

November 2023



NO MOW MAY PLEDGE RESULTS REPORT 2022-2023



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Overview

No Mow May is the campaign from Plantlife that encourages you to stop mowing your grass to allow naturally occurring wildflowers to bloom that may normally be mown before they can flower.

In 2022 and 2023, Kent County Council (KCC) conducted surveys of the residents and organisations of Kent to find out who was taking part, where in the county they were from and their reasonings why.

In 2022, 324 residents and 16 organisations took part in the survey, with the greatest number of pledges coming from Canterbury and the largest area of land pledged was in Folkestone and Hythe. The total area of No Mow May grassland that was pledged that year amounted to 129865m² (about 32 acres or just shy of 13 hectares), and roughly equates to 497 tennis courts.

In 2023, only 272 separate responses were recorded, which was 68 fewer responses than in 2022. Despite this, a larger area of land (131510m²) across the county was pledged, approximately 6 more tennis courts of land than last year. Again, Canterbury were the top pledgers, but the district to pledge the largest area of land changed to Sevenoaks.

In both years, participants were asked why they were taking part. Whilst any reason to take part and grow more wildflowers will benefit pollinators, there was a shift in reasoning from “taking part to help pollinators” to “wildflowers are beautiful,” which is a move away from the affirmation of Kent's Plan Bee of encouraging flowers for pollinators.

Two new questions were added in the 2023 survey. The first asked if participants had previously taken part in No Mow May, to which 72% answered yes and were returning to complete No Mow May again. The second new question asked what they planned to do with their lawn after No Mow May, to which over 50% said they would mow occasionally during the rest of the summer, and nearly a quarter said they would not mow at all until the end of the summer. Both responses are great news for increasing the number of wildflowers and supporting local pollinators.

As well as KCC running the survey, more sites across KCC land than ever before took part in No Mow May, with offices, care centres, waste recycling sites and more joining the Country Parks and many Highways verges that were managed for conservation prior to KCC taking part in No Mow May.

The results from the No Mow May surveys are incredibly positive, showing just how engaged and supportive of the campaign Kent's residents and organisations are. But there is room for improvement. Along with a few tweaks to the survey and leading the way by continuing to find more sites to take part on KCC land, the best way Kent's Plan Bee can support No Mow May and those taking part is by continuing to raise the profile of the campaign and provide education on the benefits of No Mow May for pollinators, as well as how to best manage your lawn in the long-term for increased wildflowers and pollinators.

Introduction

What is No Mow May?

No Mow May is a great initiative from Plantlife that encourages you to stop mowing your grass to allow naturally occurring wildflowers to bloom that may normally be mown before they can flower.

Why collect information on No Mow May in Kent?

This is the second year that Kent's Plan Bee and Kent County Council (KCC) have taken part in No Mow May. We collected pledges from members of the public and organisations across Kent. People committed to leave their lawns, grassland verges, gardens, and parks uncut by putting away the lawn mowers and strimmer. In the process, they allowed wild plants and flowers to grow and bloom, to provide forage and nesting areas for pollinating insects and other animals that depend on these vital grassland habitats.

We collected information on No Mow May in Kent to:

- Find out how much space was put aside in Kent for No Mow May.
- Encourage residents and organisations to take part in No Mow May, plus raise awareness of the No Mow May campaign and the Kent's Plan Bee profile.

Method of Data Collection

A survey form was set up on the Kent Let's Talk website to collect information from Kent's residents and organisations taking part in No Mow May. The survey was kept open throughout the whole of May. In 2022, the survey was opened a few weeks prior to May.

Information collected included where residents or organisations across Kent were taking part from, an estimate of roughly how much lawn was not being mown, and their reasoning for taking part. In 2023, additional questions on whether participants had previously completed No Mow May and how they were planning to cut their lawns after May were added to the survey. There was the option to also add an image of their lawns.

As part of data protection rules set up through the Let's Talk site and to protect the exact locations of participants, only partial postcodes were collected to record the location. However, participants had the choice whether to provide their location or not.

For the multiple-choice questions on the reasoning for taking part, the answers were randomised for each participant to reduce one answer being selected over the others because it was the first choice.

To make it less onerous for organisations that may have multiple sites, they had the option to add multiple locations under one survey entry. This could potentially result in more locations to the number of individual responses recorded.

2022 Results

We received 340 separate responses from 324 residents and 16 organisations. Of these, 336 people gave us details on their location. This broke down to:

- 122 pledges for small areas of 8m² or less (2 table tennis table sizes or smaller)
- 199 pledges for medium areas of approx. 261m² (roughly the size of a tennis court)
- 19 pledges for large areas of 4050m² or more (the size of a small football pitch or greater)

The total area of No Mow May grassland that was pledged amounts to 129865m², which is approximately 32 acres or just shy of 13 hectares. This roughly equates to 497 tennis courts!

| Pledge Type | No. of Large Areas | No. of medium Areas | No. of Small Areas | Total (m ²) |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Resident | 16 = 64800m ² | 190 = 49590m ² | 118 = 944m ² | 115334m ² |
| Organisations | 3 = 12150m ² | 9 = 2349m ² | 4 = 32m ² | 14531m ² |

Table 1. Area of land pledged spilt by size and participant type for 2022.

Locations of pledges

The highest area of land pledged was in Folkestone and Hythe with 16960m², and the largest individual numbers of pledges were recorded in Canterbury with 40 pledges.

