NATURE 2030

BECAUSE WE CANNOT UNKNOW

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Restoring A Green Britain

A report on reintroducing biodiversity to the UK's green spaces

Contents

Foreword

Dominic Dyer
Chair of Nature 2030

When I was born in 1970 there were 2.7 billion people on planet earth, today that number exceeds 8 billion and, in my lifetime, there has been a 69% decline in populations of wildlife species.

Research conducted in 2021 found that nearly half of Britain's biodiversity has been lost since the industrial revolution and that the UK has lost more biodiversity than any G7 country. In fact, for biodiversity loss, the UK is in the worst global 10 percent making this nation one of the most nature depleted in the world.

By 2050 the world's population will exceed 9 billion people and over 70% will live in urban areas. Although cities and towns take up less than 2% of the world's surface, they consume two-thirds of the world's energy and produce over 70% of carbon emissions.

Rewilding might often be associated with wilderness and rural areas, but urban rewilding is just as important when it comes to tackling the biodiversity and climate crisis and improving physical and mental health.

As I have found in my home city of Milton Keynes over the last 20 years, the rewilding of urban spaces such as road verges, roundabouts, railway embankments, parks and recreation grounds helps reduce pollution, store rainwater, boosts biodiversity and reconnects those living in urban areas with nature and helps foster a greater sense of stewardship of the precious natural world.

Urban rewilding offers a glimmer of hope in the battle to protect biodiversity and wildlife. Roadside verges alone cover 500,000km in Britain and if responsibly maintained they can maintain rapidly depleting grasses and native plants, house vast numbers of bugs, butterflies and create vital wildlife corridors for wild animals.

It's now time that nature is brought back from the margins and integrated into our increasingly urban lives and this white paper from Nature 2030 provides a valuable road map of how this can be achieved.

From more effectively communicating the value of increasing biodiversity to the public to engaging local councillors, community groups and inspiring future generations to become urban nature champions, Nature 2030 are building a very convincing case for urban rewilding.

Background

Around 97% of Britain's wildflower-rich grasslands have been lost since the 1930s[1], due to pressures including the intensification of agriculture and urban development. Instead of the UK edging closer to the 30x30 goal set at COP15, nature in the UK is facing a further stark decline with the 2023 State of Nature Report showing nearly one in six species are now threatened with extinction.[2 3]

Road verges and greenspaces have the potential to act as a sanctuary for wildflowers in landscapes where they have been lost elsewhere and collectively could provide a network of nature corridors across the UK. By unlocking their potential, road verges and greenspaces have an important part to play in nature's recovery, whilst delivering for the climate and people.

Road verges account for 1.2% of the total area in Great Britain, amounting to just under 260,000ha, about the size of Dorset. Approximately 70% of verges are grassland and over a quarter of all verges are mown frequently and maintained like lawns.[4]

Publicly accessible urban green space adds a further 85,000ha across more than 40,000 sites throughout Great Britain, accounting for 5% of urban areas.[5]

Over 700 species of wildflowers grow on verges, making up nearly 45% of the UK's total plant diversity, including 87 species threatened with extinction Species-rich grasslands are vital habitats.[6]

Grasslands that are species-rich cover less than 1% of the UK, so the scale and ecological quality of verges and public green space have great conservation significance.[7 8]

Source: Roel Meijer/Shutterstock.com

Source: Plantlife International

Better connected green spaces can create wildlife-rich corridors, reducing habitat fragmentation and making our towns and cities more permeable to wildlife. Urban landscapes would no longer be barriers but could act as bridges for nature, enabling wildlife to move and disperse on a landscape scale as it needs to, to cope with environmental pressures such as land use change and climate change. This will help our other wildlife, such as our declining pollinators.

Road verges have considerable potential to be used for pollinator conservation. Verges can be hotspots of wildflowers and pollinators in managed landscapes.[9] Even narrow verges close to heavy traffic can be a significant resource for bees.[10] Roadside bumblebee abundance has been found to be more than double that observed in adjacent arable margins, suggesting that roadside verges should be seen as a conservation opportunity to promote pollinator biodiversity.[11]

Plantlife's Best Practice Guide for managing grassland road verges advocates mowing less frequently, where safe to do so, and collecting the cuttings.[12] The initial costs associated with cuttings collection are more than offset by longer-term savings as fertility is reduced and therefore less frequent cuts are required.[13]

Carbon emissions from green space management can be reduced dramatically by decreasing the frequency of mowing grassy open spaces. Managing species-poor grassland less intensively, to increase its biodiversity can also significantly increase its ability to capture and store soil carbon.[14]

It is well understood that having a closer connection with nature brings real improvements to well-being.[15]

For many of us, a flash of colour on a road verge during the commute to work may be the only view of wildlife that day. These connections with nature are important and significantly boost mental well-being.

