The introduction of a properly maintained wildflower meadow allows the pollinator populations and other species of insects, birds and mammals to thrive.

Edinburgh Living Landscape (ELL) produces every two years a report on what has been achieved within that period. According to the [impact report from 2014-2017](#), in total there are 840 hectares of grass green spaces in the city, from which 12-13% have been transformed into biodiversity-rich living landscape grasslands. Other quantitative impacts include the creation of 74 new floral meadows and 0,52 ha of woodland habitats.

During those years, the University of Edinburgh carried out 221 meadow pollinator monitoring surveys at different sites and over a period of time to identify which specific species have been benefitting from the changes. The city council measured the extent of the area transformed for the report.

Since the start of the ELL, the council has had an ongoing public information strategy to ensure the citizens were aware of the changes made in local parks and green

spaces. The people engagement approach was delivered by using various tools that include Social media (ELL website, Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, and press releases), council seminars - training sessions, and production of materials for gardeners, council staff, and teachers. As an additional feedback mechanism, every year the city council sends a household survey across the whole city with various questions like: How happy are you with your local green spaces?

The positive formal feedback from ELL participants indicated that the work done by the project is motivating a shift in attitudes, improving participants' knowledge of wildlife habitat creation techniques, providing skills, and generating awareness. This increase in motivation also allowed all the participants to take measures in their gardens or encourage other citizens to act. The outcome was a greater demand in local communities for neighbourhood improvement support.

ELL is financed by the City of Edinburgh Council through its existing core budgets within the Parks & Greenspace Service. This funding comes from the Scottish Government, through aggregate external finance (AEF). It consists of three parts: revenue support grants, non-domestic rates, and income and specific grants. Additional income comes through the Council Tax, which the council itself sets. Some funding for projects has also been secured through the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and external grant awards from NatureScot.

> CHALLENGES

The main challenge was people's (general public and staff) perception towards "wild areas". People are used to areas being maintained differently, therefore many of them due to lack of knowledge do not understand what the project is trying to achieve with the new forms of landscape maintenance.

> OPPORTUNITIES

After initial scepticism and some opposition, there has been a broad acceptance and increased awareness towards the project activities. People appreciate the efforts made by the city council and the project. Their feedback is always very positive and often they demand more actions.

> LESSONS LEARNED

Ongoing public communications are key to the project becoming a success. Communication and explanation of landscape management changes to the wider public, elected members, and also the staff have proved crucial. Also, public engagement and consultations have to be

constant. Community engagement from Friends Groups, community groups, schools, and individuals has to be prioritised.

Training of the staff is another important factor to take into account in order to increase the green areas maintenance expertise.

> INSPIRATION FOR OTHERS

The aim has been to make Edinburgh an urban exemplar of a Living Landscape approach to landscape and green estate management across Scotland, the UK, and further afield. Any city that wants to introduce nature across their neighbourhoods can develop a similar green spaces network. Actions such as, maintenance of wildflower meadows and management of grassland areas' cutting regimes can be replicated in other metropolitan areas and receive very positive feedback from the general public, thanks to good communication and engagement strategies.

FURTHER INFORMATION

All fact sheets were produced from questionnaires and interviews conducted by the ICLEI team. Contact ICLEI Europe for more information or access Oppla: <https://oppla.eu/casestudy/21288>

Contact point:

Stephen Macgregor,
Technical Officer, City of Edinburgh Council

Authors:


Daniela Rizzi
(Senior Officer NBS and Biodiversity)
Shreya Utkarsh
(Officer NBS and Biodiversity)
Roger Roca Vallejo
(Junior Officer Sustainable Resources, Climate & Resilience)





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