Area of Land Pledged per district for 2022

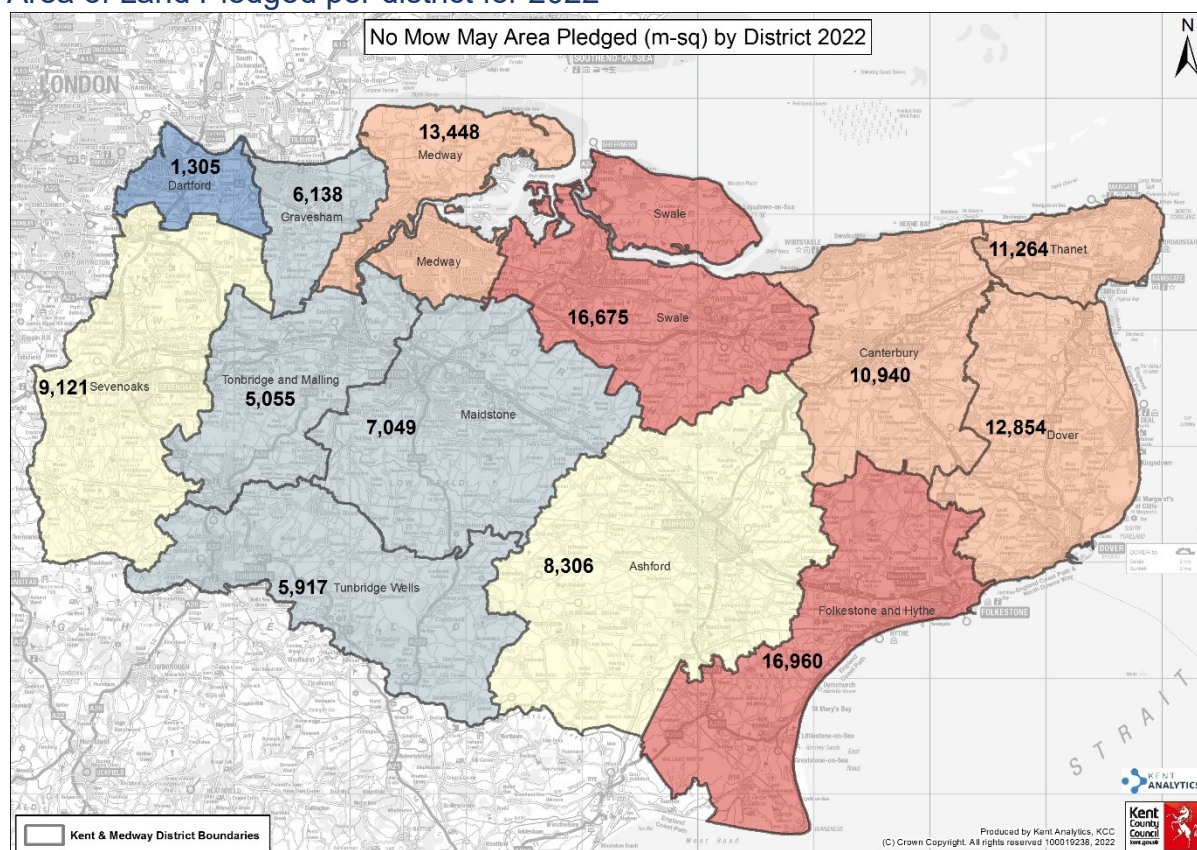


Figure 1. Map of Kent showing the area of land pledged per district for 2022

| District | No. of Large Areas | No. of medium Areas | No. of Small Areas | Total area (m ²) |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Ashford | 1 | 16 | 10 | 8306 |
| Canterbury | 1 | 26 | 13 | 10940 |
| Dartford | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1305 |
| Dover | 2 | 18 | 7 | 12854 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 3 | 18 | 14 | 16960 |
| Gravesham | 1 | 8 | 0 | 6138 |
| Maidstone | 1 | 11 | 16 | 7049 |
| Medway | 2 | 20 | 16 | 13448 |
| Sevenoaks | 1 | 19 | 14 | 9121 |
| Swale | 3 | 17 | 11 | 16675 |
| Thanet | 2 | 12 | 4 | 11264 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 0 | 19 | 12 | 5055 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 1 | 7 | 5 | 5917 |
| Total | 18 | 196 | 122 | 125032 |

Table 2. Number of area types pledged and area of land this equates to per by district for 2022.

Number of Pledges per district for 2022

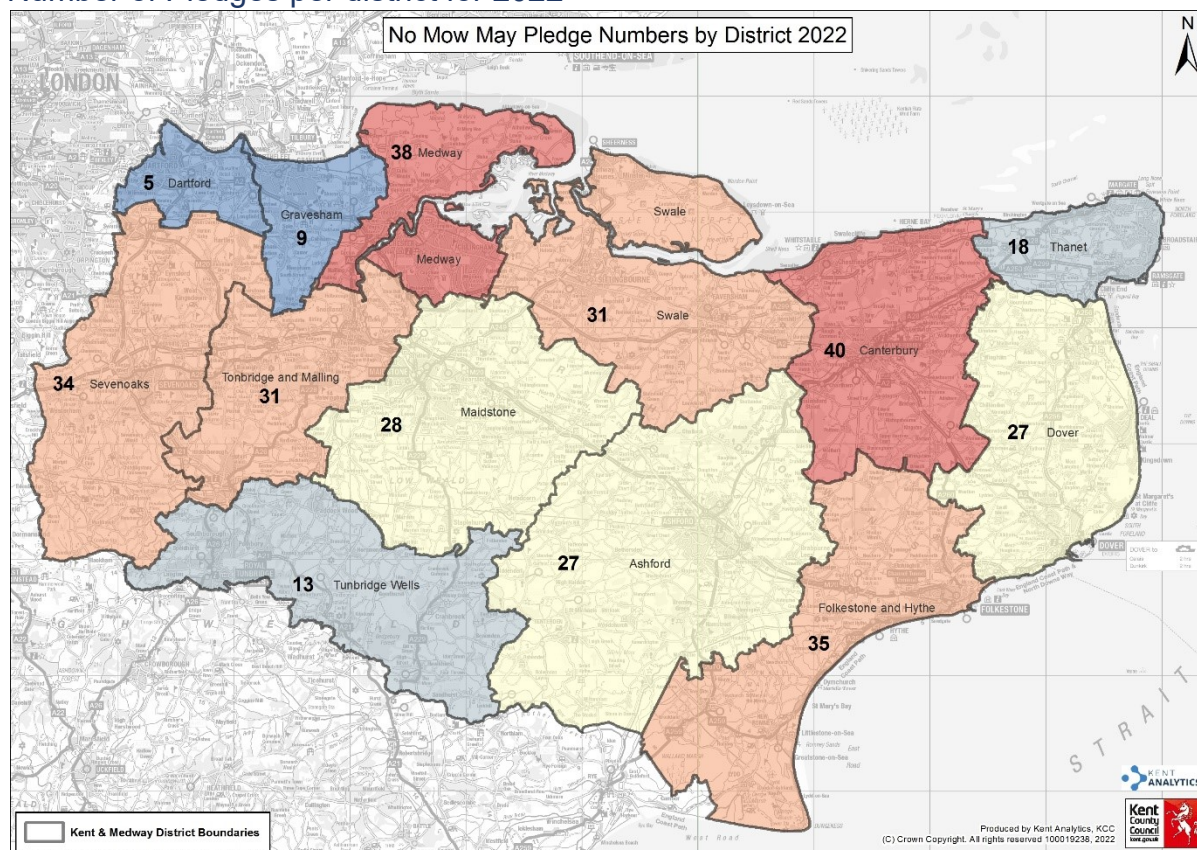


Figure 2. Map of Kent showing the number of pledges per district for 2022

| District | Resident | Organisations | Number of Sign Ups |
|---|------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Ashford | 26 | 1 | 27 |
| Canterbury | 40 | 0 | 40 |
| Dartford | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Dover | 27 | 0 | 27 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 35 | 0 | 35 |
| Gravesham | 7 | 2 | 9 |
| Maidstone | 26 | 2 | 28 |
| Medway | 37 | 1 | 38 |
| Sevenoaks | 28 | 6 | 34 |
| Swale | 31 | 0 | 31 |
| Thanet | 17 | 1 | 18 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 30 | 1 | 31 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 13 | 0 | 13 |
| Total Pledges with location data | 320 | 16 | 336 |

Table 3. Number of pledges split by district and participant type for 2022

Motivations for taking part.

The biggest motivation to take part in No Mow May was 'to grow more flowers for pollinators,' which is a strong affirmation for Plan Bee and its objectives. This was supported by the additional reasons that 'wildflowers are beautiful' and 'to mow less often throughout the year.'