A cleaner environment to live in can also be created through nature-friendly management of road verges and urban greenspaces. This can improve air quality, reduce heat island effects, reduce noise and air pollution and mitigate flood risk among a range of other ecosystem services. [16] [17]

Within the legislative and policy frameworks of the devolved nations of Great Britain, there are key drivers for change that require and support local authorities to improve or enhance biodiversity:

England

The 25 Year Environment Plan includes the vision of Nature Recovery Networks.[18] Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework provides guidance and tools on how to plan, design and retrofit biodiversity into urban green space.[19]

The Environment Act 2021 has strengthened the Biodiversity Duties for local authorities and their contractors under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, to consider at least every 5 years what action the authority can properly take to conserve and enhance biodiversity.[20]

As part of this duty, the authority must have a particular regard for any relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and any relevant species conservation strategy or protected site strategy prepared by Natural England. The requirement to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain resulting from development could motivate local authorities to incorporate urban green space into biodiversity gain site registers.[21] Local Nature Recovery Strategies will require consideration of urban biodiversity opportunity mapping and urban green infrastructure strategies.[22]

Scotland

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045 sets out a requirement to expand and connect protected areas and improve their condition; ensuring every local authority has a nature network improving ecological connectivity across Scotland.[23]

The National Planning Framework (NPF4) requires local development plans and proposals to restore and enhance biodiversity, 'strengthening nature networks and the connections between them'.[24]

The Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) is a commitment in the current Programme for Government for multi-year funding as part of overall investment in the natural economy.[25]

Wales

The Welsh government has placed a statutory 'Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty' on public authorities under the Environment (Wales) Act, 2016, which requires public authorities to "maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions".[26]

Most recently, the government has implemented The Welsh Strategic Road Network Nature Recovery Action Plan (2023) which commits the Welsh Government to "...maintain and enhance biodiversity and increase ecosystem resilience through transport operations and infrastructure projects."[27]

This strategic network aims to safeguard designated sites, including species and habitats of principal importance to nature conservation, restore and improve existing habitats such as creating native wildflower verges to better support biodiversity, create new habitats of higher biodiversity value and improve road crossing opportunities for wildlife.[28]

Source: Plantlife International

Impact on Biodiversity

Restoring our once-rich biodiversity concerns more than just plants or animals. It is imperative to do what we can to cultivate a thriving ecosystem which protects the symbiotic relationship between plants, animals and humans.

The below impact study shows the detrimental effect that poor road verge management can have on the whole ecosystem.

Revitalising road verges to save Britain's bees

Seven weeks is the average lifespan of a bee. In these short seven weeks, bees facilitate the circle of life. By helping plants grow, breed and produce food, bees transfer pollen between flowering plants, keeping them alive.

Bees also ensure we have food to eat. Pollination is worth £690 million to UK crops each year, contributing directly to food security[29]. According to bee experts at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, a third of the world's food production depends on bees[30].

However, with the rapid changes in land use, including intensive urban development, pollinator-friendly habitats have continued to be threatened. This results in bees losing the diverse food sources they need for a healthy diet.

Across the UK, there are approximately 313,500 miles of road verges that can act as thriving wildlife corridors for insects, wildlife and our precious pollinators[31]. Yet at present, these are either cut too frequently and at the wrong time or abandoned to scrub[32].

Current cutting schedules mean maintenance takes place during the summer months which is the peak activity time for pollinators. This in turn leads to the desecration of vital sources of pollen and nectar for pollinators. Wildflowers must be able to complete their full lifecycle: grow, flower, and set seed to replenish the seed bank for future bees[33].

Case studies such as Braunton, Devon, where over the last five years road verges have been managed with bees in mind and seen pollinator numbers increase exponentially, prove that we have the tools needed to increase bee numbers across the UK. With simple changes and a commitment to saving Britain's biodiversity, bees can once again thrive.

They only have seven weeks to help our environment thrive, so we must give bees a helping hand with a managed, nature-first approach to verges.

Safe Strimming for Spiny Friends

Not only are hedgehogs one of the nations favourite critters, they are also an integral part of a healthy hedgerow. They are part of a full spectrum of wildlife that helps to keep our environment healthy, proving adept hunters that maintain populations of snails, slugs, beetles and worms.

However, over recent years hedgehogs have been under threat. According to the State of Britain's Hedgehogs report Urban Hedgehog sightings have declined rapidly over the last half-century, and while the population has stabilised over recent years, they still need our help to keep playing their role in maintaining our verges.[34]

In rural Britain this problem is even starker. The number of Hedgehogs spotted in the countryside has fallen by between 66% and 75% nationally.[35]

While there are a number of reasons for this decline, reckless or indiscriminate strimming of hedgerows and verges is a significant one. Hedgehogs love to hang out in grassy verges, safe from predators like badgers, owls and foxes, and many do not realise this when they begin maintenance of grassy areas.

