



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE, DOCUMENT

Road verges and amenity grasslands supporting wildlife: frequently asked questions

Common questions about supporting wildlife in grassland on road verges and amenity areas.

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What is the nature emergency?

In 2021, the [Senedd declared a 'nature emergency' \(on research.senedd.wales\)](#). This was in recognition of human induced declines in biodiversity. The [2019 State of Nature Report \(on nbn.org.uk\)](#) highlights that 17% of 3,902 [species assessed in Wales are threatened with extinction \(research.senedd.wales\)](#).

Nature is beautiful and we cannot survive without it. Our natural environment is in decline and so are the benefits that it delivers. We all urgently need to take action to stop and reverse this decline.

Creating more meadow-like areas by reducing the amount of closely mown grass is one way we can help.

What is the climate emergency?

In 2019, [we declared a climate emergency](#). Climate change is largely due to human activity. Rising levels of carbon dioxide and other gases create a 'greenhouse effect'. This traps the Sun's energy and causes the Earth's temperature to rise.

Along with many public authorities, we have committed to reduce carbon emissions. Plants absorb carbon from the atmosphere. Species-rich grassland stores more carbon than species-poor grassland. Having verges and parks which are species-rich is a natural solution to combat climate change.

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is short for biological diversity. It is the variety of all living things in the natural world, both common and endangered. It is not only about the rare or threatened species.

Biodiversity:

- is about more than the number of species living in a place
- is about all the interactions within the same species and between different species
- covers whole communities of plants and animals and the places where they live

Is section 6 duty of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 a legal requirement?

The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems duty was introduced by Section 6 under Part 1 of the [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016 \(on legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.wales/road-verges-and-amenity-grasslands-supporting-wildlife-frequently-asked-questions-html). This duty is commonly known as the section 6 biodiversity duty. It legally requires public authorities to maintain and enhance biodiversity. Further information can be found in the [Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty \(section 6\): guidance for public authorities](#).

Actions taken to benefit wildlife will help public authorities meet their legal obligations under the section 6 biodiversity duty.

What are road verges and amenity grasslands?

A road verge is a strip of vegetation (grass, flowers, trees, hedges) beside a road or pavement.

An amenity grassland is an open grassy area (park, playing field, green space) used by the public.

What is a meadow?

A meadow is a field made up of native wildflowers and finer grasses left uncut until late summer. Before cutting, grasses and wildflowers may grow to about knee high. In a traditional hay meadow, the cut grass is collected as hay, which is used to feed animals in winter.

We can copy the management of traditional hay meadows, by:

- cutting and
- collecting

at the right time. Letting wildflowers grow and set seed allows them to increase year-on-year. We need to be patient. After a few years, our verges and amenity grasslands could become native wildflower meadows.

In late summer, meadow-like areas may start to look untidy. Plants put energy into making seeds for next year's wildflowers. These areas are still very important for wildlife to complete their full lifecycle. They continue to provide shelter and food for insects, mammals, reptiles and birds.

A wide range of wildlife lives in meadows with native wildflowers. A typical natural meadow can support more than 1,400 species of invertebrates. Over

many thousands of years, they have all adapted to live together.

You can find out more about meadows on [Plantlife Meadows Hub](#).

Why are meadows good for people?

Research shows that connecting with wildlife can benefit people's health and mental wellbeing. Creating more meadow-like areas nearby allows us to experience nature day by day.

Walking through wildflower meadows can improve mental health through reductions in:

- stress
- anxiety
- depression

It also reduces the risk of illnesses, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. As humans, we are part of nature. When we are in nature we also feel calmer, happier and more focused.

NHS Wales recognises the importance of connecting with nature. We recently funded the Magnificent Meadows project. Through this, Plantlife and NHS staff created Eithinog Meadows Health and Wellbeing Route. You can take a virtual tour and follow the [Eithinog Meadows Health and Wellbeing route story map \(on the storymaps.arcgis.com\)](#).

What is cut and collect?