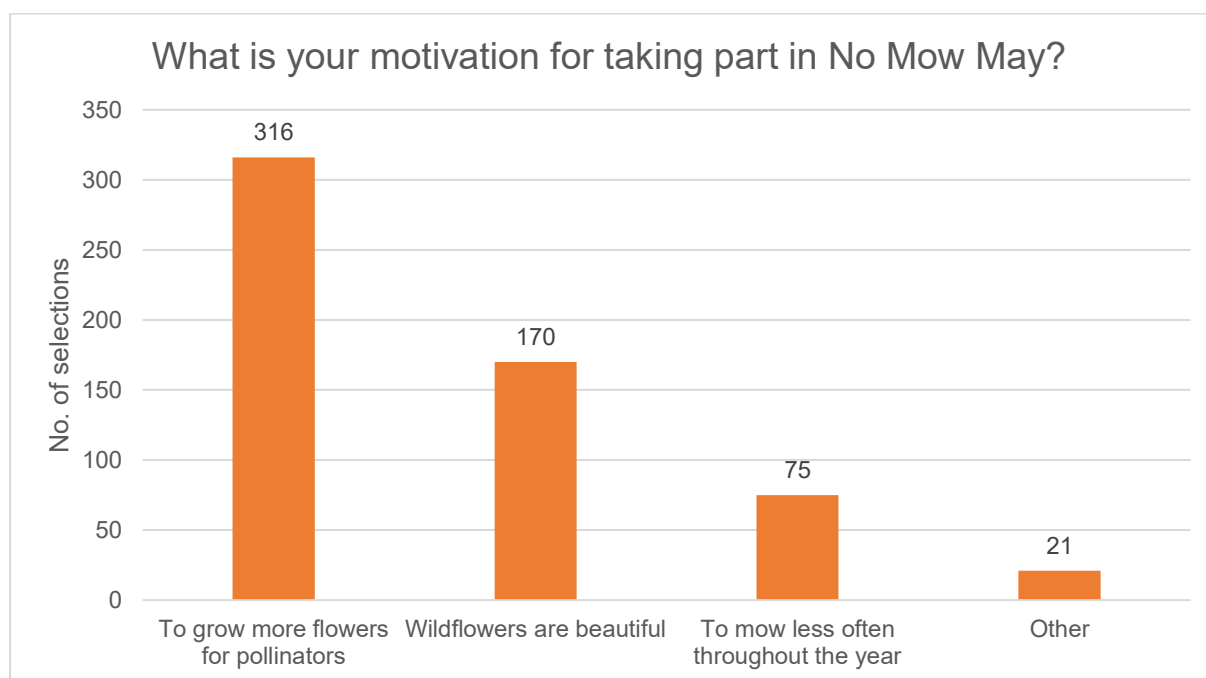


Figure 3. The number of times the different motivation options for taking part in No Mow May 2022 were selected by Kent's residents and organisations.



Figure 4. A Word cloud showing which words represented No Mow May motivations for 2022. The larger the word the more times it was selected.

2023 Results

We received 272 separate responses from 252 residents and 8 organisations. This was about 80 fewer pledges than 2022. Of these, 260 people gave us details on their location and 264 gave us information on size of their lawns. This breaks down to:

- 97 pledges for small areas – of 8m² or less (2 table tennis table sizes or smaller)
- 144 pledges for medium areas of approx. 261m² (roughly the size of a tennis court)
- 23 pledges for large areas of 4050m² or more (the size of a small football pitch or greater)

The total area of No Mow May grassland that was pledged amounts to 131510m², which is approximately or more than 32 acres or 13.15 hectares. This roughly equates to 503 tennis courts! This is 6 more tennis courts (roughly 1566m²) than last year.

| Pledge Type | No. of Large Areas | No. of medium Areas | No. of Small Areas | Total (m ²) |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Resident | 19 = 76950m ² | 141 = 36801m ² | 96 = 768m ² | 114519m ² |
| Organisations | 4 = 16200m ² | 3 = 783m ² | 1 = 8m ² | 16991m ² |

Table 4. Area of land pledged spilt by size and participant type for 2023.

Locations of pledges

The highest area of land pledged was in Sevenoaks with 25502m², and the largest individual numbers of pledges was recorded in Canterbury with 50 pledges.

Area of Land Pledged per district for 2023

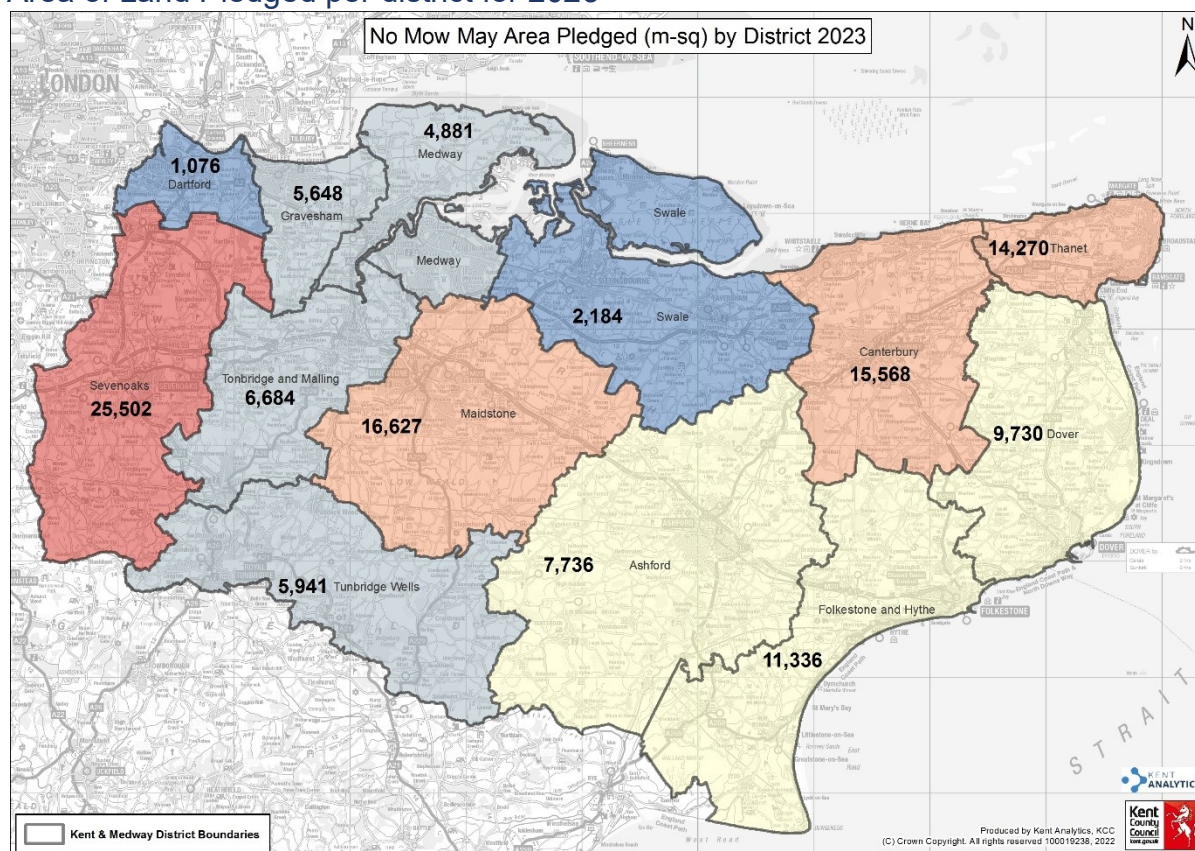


Figure 5. Map of Kent showing the area of land pledged per district for 2023

| District | No. of Large Areas | No. of medium Areas | No. of Small Areas | Total area (m ²) |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Ashford | 1 | 14 | 4 | 7736 |
| Canterbury | 2 | 28 | 20 | 15568 |
| Dartford | 0 | 4 | 4 | 1076 |
| Dover | 2 | 6 | 8 | 9730 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 2 | 12 | 13 | 11336 |
| Gravesham | 1 | 6 | 4 | 5648 |
| Maidstone | 3 | 17 | 5 | 16627 |
| Medway | 1 | 3 | 6 | 4881 |
| Sevenoaks | 5 | 20 | 4 | 25502 |
| Swale | 0 | 8 | 12 | 2184 |
| Thanet | 3 | 8 | 4 | 14270 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 1 | 10 | 3 | 6684 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 1 | 7 | 8 | 5941 |
| Total | 22 | 143 | 95 | 127183 |

Table 5. Number of area types pledged and area of land this equates to per by district for 2023