While a hedgehog's spikes may protect it from other animals they are no match for a powerful strimmer and many hedgehogs end up injured, or worse, as a result of careless mowing. And it's not just hedgehogs who face this danger. Our hedgerows are full of small animals like mice and moles who all play a vital role in maintaining our biodiversity.

Areas of grass that may look empty are often full of hidden wildlife, no one sets out to injure animals when carrying out regular maintenance or gardening, but the sad reality is that for many of our favourite critters, careless strimming can be one of the biggest dangers they face.

Road Verges and Pesticides

In 2022, Brighton pledged to become a pesticide-free city in three years, to end the use of the toxic weed killer Glyphosate, the world's most widely sold weed killer.[36]

However, unlike Brighton, the rest of the UK will continue to be affected by this dangerous pesticide. Speaking at a Westminster reception as part of the NFU's Back British Farming Day, former Defra Secretary of State Thérèse Coffey has said farmers will continue to have access to glyphosate once the UK's post-Brexit pesticides regulation regime is developed.[37]

Glyphosate is used by land owners, such as councils, to control weeds in our towns and cities. It is used in our parks, playgrounds, schools and on our road verges. However, studies have found that Glyphosate has direct and indirect effects on our biodiversity.

Indirect impacts on birds and other animals occur due to the wiping out of weeds and wildflowers, destroying habitats and food supplies.

It can also upset the balance of microbial communities in soil, increasing the numbers of some microorganisms and decreasing others, impacting on soil fertility. Finally, it causes a reduction in plant uptake of micro-nutrients from the soil causing nutritional deficiencies in plants.

Most councils in London spray road verges around three times a year with pesticides to keep them clear of weeds, however it is not authorised to be used in open areas to the public.[38]

If councils believe that **by encouraging pollinators, protecting small mammals and minimising harmful pesticides, we can begin to encourage flourishing ecosystems across our road verges and green spaces** Glyphosate is harmful to human health and therefore will not use in public areas, then the same logic should be applied to the health of our road verges, teaming with bird and bug life that maintain the ecological balance of this important biome.

Source: Sheryl Watson/ Shutterstock.com

Best Practice Guide

Below are six best practice recommendations on how to increase biodiversity in your local area:

Reduce Mowing Frequency

For wildflowers to establish, they must be able to complete their full life cycle - grow, flower and set seed. The optimal mowing frequency for native perennial wildflowers to thrive is twice a year outside of April to August.

Grasslands in the wild are dynamic habitats, which rely on natural disturbance such as wild grazing to prevent shrubs and trees from taking over - a process known as ecological succession. Wildflower meadows and open green spaces in agricultural or urban landscapes consequently rely on livestock and/or mowing to maintain them.

> *"For Grasslands to be rich and diverse they have to be grazed"*
> ***- David Attenborough Wild Isles***

Therefore, a '*Managed for Nature*' approach is recommended for road verges and greenspaces. By adopting an annual or cyclical two-cut management approach we can reduce costs, carbon emissions, minimise operational impact, and maximise the biodiversity potential of road verges and greenspaces.

Management option		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
One cut									full cut				
Two cuts	Summer and autumn cutting								partial cut		full cut		
	Late winter and autumn cutting		full cut							full cut			
	Dry verges (short vegetation)	regular cuts								regular cuts			
	Species-rich verges with mown edge		1m strip							full cut			

Source: Alagz/ Shutterstock.com

Many road verges are regularly cut to maintain clear lines of visibility and safe pull-over zones. This is particularly crucial at junctions where a 'visibility splay' must be maintained at all times. On busy roads this often also applies to the first metre from the edge of the carriageway.

Safety must come first on roads, but wherever safe and practicable, the opportunity should be taken for wildlife conservation. For many verges, a regular annual cut and removal of cuttings will keep the verge open, safe, and thriving with interesting wildlife.

Source: Sheryl Watson/ Shutterstock.com

Collect the Cuttings

Due to high artificial levels of nutrients in our environment, from sources including intensive agriculture, industry and vehicle emissions, the soil fertility of our road verges and greenspaces is often unnaturally elevated. This gives an advantage to more competitive and invasive plants leading to biodiversity loss.

Achieving reduced soil fertility levels is crucial to enhancing wildlife value and reducing management costs.

As plants grow, they draw nutrients out of the soil. By collecting grass cuttings, we remove fertility in the plant material before it can rot back down into the soil. This reduces soil fertility with each cutting operation.