Cut and collect is a method that copies traditional ways of managing hay

meadows. It involves collecting grass cuttings (arising) after mowing. This is important because:

- it prevents the build-up of dead vegetation, which can smother delicate plants
- it leaves more exposed ground to allow seeds to grow
- it reduces the fertility of soil. This slows down the growth of nutrient-loving grasses that choke wildflowers and finer grasses.

Collected cuttings can be taken to green waste sites for compost production. Where facilities are not available, arising can be left in dedicated areas to rot down. These piles can offer refuge to invertebrates and other wildlife.

Will having long grass have an impact on road safety?

It is important that we keep the road safe for all users. But, we can also improve spaces for nature along road verges. Having biodiverse verges does not mean roads will be less safe. Certain areas such as sightlines and junctions may be cut more often to ensure safety.

How should I cut the grass in an amenity grassland?

To be of greatest benefit to wildlife, amenity grasslands should be cut like a meadow. But, different parts of an amenity grassland are used for different things. Some areas may need to be cut more often. Leaving patches uncut for longer than usual in spring or reducing the number of cuts through the year will help short flowers (daisies, clover) to grow. These provide food for pollinators.

Cutting different areas in rotation will allow some areas to be in flower.

In meadow areas, cutting narrow strips along the edge of hard footpaths will keep them clear. Short cut grass footpaths allow people to walk through areas of longer meadow grass with wildflowers. Cutting in this way shows that the longer grass is being left intentionally.

Putting up signs can explain the benefits for wildlife. They can also be a helpful reminder that areas are not being neglected.

Nature isn't Neat (on monmouthshire.gov.uk) has produced a Code of Action. This can help organisations understand alternative ways to manage grasslands.

Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) have coordinators in all parts of Wales. They provide expert advice and support. You can find out more at [Wales Biodiversity Partnership](#).

The **Local Places for Nature Officer, Rachel Carter** supports Community and Town Councils. Rachel provides advice and support to access funding. She also offers general support on biodiversity plans.

What checks should I make to limit injuring animals?

Before mowing, you should walk over the area to remove litter. This also helps to let most small animals know you are there so they can move away before you begin cutting.

However, when threatened, hedgehogs curl up in a tight ball and they do not move away. This makes them vulnerable to injury. Hedgehog hospitals and

rescue centres receive many hedgehogs badly injured by strimmers. Strimmer injuries to hedgehogs can be fatal or cause infections that lead to a slow death. Even if an injured hedgehog is taken to a rescue centre, it may need to be euthanised.

Therefore, it is important to check for hedgehogs before strimming or mowing. If you find a hedgehog, leave it alone and do not cut this area.

Hedgehogs may be in long meadow-like grass that has been left to grow over the summer. They could use it for day-time resting sites. They also shelter in:

- patches of dense vegetation (such as bramble or bushes)
- beneath hedgerows
- under discarded litter (e.g. car doors, old carpets etc) or
- in piles of leaves, grass, sticks or logs.

They are likely to use such areas for hibernation and breeding nests. If cutting long grass near areas like this, you should check carefully before you trim.

It is best not to cut long grass beside such areas until the autumn to avoid hedgehog breeding season (typically May to September). If a nesting hedgehog is disturbed, she is likely to abandon her hoglets.

Consider rotational cutting in these areas so that there is always an area left untrimmed for hedgehogs, insects and other small animals to shelter in.

More information on [hedgehog ecology and land management](#) is available on the British Hedgehog Preservation Society website. The [British Hedgehog Preservation Society](#) have also produced a poster.

Putting a sticker on your strimmer or other mowing machinery will remind you that you need to check for hedgehogs. Stickers are available from <https://hedgehogaware.org.uk/shop.php>.

Should I use herbicides or fertilisers on road verges and amenity grasslands?

Herbicides, including moss killer, can impact wildflower establishment and growth. Fertilisers increase grass growth, which can smother wildflowers. Avoid using these if you want wildflowers.