Number of Pledges per district for 2023

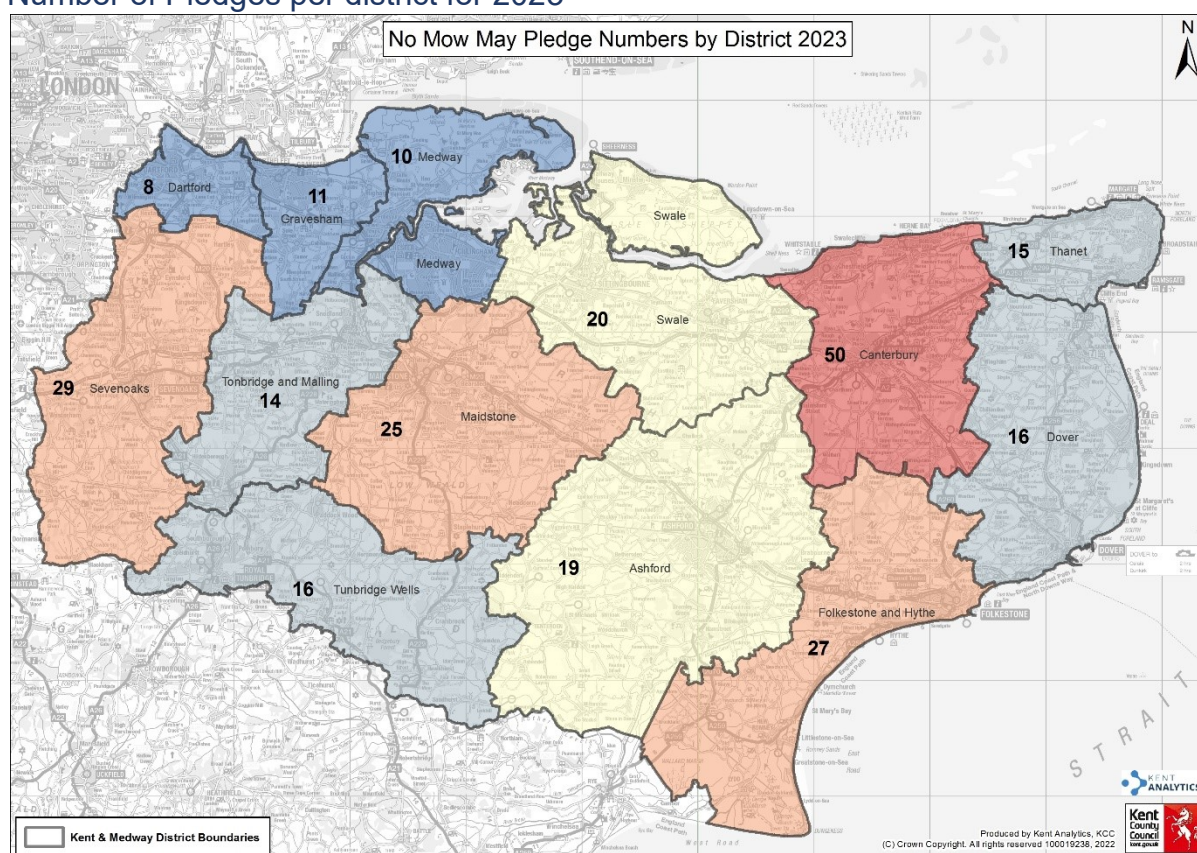


Figure 6. Map of Kent showing the number of pledges per district for 2023

| District | Resident | Organisations | Number of Sign Ups |
|---|------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Ashford | 19 | 0 | 19 |
| Canterbury | 47 | 3 | 50 |
| Dartford | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| Dover | 16 | 0 | 16 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 26 | 1 | 27 |
| Gravesham | 11 | 0 | 11 |
| Maidstone | 24 | 1 | 25 |
| Medway | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Sevenoaks | 28 | 1 | 29 |
| Swale | 20 | 0 | 20 |
| Thanet | 13 | 2 | 15 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 14 | 0 | 14 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 16 | 0 | 16 |
| Total Pledges with location data | 252 | 8 | 260 |

Table 6. Number of pledges split by district and participant type for 2023

Motivations for taking part.

The biggest motivation to take part in No Mow May this year was because 'wildflowers are beautiful,' which is different from last year's top reason of growing more flowers for pollinators, which was in a close second place.

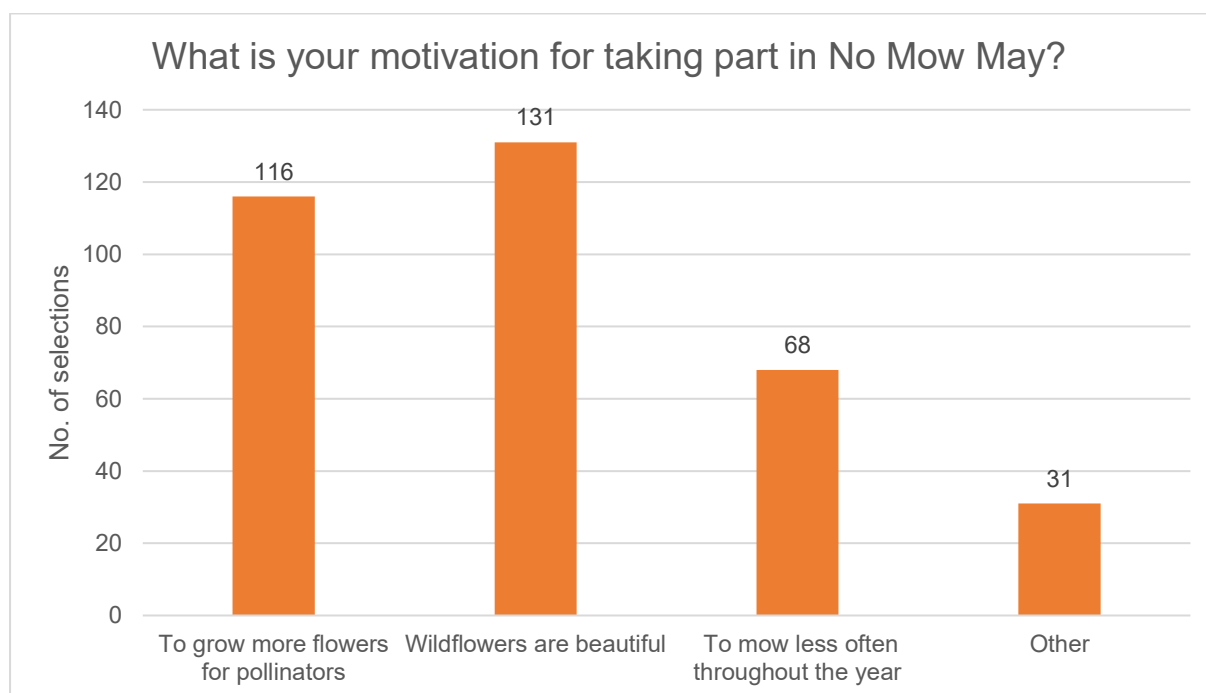


Figure 7. The number of times the different motivation options for taking part in No Mow May 2023 were selected by Kent's residents and organisations.



Figure 8. A Word cloud showing which words represented No Mow May motivations for 2023. The larger the word the more times it was selected.

New questions for 2023

We added two new questions for this year based on the results from last year.

One of these was to examine who took part last year. 72% of participants said they had taken part last year, whilst for the other 28% it was their first year taking part.

