

Local Road verge restoration guidance

As many Councils throughout the UK are declaring a climate emergency, there is a growing pressure on local authorities to readdress their greenspace management to create species-rich grassland habitats. This approach has the potential to improve the biodiversity of our roadside verges to support more wildlife by creating a more balanced landscape while also increasing the number of native wildflowers that have been in decline since the 1930's.



This guidance document has been created in-line with the current Plantlife campaign, to help and support parish and town councils, or local groups who want to help manage and maintain roadside verges separately to our existing safety management.

Plantlife have successfully campaigned to highlight the benefits that can be gained by managing our roadside grassed verges for safety and wildlife. For more information you can read the following documents, [Managing grassland road verges](#) or [The good verge guide](#)

NOTE: not all verges will be suited for individual management plans, each site must be assessed by North Yorkshire Council prior to any works commencing.

This document has been designed to assist with urban highway grass management, however it can be used for rural verges following a safety assessment. Please use this [LINK](#) to identify the grass verges within your local area, the areas outlined in blue are currently maintained under the existing policy.

North Yorkshire Council's existing grass cutting policies are focused on safety to provide full visibility for all highway users and have been separated into the following categories,

Urban, *under 40mph network*, - min 5 cuts per season and include all junction vis-splays, event/hazard warning signs and remote footways.

Rural, *over 40mph network* – min 2 cuts per season and include all junction vis-splays, event/hazard warning signs, longitudinal swathe up to 2.4m, overtaking sight lines and remote footways which fall outside of the existing swathe cuts.

Both policies are currently being reviewed to incorporate biodiversity without negatively impacting the safety requirements of the highway users.

CAUTION! You must ensure there is a safe distance between the carriageway edge and your chosen site: Roads with a speed limit of 40mph or greater require a minimum safety zone of 1.2m from the carriageway edge. Roads with a speed limit of under 40mph require a minimum safety zone of 0.5m from the carriageway edge.

All works must be carried out in a safe manner, we can provide safety assessment documents if required.

The key factor required for wildflowers is maintaining low soil fertility, this can be achieved by removing the grass cuttings after each cut as this helps to reduce the nutrient levels of the soils. This approach can be labour intensive and costly, so it is important to understand your disposal options before starting,

- Local allotments or landowners for composting.
- On-site disposal, this involves creating a sacrificial area for the arisings which can be under hedges or trees, or an area to the rear of the verge away from the proposed working area. Further guidance can be found at [How to manage grass cuttings](#)
- [Transport to your local household recycling centre](#)

Help with public perception,

- By framing the verge to maintain a 0.5-1m strip of short mown grass around the edges of the project space, and alongside footways.
- Use signs to highlight the restoration works being carried out. We are happy to promote the use of blue hearts in collaboration with the rewilding blue campaign, further information can be found at [Blue campaign](#) which includes instructions of how to create your own signs.



Creating a structurally diverse verge can benefit both flora and fauna. This is ideal for areas which are lined by a hedge or woodland and can be managed to maintain a shorter wildflower sward to the front with a reduced cutting regime for the rear to allow taller flowers and grasses to provide shelter for wildlife.

Prior to carrying out any management, it is important you have a clear goal for the area and understand what is required to improve it. We recommend carrying out a [baseline survey](#) to identify all existing flora and fauna to prevent losing any potentially unknown species-rich pockets of verge.



Verge restoration with existing wildflowers,

- Carry out one Autumn cut after the seeds have matured and fallen.
- Cut all vegetation at ground level and remove all the cuttings.
- This approach is less labour intensive and will mimic a hay meadow cut.



Lowering the soil fertility,

- The verge will need to be cut three times during the first year's growing season to maximise the removal of nutrients and stunt the growth of the stronger grasses.
- Aim to cut during April, July, and September once the grasses have reached a height of 150-200mm.
- Remove all cuttings after each cut
- Verges with high fertility may need to be replicated into year 2.



Creating a new wildflower verge

- This approach can be labour-intensive but does generally provide quicker results.
- The ground preparation and time of year are essential to a successful project and needs to be completed during Autumn or early spring.
- Prepare the grounds by cutting the grass back as low as you can and remove all cuttings.
- [Rake or scarify the area to create about 50% bare soil or bare patches ready for sowing.](#)
- Mix the seeds with coarse sand and scatter over the area before lightly treading in.

NOTE: It is important to use a wildflower seed mix which is native to your local area. Including yellow-rattle when seeding can help to reduce the soil fertility as it feeds off the nutrients of the vigorous grasses. [Further advice on seed sourcing can be found here](#)

****[Specific guidance can be provided for all areas highlighted in green.](#)**

For all enquiries or further information please contact us at HAM@northyorks.gov.uk