Over time, as the soil fertility drops, so does the vigour of the vegetation and the rate of regrowth. This reduces the frequency needed to mow and therefore the cost, carbon footprint and management burden on both labour and equipment.

In combination with a reduced mowing frequency, investing in 'cut-and-collect' equipment has been shown to be a financially sustainable investment strategy by Dorset County Council:

> Dorset Council implemented a cut-and–collect approach to urban mowing across the north of the county in 2014. By reducing road verge fertility, it was possible to drastically reduce cutting frequency from 7 to 2 times per year leading to a 45% saving in mowing costs within 7 years. This enabled the investment in new mowing machinery to be paid back within a viable timeframe.

Green Waste Management

Grass cuttings can be managed either on-site or off-site. Below are examples of best practice guidance to managing grass cuttings.

Disposal Sites

Some local authorities have successfully identified Disposal Sites along their road verge network to dispose of grass cuttings. The approach has shown that:

- Soil fertility can be reduced, as the vegetation is displaced away from the verge or greenspace;
- No waste management licence is required;
- Two for one: road verge litter also displaced can be removed after disposal, improving staff safety as work is moved away from live traffic;
- Share the load: disposing of the grass cuttings evenly and in small piles reduces the risk of methane release.

Side Discharge

A side-discharge mower displaces the grass cuttings to the back verge as you cut. By improving soil conditions for wildflowers on the verge and displacing the fertility to the hedgerow or the back verge, structural diversity can begin to flourish which complements the verge biodiversity.

This method should not be used on sites where the back verge, hedgerow, or woodland edge is populated with ancient woodland or protected species.

The on-site management of grass cuttings is a sustainable, cost-effective, low-carbon approach to creating wildflower-rich habitats on road verges and greenspaces.

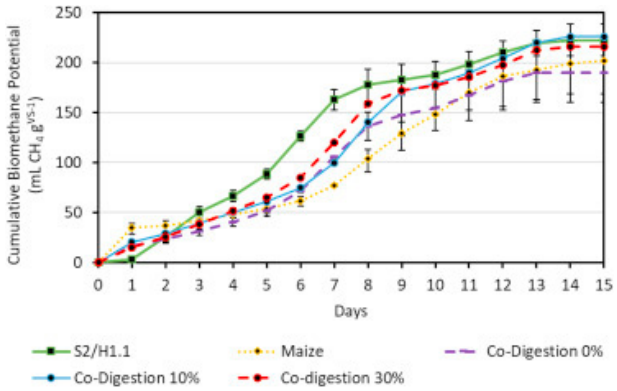
Plantlife is working with partners to build the case for bio-based circular economy solutions which would embed economic and environmental sustainability into greenspace management.

Innovations in cut and collect machinery and biotechnologies (such as anaerobic digestion and hydrothermal carbonisation) have allowed *Plantlife* to start rethinking green waste management, with the potential of transforming grass cuttings from a waste product into a valuable and sustainable resource. This could be capable of generating:

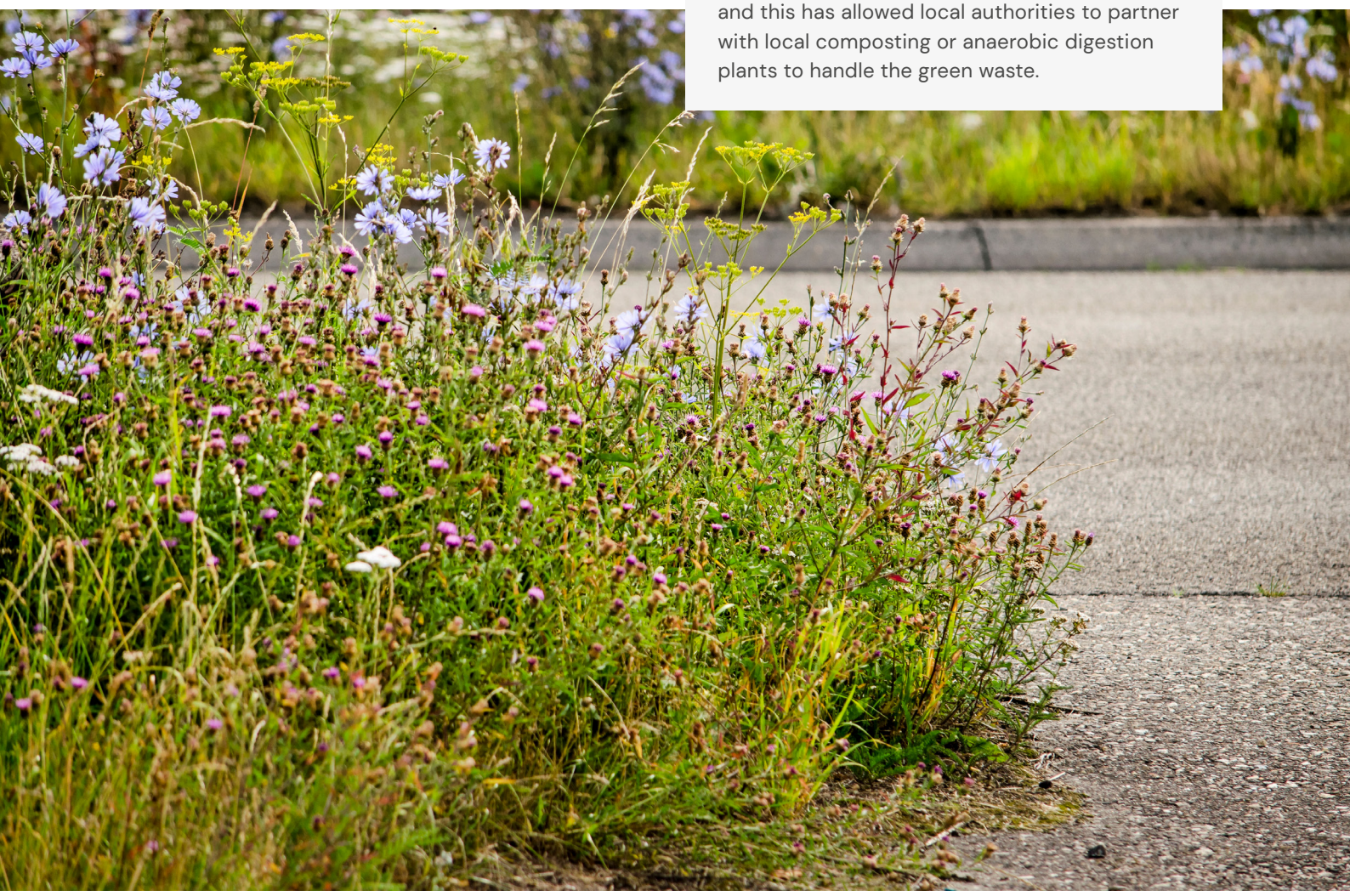
- Heat and power
- Biofuels
- Fertiliser
- Bio-based construction materials

There is a 'sweet spot' in grass cutting regimes whichboth promotes optimum plant diversity and harvests biomass for bioenergy most efficiently. The ideal cutting frequency is twice per year, spaced by about 3-4 months either side of mid-summer and can be applied to 90% of grassland green spaces.

Currently trials by Lincolnshire County Council (see table below) have shown that it is potentially profitable to use grass cuttings as a feedstock in anaerobic digestion. Research by the University of Leeds in 2018 and by Canterbury Christchurch University (CCU) in 2021 show that potential contaminants (such as heavy metals and PAHs) in road-verge grass cuttings are well below levels of concern for use in composting, anaerobic digestion or for spreading digestate to agricultural land as a bio-fertiliser. CCU is currently investigating micro-plastic content.



Plantlife is working to inform green waste management licencing to enable the off-site removal and utilisation of grass cuttings from road verges. The waste management licences concerning grass cuttings from non-roadside greenspaces already enable off-site removal and this has allowed local authorities to partner with local composting or anaerobic digestion plants to handle the green waste.



Source: Roel Frans Blok/Shutterstock.com

Different Structures of Grassland

Each road verge and greenspace is unique. The best approach can quite often be site-dependent and informed by the functionality and ecological value of the space.

In assessing road verges or greenspaces, consider creating different structures of grassland through a different frequency of mowing when managing greenspaces, including areas managed for nature.

Grasslands can take the form of different structures, all of which have ecological value, and can be created by adopting different frequencies of mowing intervention:

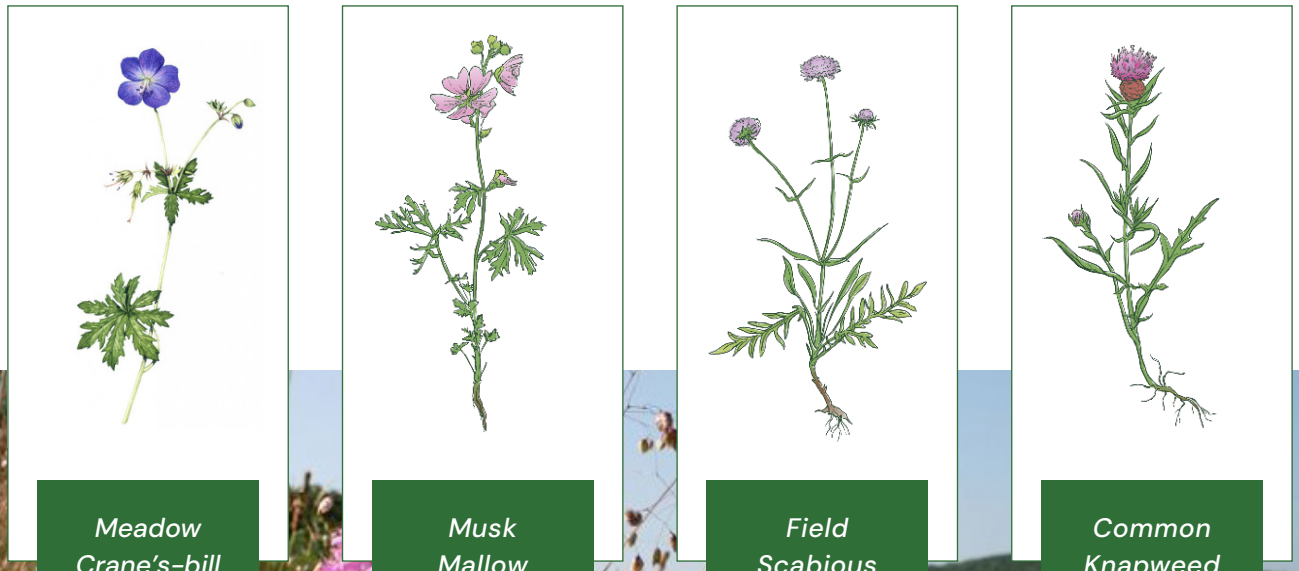
Functional, grassy surfaces mown frequently and kept very short are costly and labour-intensive to maintain but can be minimised to paths and amenity areas.

These functional surfaces can provide access to and be framed by other grassland types.

Flowering lawns, mown every four to eight weeks, allows smaller plants such as Daisies, Bird's-foot-trefoil, and other low-growing flora to flower and re-flower between cuts, providing a valuable nectar source for pollinators.

Mid-length grassland, mown one to two times a year, allows taller-growing summer flowers like Meadow Crane's-bill, Musk Mallow, Common Knapweed and Field Scabious (see below) to flourish and begin to establish perennial wildflower meadow habitat in your greenspace.

Taller grassland, often left undisturbed over winter and only managed to prevent woody saplings and bramble from taking over, will provide valuable feeding material, shelter, and nesting sites for insect larvae and species such as small mammals, reptiles and amphibians.



Meadow Crane's-bill

Musk Mallow

Field Scabious

Common Knapweed

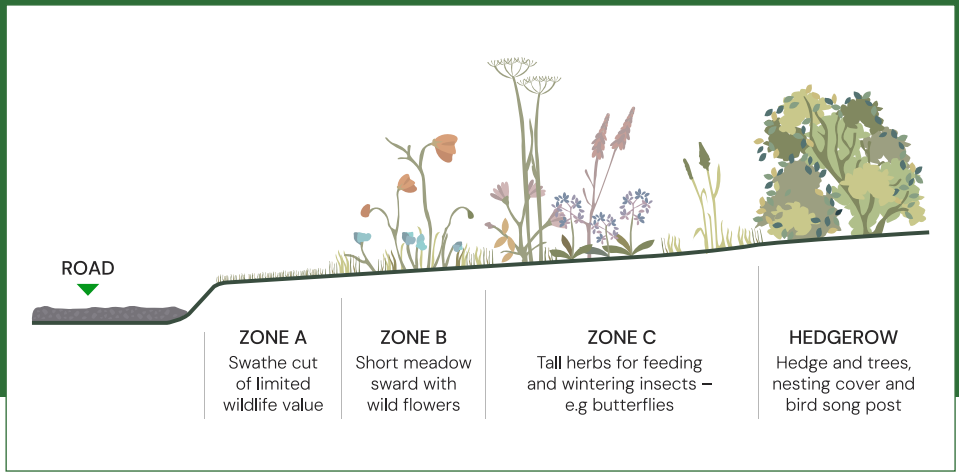
Source: Plantlife International

For Road Verges

Safety comes first; therefore, all road verges must maintain safe pull-over zones, clear sight lines and visibility splays. By providing a safety strip of approximately one metre at road edges the local highways, safety standards can be met whilst providing a neat and tidy edge to taller-growing habitats.

After ensuring safety standards are met, consider how to incorporate the different structures of grassland into road verge management through incremental management.

For example, as seen in the diagram below, by altering the frequency of mowing intervention moving to the back verge, a greater variety of habitats for wildflowers and wildlife can be created.