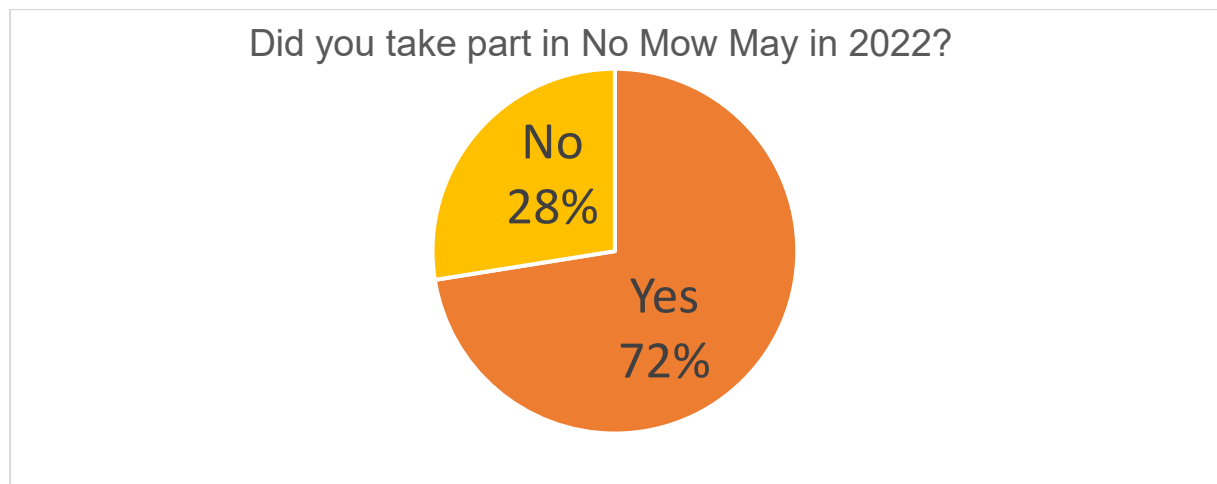


Figure 9. The number of participants that took part in No Mow May last year.

Our second new question was aimed at understanding how participants planned to manage their lawns after No Mow May. Over 50% said they would mow occasionally during the rest of the summer, and nearly a quarter said they would not mow at all until the end of the summer.

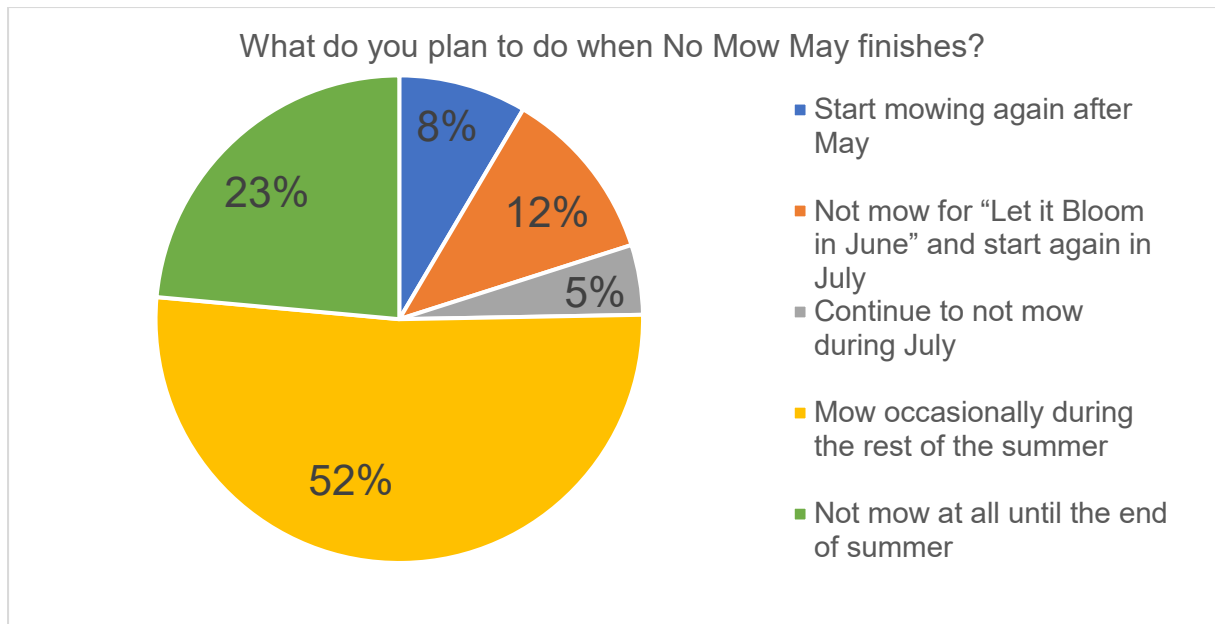


Figure 10. Percentage of participants on how they plan to manage their lawns after No Mow May

Discussion

Number of pledges

The number of pledges decreased compared to when we first launched the survey from 340 responses in 2022 to 272 in 2023. Looking at this on a district level, for Canterbury, Dartford, Gravesham and Tunbridge Wells, the number of pledges increased from 2022 to this year. For all the other districts, numbers fell with some, such as Medway, decreasing quite drastically.

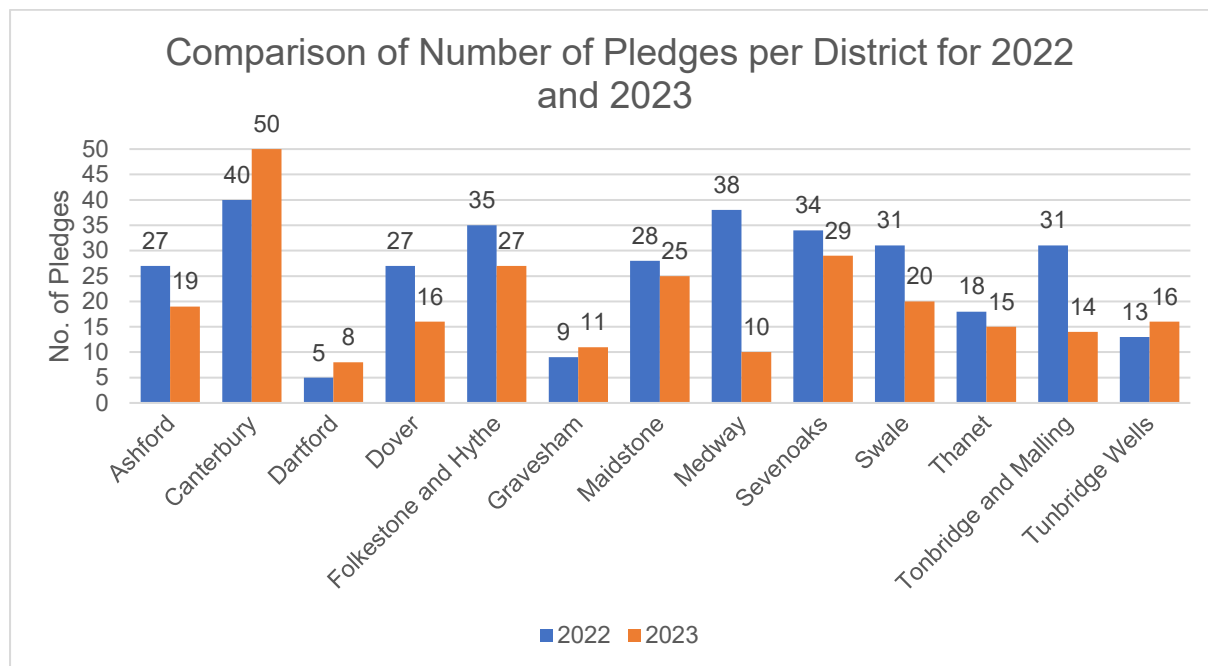


Figure 11. A comparison in the difference between the number of pledges per district for 2022 and 2023

However, despite the drop in the number of pledges, a similar amount of land was pledged for 2023 as more larger sites were recorded this year.

