

Contributions to consideration of Agenda item 7. – Biodiversity and grass verge management at the Town Council meeting dated 16 February 2026.

Representation made by Nigel Croad, in a personal capacity, sharing the views of many residents that he has spoken to and continues to speak to about the project.

I wish to thank some councillors for having listened to the many town residents who were so very upset and disappointed in how the previous project was rolled out and, in their opinion, the adverse impact it was having on the town. I am however concerned that the wording of parts of this evening's agenda item gives the distinct impression of bias towards continuing with a project for which no detail is provided and the council has previously aborted.

As interested residents we are not, in principle, against the town council carrying out a project that assists meet its duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity. That duty however is not meant to be implemented at the expense of other duties the council has placed upon it to promote the vitality, viability and wellbeing of the town, its residents and businesses. You equally have an overriding duty to take decisions for the benefit of the town not necessarily for the benefit of any other organisation. The Town Council have a duty to balance all of these important matters in deciding whether to implement any policy or project and if so set out when, where, how, why and for what purpose.

Kirkbymoorside is not an environmental desert! The town has an enormous range and size of greenspaces both privately and publicly owned. The town is surrounded right up to and within its boundaries by farmland, copse, hedgerows and grass verges that have and do provide an enormously varied and biodiverse landscape without any intervention by the council.

Indeed, at our own property we have for a number of years ensured that we assist the local populations of a wide variety of birds, reptiles and pollinators by managing and tending the various different areas of our garden, paddock, wildlife pond, railway cutting, hedgerows and adjacent grassed and tree lined areas we own to create a biodiverse landscape. There are of course many other gardens around the town providing similar or better benefits.



What we are not in favour of, is implementing projects that do not properly balance the equal needs of local residents and businesses to help keep this small market town thriving. The duty placed upon you is not an unqualified right to steam roller a specific environmental project or projects through at the expense of equally important other matters that you should consider. How you implement your duty on the environment does not mean one size or project has to fit all.

Specifically, we do not accept the overly simplified concept that has been suggested that shorter cut grass is bad and longer cut or less cut grass is much better for the environment and biodiversity. It's about balance. Shorter cut grass assists and encourages specific plants such as clovers as just one example, which are protein and pollen rich plants and are very beneficial to bees particularly bumble bees, butterflies and moths and the nectar and leaves are a good source of food for small mammals when other food sources are in short supply. Clover flowers throughout the summer even in dry conditions.

Ground feeding birds like song thrush, green woodpeckers, blackbirds, robins and starlings etc rely on shorter grass areas to access food sources like leather jackets, ants and earth worms. Longer cut grass areas can be beneficial to some birds like finches, wrens and sparrows and mammals. The issue to date has been about **where** the council has been changing the look of specific areas by significantly reducing grass cuts and encouraging very tall coarse grasses and weeds to flourish. By doing so the council has undermined the good work of other volunteer groups like KiB to make the town look attractive for residents, visitors and those driving along the A170 whilst also encouraging pollinators.

We are not asking for very short bowling green height cut grass verges. We are asking that the verge grass for, let's say, at least up to a few metres in from the highway is maintained at a frequency that keeps it relatively short, so it looks as though someone cares for it. This will as I have already said still be good for a variety of birds and pollinators and will keep the KiB plant displays visible and prominent and, dare I say, make it far easier for the Kirkbymoorside volunteer litter pickers to perform their brilliant work of keeping the town and the grass verges litter free. Patches of longer grass and wildflowers might then be placed towards the back of verges in some areas, so they are not so visually intrusive but still provide some environmental benefits.

The council has had a variety of alternative areas suggested by councillors sitting around the table tonight and by the public and KiB, that it should consider for enhancing biodiversity as well as improving the aesthetics of parts of the town. If it does this in the right way it can succeed without slavishly having just a singular focus on the grass verges along the A170, within the town boundaries, as being the **only** answer to enhancing the biodiversity of the area. This project has the potential to make it a win/win for the council if it listens to what has been raised by the public as very legitimate concerns.

I therefore urge the council to keep to its previous decision at its September meeting, which was to abort the previous wildflower verges management project and review the opportunities to improve biodiversity (away from just the A 170) and come up with a strategy that, after proper consultation, is supported by local residents and businesses.”

Nigel Croad

Independent observations

Representation made by Peter Winter, Ryedale Environment Group

“My work with the Ryedale Environment Group has involved giving many talks to various Parish Councils and organising conferences on nature restoration. The subject of wildflower verges can be contentious with strong feelings on both sides of the argument. It is clear that some people will remain forever implacable and there is little to be said to sway them.

I am advised by the Highways Division of North Yorkshire council that they receive much correspondence on road verges. 10 years ago, almost every correspondent requested that more cutting took place. The situation has now changed with 50% of correspondents objecting to verge cutting due to its detrimental effect on local flora. The overall tide is therefore changing.

It must be recognised that some people do object strongly to wildflower verges as they can look scruffy, but this matter can be mitigated in a very positive manner. Part of the verge can be regularly cut to show that council neglect is not an issue. The remainder can be given to wildflowers where publicity and education is absolutely key to obtain general support. With the presence of blue heart signs with suitable slogans, visitors will then have a highly positive impression of the town. It will be clearly seen that the Council is both showing concern for general appearance and also showing it respect for nature and biodiversity. It is unclear to me why the A170 verge should give rise to contention with this mitigation.

The use of QR Codes and the production of a poster would show the positive impact of work being done for biodiversity and help bolster support. Such material would also be good reference points for replying to correspondence on this issue by the Chair and Clerk.

I greatly appreciate this opportunity to relay my views to the Council”

Peter Winter

Ryedale Environment Group