Source: Plantlife's Good Verge Guide

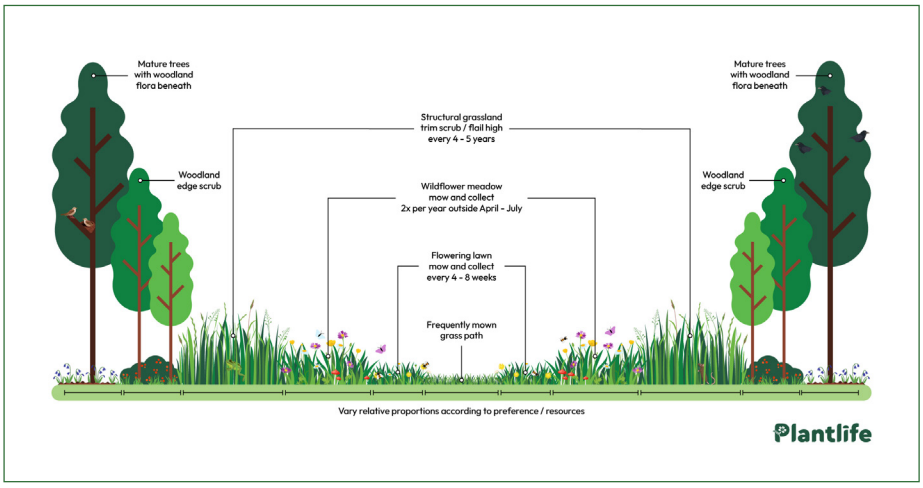
For greenspaces

It is important to identify the functional zones of greenspaces that are important to communities, such as play parks, picnic areas or desire lines for footpaths.

By framing high footfall zones with a wildflower- rich grassland border, a balance between functional zones and spaces for wildlife can be found. It is possible to begin building a nature 'amphitheatre' that moves upwards and outwards from areas of higher disturbance to lower disturbance.

By gradually mowing less often and moving away in gradients from functional areas, a range of complementary habitats for nature can be created throughout the year, whilst meeting the needs of functional and recreational spaces.

For example, if there is a frequently mown path or functional area, it is possible to move outwards towards a low-level flowering lawn mown every six to eight weeks, and then step up to a wildflower meadow mown twice a year outside of April-August until we reach the structural grassland mown high every two to four years on rotation and left as an ideal all-year habitat for over-wintering wildlife.



Case Studies

Nature isn't Neat and Gwent Green Grid

Monmouthshire County Council

'Nature isn't Neat' is a project initially piloted by Monmouthshire County Council, funded through the Welsh Government Rural Communities fund. The project's primary objectives were to increase pollinator habitats, connect isolated habitats, and start building a network for nature to increase wildflower and pollinator diversity.

The project outlined key management principles, consisting of a single cut-and-collect in late August/early September with an option for an additional cut-and-collect if needed, for the council to adopt that will help achieve the primary objectives of the *Nature isn't Neat* project.

The *Nature isn't Neat* project also championed the benefits wildflower-rich habitats can have for mental and physical well-being whilst contributing to greater carbon storage.

The lessons learned from the *Nature isn't Neat* pilot led to a successful bid to the National Heritage Lottery Fund and the Welsh Government for a grant that enabled the purchase of cut-and-collect machinery.

Nature isn't Neat has gone on to form part of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership (GGGP). The partnership includes the five local authorities of Gwent (Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport and Torfaen), as well as Natural Resources Wales, Forest Research and Severn Wye Energy Agency. The partnership aims to use the *Nature isn't Neat* approach to create wildflower-rich habitats across Gwent local authority areas, establish joined-up green space management, and engage the community to the benefits and opportunities biodiverse habitats can offer.

Source: Roel Francesca Leslie/Shutterstock.com

Restoring Shropshire Verges Project

Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund

Restoring Shropshire Verges Project (RSVP) is a community group focused on creating wildflower-rich habitats on Shropshire road verges. The RSVP works closely with the local highway authority, Shropshire Council, to manage road verges to enhance ecological value and reduce carbon emissions. Shropshire Council and the main contractor, Keir, have adopted *Plantlife*'s award-winning guidance on road verge management, see Managing Grassland Road Verges – a best practice guide.

Funding from the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund supported a local community verge project in the village of Edgton in South Shropshire. With the help of a local botanist, the local 'verge volunteer' group surveyed all verges in the village, identified wildflower species of interest, and produced a colour-coded map, data sheet and photographic records. There is now baseline evidence that Edgton has some of the best verges currently identified in South Shropshire, with 53 species of interest positively identified.

Cutting regimes were agreed with the South Shropshire Highways department with support from the local verge group, following public consultations in the village. Road safety and visibility were raised as concerns at these village meetings and resolved with the help of volunteers clearing vegetation from problem areas. The Plantlife Good Verge Guide was also used as an educational resource, and regular talks were given to organisations wanting to start a local project.