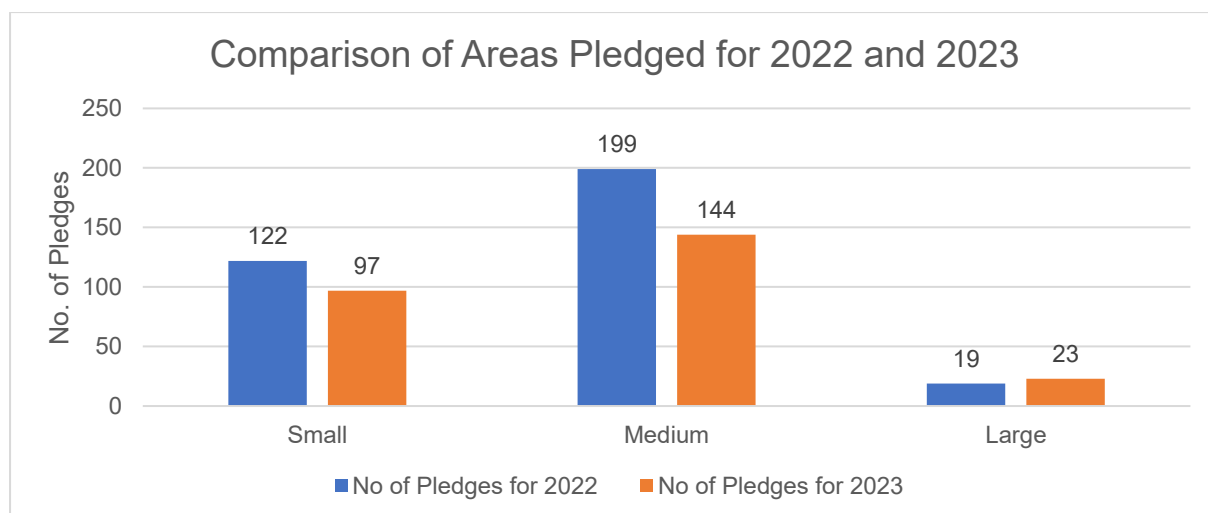


Figure 12. A comparison in the difference between the number of area sizes pledged for 2022 and 2023

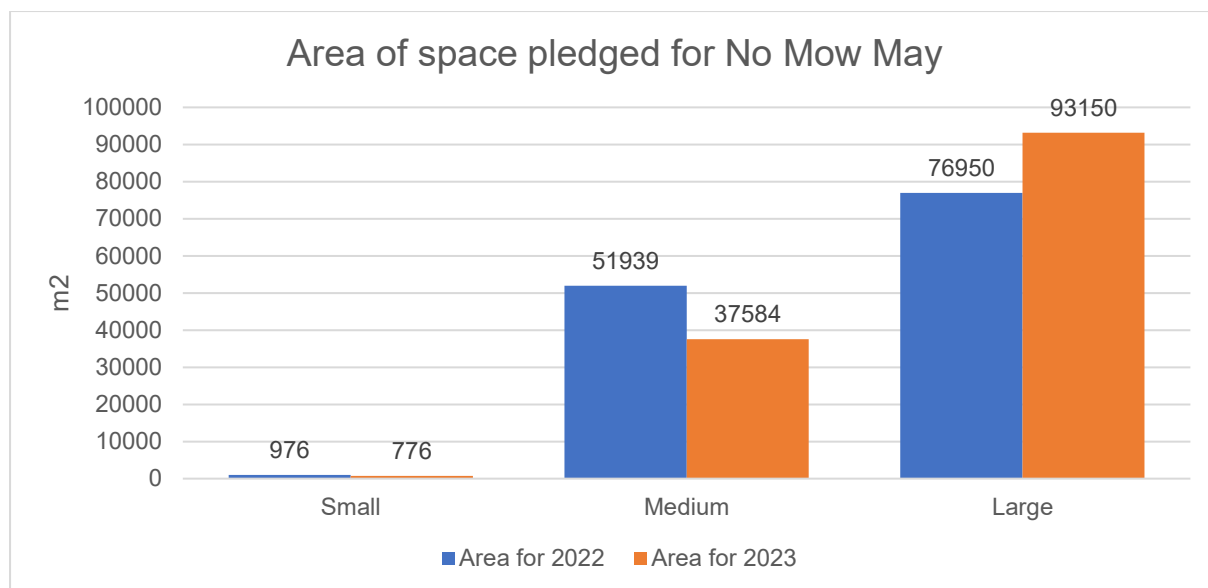


Figure 13. A comparison in the difference between the areas pledged for 2022 and 2023

Whilst a definitive reason for the fewer number of pledges is hard to determine, one plausible reason is that opening the survey later in the year for 2023, due to election restrictions, was an influence. The pre-election period of 6 weeks restricts certain activities, policies, or decisions from being announced because they may be seen to provide a political advantage to a candidate or party. In 2022, the survey was opened on 27th April and for 2023, the survey started on 5th May. Although for 2023 we did encourage people to take part in No Mow May on our social media prior to the survey opening, perhaps by not completing the survey ahead of May, many people may have felt that it was too late once May had started to take part.

After the 2023 local elections, it has since been decided by the Kent's Plan Bee members group, that No Mow May should not be viewed to confer advantage on any one political party or candidate. For future May elections it is unlikely that promoting No Mow May, a national campaign set up by a charity organisation, will affect election outcomes as it is not politically motivated. Therefore, for future surveys we hope to open the survey in April prior to the start of May to encourage more people to plan ahead and be able to take part.

Locations of Pledges

For both years, Canterbury recorded the largest individual numbers of pledges, with 40 responses in 2022 and even more in 2023 with 50.

In 2022, residents and organisations in Folkestone and Hythe pledged the largest area of land with 16960m², but this changed in 2023 to Sevenoaks pledging the highest area of land at 25502m². This is a substantial change as Folkestone and Hythe was one of the biggest contributors last year, having dropped down the list considerably this year with only 11336m² pledged for 2023.

It is interesting to examine where the responses came from and to encourage some friendly competition between the districts to see who would come out on top, but it was not without its issues. Partial postcodes (max. 5 characters) were collected to record location if participants wanted to submit this information, which kept to data protection requirements to protect the exact location of residents. However, it has proven quite difficult to determine which district these partial postcodes fell under as the first part of many postcodes are split over two or more districts. We plan to introduce a new question next year asking which District Council the participant sits under to make comparisons and data analysis easier.

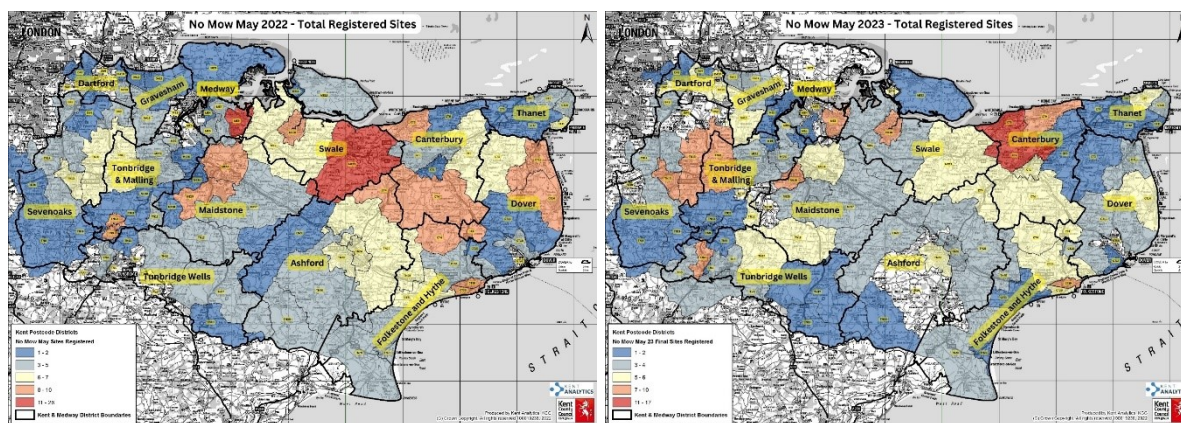


Figure 14. Maps produced using partial postcode data. These are not accurate as some of the postcodes were interpreted incorrectly depending on how many characters were submitted. Left map for 2022, right map for 2023.

