



### In addition please ...

- Take an interest in your local verges. Record and report what you find.
- If you see someone damaging a verge near you consider contacting one of the organisations overleaf.
- If you frequently cut a verge near you, why not leave it over the summer and see what grows?

- Don't plant bulbs or cultivated plants on roadside verges. Save them for your gardens.
- Don't litter or fly tip on verges.
- Avoid driving on verges or over-trampling with horses in order to prevent damage to soil structure. If a lane is narrow please use existing passing places.
- Educate others on the value of Special Interest Verges, they can be very attractive when managed correctly. It is unmanaged verges that are permanently scruffy and over-managed verges that are plain and uninteresting.

***This advice note provides general guidance on SIV management. If you would like further advice please contact the relevant person ...***

- Biodiversity Officer, North Yorkshire County Council: 01609 533240
- Verges Officer, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority: 01756 751603
- Ecologist, North York Moors National Park Authority: 01439 770657
- Countryside Officer, Ryedale District Council: 01653 600666 ext 333
- Howardian Hills AONB Officer: 0845 0349495



## Advice notes: Special Interest Verge Management

Road verges can include woodland, wetland, species-rich grassland and bank habitats.

**Special Interest Verges (SIVs) are our most valuable verge habitats**, often supporting swathes of colourful wildflowers. Over recent decades these habitats have reduced in area and have become increasingly fragmented. They were more common before the modernisation of agriculture, increased traffic flow and pressures from development. However, all is not lost; remaining SIVs can be preserved and other verges can be improved with appropriate management.

Verges provide food, shelter and breeding sites for pollinating insects (especially bees and butterflies), other invertebrates, birds and small mammals. Associated features such as hedge bottoms, walls and ditches provide additional habitats for a wide range of plants and animals. This combination of verges and boundaries provide important green corridors linking areas of semi-natural habitat that may otherwise be isolated.



It is vital that verges are maintained for safety; ensuring visibility at bends and junctions, traffic sign clarity and that pedestrians can step off the road when vehicles approach.

Around towns and villages verges are important aesthetically, they are often the first impression of a community.

## The importance of a verge as a wildlife habitat and landscape feature is determined by the management it receives.



A verge which receives no management quickly becomes overgrown, rank and dominated by competitive grasses, tall ruderals (such as nettles, thistles and hogweed) and scrub. This results in a reduction in the diversity of flowering plant species, aesthetic value and usability for wildlife. It can also be a safety issue for motorists, pedestrians and other road users.



Intensive cutting and/or use of pesticides decreases the diversity of wild plants. It results in no structural diversity which in turn leads to the loss of food and shelter for invertebrates and other wildlife.



SIVs therefore need to be managed sensitively to maximise their potential for biodiversity and to ensure there is a balance between wildlife, aesthetic and safety interests.

## Verge management for biodiversity

Due to the wide variety of verge types across the county, exact specifications for management, techniques and timings will vary. The following points can be used as a general guide on wildflower verges.

- Avoid cutting whilst the verge is still flowering. In general;
  - if the verge is to be cut only once, cut later in the year, to allow the flowers to set seed (approx. August / September),
  - for verges requiring two cuts (usually for safety reasons), make the first cut prior to flowering (approx. March / April), then allowing the verge to flower, making the second cut after seed has set.
- To prevent the loss of structural diversity an area of verge should be left uncut. On wide verges this can be a strip at the back of the verge. On narrow verges consider leaving short sections or bays at intervals along the stretch of road. Every few years (approx 3-5), a full width cut should be made late in the year, to encourage species diversity and prevent scrub and saplings growing.
- Following the cut, verge cuttings should be removed from the verge, either by bailer or by hand. Removal of these cuttings will prevent enrichment of the soil and a build up of a mat of vegetation, which would lead to the loss of wildflowers.
- Where possible, the sustainable after-use of verge cuttings is advocated. For example, cuttings rich in wildflower seed can be used as green hay to benefit other local verges or grasslands or cuttings can be composted locally.
- Avoid leaving hay or silage bales on verges – these will rot down and enrich the soil, leading to a reduction in biodiversity .
- Avoid the use herbicides and/or pesticides.
- Management of hedgerows and scrub on a rotational basis is necessary to prevent shading out of wildflowers. Following the management, any cuttings should be removed from the verge.
- Where management of adjacent ditches is required, avoid depositing the spoil on the verge, as this can smother vegetation and lead to nutrient enrichment.
- Avoid carrying out management to adjacent features in wet conditions as machinery will rut the verge.