An agreement was reached with Shropshire Highways Department and Shropshire Council to ensure the project is maintained and extended.

Formed in 2018 and run by local volunteers, The Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project has been established with The National Trust, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Caring for Gods Acre, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and Plantlife.

Communication

At the heart of implementing effective, long-lasting change is communicating successfully with the general public. For many, councils have been maintaining short, cut grass in public areas throughout their lives and have associated this with tidiness. It is therefore imperative to change this outdated and inaccurate view of public spaces.

Preconceived ideas of ground maintenance will not change unless alterations to grass maintenance are communicated effectively. This includes implementing several measures to increase public engagement, foster community ownership in the scheme and reinforce the positive benefits to the area and their lives.

Signposting benefits of biodiversity

At nature recovery sites, such as verges or parks, include signage that clearly explains the work and benefits of restoring greenspaces. This offers a direct method of educating the public on the changes to the area on the site of projects and enables a transparent nature recovery campaign.

It is also important that official websites stay up to date with the latest information and updates on the campaign, so the public has a clear source of information. Organisations and councils could use tools such as QR codes that could link back to informational websites.

Communicating maintenance work

Many members of the public may assume that increasing biodiversity means the council will no longer be maintaining greenspaces. However, to ensure the public sees the work councils put into maintenance whilst also encouraging nature, mowing small strips around the edge of verges and pathways through nature encouragement sites, communicates that the council is still engaged in keeping the area accessible and well maintained.

Employing Social and traditional media

Outside of the biodiversity sites, communication campaigns must also span across social media as well as traditional print, such as community newsletters or leaflets, allowing for cross-generation engagement in the project. This could include a press release in local media detailing the new maintenance schedule, its benefits and how the community can get involved alongside sharing information graphics on social media.

Sticking to your message

To create an effective campaign, it is important to frame all communications around the key message that this is an opportunity to change the area for the better. It is beneficial to not overburden the public with negative statistics on the declining state of nature. Instead, frame these policies as forward looking, solutions focused approaches which benefit local wildlife, improve their area, and increase their quality of life.

Facilitating community engagement

To facilitate this community engagement, sharing information on the biodiversity programme with schools and community groups allows for direct discussion and open dialogue. Sharing information with local schools and equipping teachers with materialsto educate their class on the programme allows the children to understand the changes happening in their community.

Source: angel217/ Shutterstock.com

Materials

8 Step Framework

To follow the recommendations set out in this paper, the below steps act as a simple guide on how to begin a biodiversity programme that engages both councils, stakeholders and local communities.

1. Identify opportunities

At the beginning of the biodiversity project, it is essential to assess the current state of biodiversity in the area. This does not require gaining third party opinion, but by carrying out surveys, as well as using existing data from local surveys or biodiversity projects, will determine the biodiversity and ecological value of the green space".

2. Understanding locality

Once there is an understanding of the scope and health of green spaces in the area, gaining further insight into the types of grassland or wider habitat in the chosen area will help decide the action needed to improve biodiversity. At this stage, it is important to identify the initial biodiversity action locations and gage community appetite for the project.

3. Setting goals

Identify any commitments the council has made to biodiversity targets and how these targets align against 30x30. Looking more broadly, understand the impact of the new targets on the local community and use this time to engage councillors and gain support.

4. Changing the narrative

Often, rewilding can be seen as fixing the problem, rather than an opportunity to create positive change. Whilst preparing documents on the rewilding project and communicating to the public, understand the importance of using positive messaging such as enabling bee and butterfly populations to thrive and increasing locality aesthetics with local wildflowers.

5. Working with local groups

Communicating the biodiversity project with a variety of stakeholders such as community and nature groups will ensure the project is welcomed in the community. This also includes engaging with national campaigns such as Plantlife's No Mow May, which can increase the sense of community pride in the project.

6. Inspiring Future Generations

Community engagement should also focus on ensuring the next generation of residents understand the changes in the area. Children can help inspire other generations to consider biodiversity and green projects in the community, as seen with the success of teaching recycling in schools. Where appropriate, consider asking schools or other groups to support engagement among local children with the biodiversity project, such as sharing resources.

7. Evaluate and continue

To ensure the longevity and success of your project, take this time to evaluate whether targets have been met and whether biodiversity is improving in the area. This is also an opportunity to reflect on the challenges of the project, what didn't work and why and how communications can be improved as well as inform Plantlife of the positives and negatives of your case study.

8. Sharing knowledge

Whilst every council may take on different biodiversity commitments, everyone engaging with this work is doing so for the good of the environment, the community, and the country. It is important to share the biodiversity journey not only to promote great work, but also to inspire and help other councils engage with their own projects.

Source: Pete Mella/ Shutterstock.com

Endnotes

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