Motivations for taking part

For a range of people, No May Mow is part of their organic and wildlife-friendly approach to gardening and caring for their open spaces, to encourage as much biodiversity and wildlife as possible – as well as reducing the amount of time, effort and fuel used. Amusing reasons for participants taking part in No Mow May in 2022 included because ‘Bill Oddie told us to leave our lawns many years ago’, and ‘to make a statement and stand out in the crowd as both my neighbours have block-paving front gardens’!

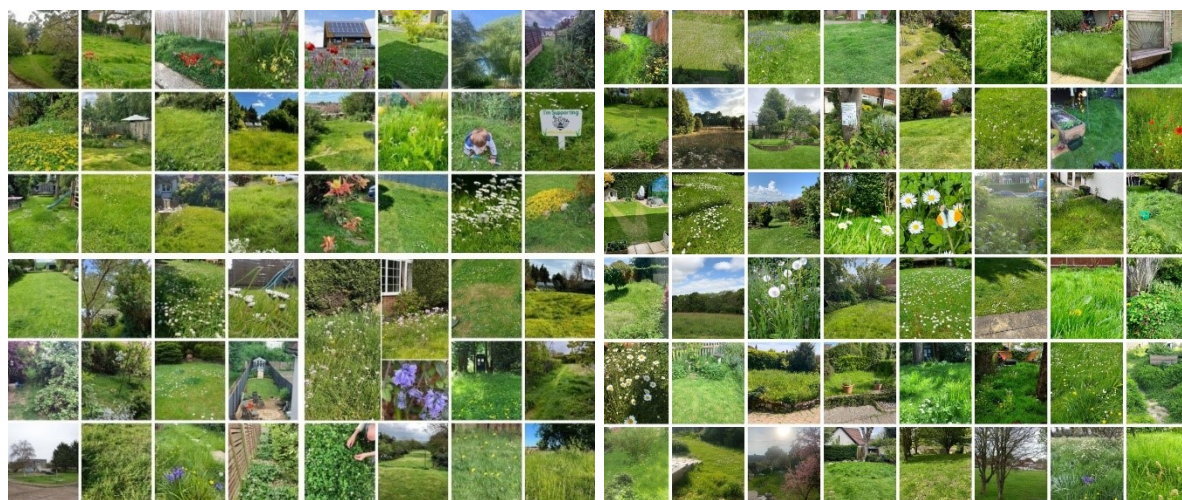


Figure 15. Collages of all the No Mow May lawns submitted via the survey. 2022 is the left collage, 2023 is on the right.

The most popular motivation to take part in No Mow May in 2023 was because ‘wildflowers are beautiful’, which is different from last year’s top reason of growing more flowers for pollinators, which was in a close second place. This suggests that this year a vibrant, green, healthy environment was on everyone’s mind.

More people also left other reasons this year for taking part in No Mow May, with most of these leaning towards wanting to help support all their local wildlife, not just pollinators.

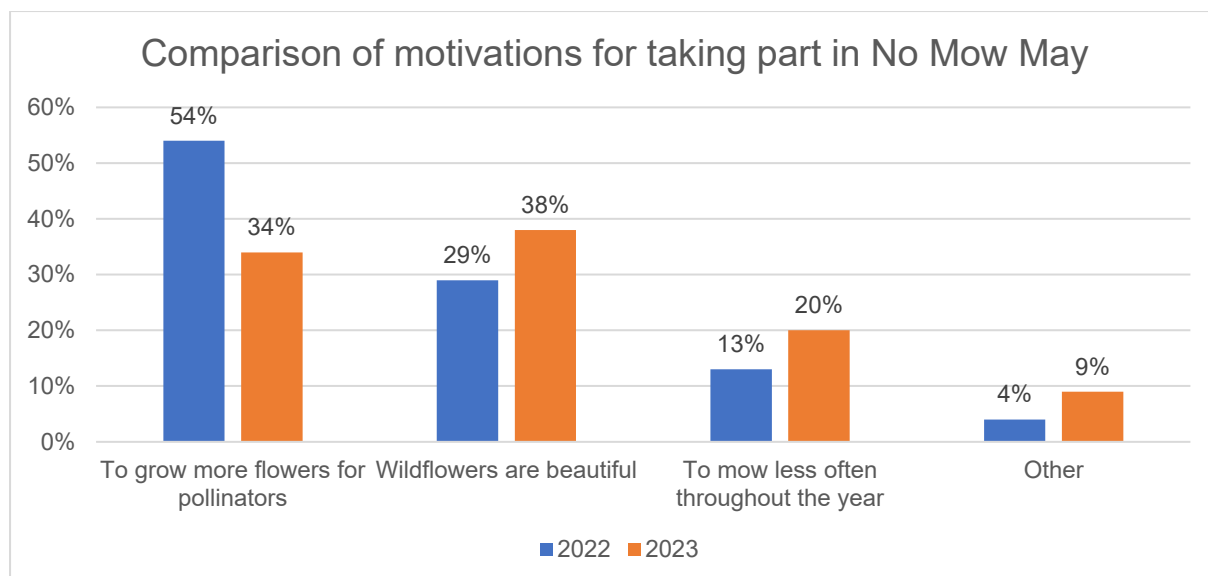


Figure 16. A comparison in the difference between the motivations for taking part in No Mow May for 2022 and 2023

This was a change in motivations from “to grow more flowers for pollinators” in 2022, to “wildflowers are beautiful” in 2023. Whilst any reason to grow wildflowers is a good one, this is a shift away from the affirmation of Kent’s Plan Bee of encouraging flowers for pollinators. On social media and through our newsletters, we will continue to publish articles and posts on how flowers benefit pollinators and which flowers are most suited to which pollinator. This will hopefully encourage more people to want to grow a variety of flowers to support all the pollinators you may find in a lawn, as well as enjoying the visual aspect they bring.

Who has previously taken part in No Mow May

One of the new questions added this year was to examine who took part in No Mow May last year. 72% of participants said they had taken part last year, whilst for the other 28% it was their first year taking part. It is great to see that even though the majority of participants enjoyed the campaign last year and have taken it up again, there are still newcomers being encouraged to take part.

By continuing to promote No Mow May on our social media and other outlets, plus support those taking part by providing guidance on encouraging flowers in lawns, it is hoped that even more people will continue to find the campaign and take part year after year.

Understanding how participants planned to manage their lawns after No Mow May.

The second new question to the survey this year looked at understanding what participants planned to do after No Mow May. The campaign is great at raising awareness of wildflowers that may be hiding in our lawns. However, sometimes the benefits of leaving lawns uncut for the whole of the summer is not always well promoted. These benefits include the increased shelter and habitat for pollinators, plus free seeds for the following year.

Over 50% said they would mow occasionally during the rest of the summer, and nearly a quarter said they would not mow at all until the end of the summer. Both of these responses are great news for increasing the number of wildflowers and supporting local pollinators.

We will encourage more people to leave their lawns uncut for the summer by promoting the follow up campaign, Let it Bloom June, and explaining the benefits for pollinators that an uncut lawn can bring and how it improves the biodiversity of lawns.

Kent County Council's No Mow May sites and results

In 2023, more KCC sites than ever before took part in No Mow May. This included:

- Six of KCC's country parks
- More than 450km of road verges in rural and urban areas across Kent that are managed specifically for conservation, by KCC Highways
- Five Household Waste Recycling Centres
- Plus, nine other KCC sites, including the grounds around KCC offices, day care centres and adult education centres.

Collectively, these sites provided about 300 hectares of wildflower-rich grassland, providing habitat corridors, conservation meadows and pastures, mini-meadows, and pollinator patches across the county. We are proud as this is a huge increase on the number of sites and area compared to the previous year, where it was predominantly Highways and Country Parks.

To ensure the new sites could commit to No Mow May took some time, and many of them were not confirmed until May was upon us. Because of this, we were unable to visit them prior to No Mow May to get a baseline of the site. However, we hope that the majority of these sites will be committed to taking part in the future and we should be able to see a long-term improvement in the biodiversity of the green spaces with the conservation focused management.

That is not to say that we have not had any successes this year. From across all the sites that took part, we have seen some great results just this year:

- By changing the management at Worrel House, Kings Hill offices as part of No Mow May and leaving the grass uncut in June as well, Bee and Pyramidal Orchids were found by Alison Woodger, Receptionist at Worrall. On her lunchtime strolls over June, she counted 4 Pyramidal Orchids and found 1 Bee Orchid amongst many other wildflowers in the long grass. It is amazing how quickly the biodiversity has increased at this site, just through not cutting for a few months!



Figure 17. Orchids found at Worral House taken by Alison Woodger and a blooming brilliant verge of Knapweed near Horsmonden taken by Suzanne Marshall from the Soft Landscape team during a PoMS FIT survey.

- Spurred on by the amazing displays on our Rural Conservation verges, KCC's Highways Soft Landscapes team have also taken up pollinator monitoring of some of their verges using the PoMS FIT survey. As well as monitoring some of the verges not being mown during May as part of the conservation management scheme, the team have been

monitoring some verges that receive more regular management. It is hoped that over the years, the evidence they collect on wildflower types, pollinator diversity and population sizes will show that the diversity and number of wildflowers and pollinators increases through the verges taking part in No Mow May and other conservation management practises.

- As part of the ongoing conservation work at the Country Parks, the wildflower meadows, and areas there are not only left uncut for May but are left for the whole summer. Many were only just cut in September, giving these wildflower areas time to be pollinated and drop their seeds back into the soil, replenishing the seed bank ready for the next year.

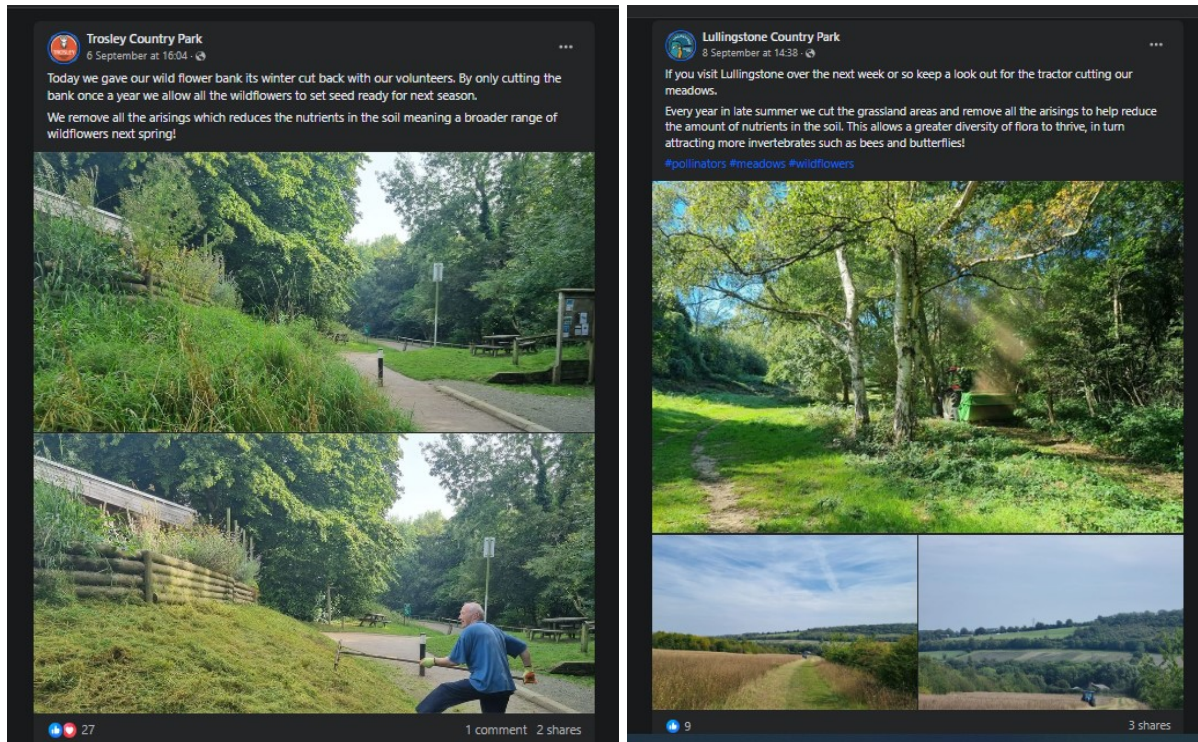


Figure 18. Screenshots of social media posts by Trosley and Lullingstone Country Park showing their wildflower management in September.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Despite not getting the same number of pledges for No Mow May through the survey for 2023 compared to 2022, a larger area of land was pledged. Plus, this year, more KCC sites took part than ever before.

There is lots to take away from both years KCC has taken part in No Mow May and use these lessons to improve the experience for next year:

Lessons Learned and Action for Future Years

For KCC

- We had lots of talk ahead of May on potential sites, but it was not until May was upon us that they were confirmed, and we were able to get out and look at them. We hope to confirm new and repeat sites much earlier in subsequent years so that sites can be visited early and the impact of No Mow May recorded. We also hope to keep the momentum going with the release of this report to inspire KCC staff to find even more spaces for No Mow May next year.

For the survey

- Start earlier if possible – we waited to launch the pledge site until after the elections. Next time we should query if the pledge truly is going to affect the election results as it potentially cost us a lot of pledges. Regardless of when the pledge is launched, we will use the time leading up to May to push the importance of No Mow May for pollinators and the need to provide natural food sources for them.

- It became clear when analysing the data there were difficulties using partial postcodes to confirm district, as the beginning of many postcodes are split by the district boundaries. To make this easier for the next year, we will add a new question to the survey form to confirm which district the participant is taking place from. This will make totals easier to calculate and the maps easier to draw.

Promoting No Mow May and its benefits

There are plenty of opportunities to promote No Mow May prior to 2024:

- When announced in the next Kent's Plan Bee summit, we hope to use the launch of the District Blueprint and Parish Pledge toolkit to encourage more Parish, Town, and District councils to take up the call.

- Use our New Year's Pledge for Pollinators review to celebrate those that took part in No Mow May this year and get people thinking about taking part earlier next year, as well as celebrating all the other activities that people have done throughout the year to benefit and help their local pollinators.

- Continue to support education around the importance of biodiverse lawns, the benefits for pollinators and how to encourage more flowers in lawns. This will be done through our social media and newsletter.

- Some of the feedback outside of the survey was that not everyone has a lawn or can give up their whole lawn for No Mow May. To address this, we will encourage other ways to take part if people do not have a lawn or cannot give up their lawn space for No Mow May.