There are several ways to control weeds without using chemicals. Adopting an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach can help you do this. Always ask yourself if any control is necessary and if you can use a non-chemical alternative. Find out more about hand, mechanical and chemical control in meadows on [Meadows' Hub \(on meadows.plantlife.org.uk\)](https://meadows.plantlife.org.uk). In some cases, (e.g. control of invasive non-native plants) herbicide use may be appropriate. If you use herbicides, make sure you know what to use, when to apply it and how to apply the least amount necessary.

Why is it important to engage with people about changes to mowing practices?

You should discuss changes to mowing practices with local people and community groups. It can give everyone a better understanding of how the spaces are used. It can help avoid unrealistic expectations and disappointments. It will provide opportunities to explain:

- the benefits that changes to mowing can bring for nature
- that mowing less is not about cost saving
- that it takes time to change from a grass-dominated meadow to a flower-rich meadow
- how they can get involved

Who should I contact to let them know what I think?

First, you need to find out who manages your local road verge or green space. This organisation will be able to explain what they are doing and why.

Welsh Government work with Trunk Road Agents to look after our trunk road and motorway network. See [information about verges on the trunk road and motorway network](#).

Local authorities generally manage other road verges and amenity grasslands. Community and Town Councils, housing associations and community groups may also manage public grasslands.

In urban areas, how useful are annual seed mixes?

Sowing wildflowers with colourful non-native annuals looks attractive. It can provide pollen and nectar-rich plants for pollinators. But, it has drawbacks:

- it may provide a quick fix for pollinators. It will not support the wide range of invertebrates that feed on native meadow flowers
- they are sometimes called 'wildflower meadows' but they aren't meadows
- mixtures of annual, often non-native species, can be expensive to buy. They can be labour intensive to maintain and they may need to be sown each year
- herbicides are often used to clear areas before sowing
- planting generic mixes of wildflower seed does little to conserve our native wildflowers. It can also threaten their uniqueness

The cut and collect method copies traditional ways of managing hay meadows.

Changing to this method gives grassland a chance to reach its flowering potential. We need to be patient. It can take several years to turn a grassy area into a native wildflower meadow. To restore especially species-poor grassland, consider using locally sourced wildflower seed or green hay.

More information about creating species-rich verges and amenity grasslands is available:

- [Managing grassland road verges \(on roadverges.plantlife.org.uk\)](https://roadverges.plantlife.org.uk)
- [Maintaining a meadow \(on plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk\)](https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk)
- [Local Nature Partnerships coordinators](#) can provide expert advice and support.
- The [Local Places for Nature Officer, Rachel Carter](#) supports Community and Town Councils. Rachel provides advice and support to access funding. She also offers general support on biodiversity plans.
- [Nature isn't Neat \(on monmouthshire.gov.uk\)](https://monmouthshire.gov.uk)

What are pollinators and why do they need our help?

Our wild pollinators include:

- bumblebees and other bees
- butterflies and moths
- flies and various other insects such as beetles, wasps and thrips

Many are in decline. Honey bees are also pollinators. In Wales, honey bees are largely a farmed species. They are a valuable resource but they are not in decline.

The decline in wild pollinators is mainly due to habitat loss, fragmentation and

degradation. See [Wales' Threatened Bee Report \(2018\) \(on \[cdn.buglife.org.uk\]\(https://cdn.buglife.org.uk\)\)](#). Pollinators need flowers to feed from. They need habitats to live in, to lay eggs and for young to feed and develop. So, providing habitat, with food sources and shelter will help their survival.

Pollinators are essential for the maintenance of biodiversity and the wider ecosystem. They pollinate many:

- farmed crops
- wild plants

by producing seeds, fruits and nuts. A wide variety of wildlife feed on these.

Having more meadow-like verges and amenity grassland is one way to help pollinators.

You can find out more ways to help pollinators at [Bee Friendly \(Wales Biodiversity Partnership\)](#).

What is the Bee Friendly scheme?

The Bee Friendly scheme was launched in 2016 under the [Action Plan for Pollinators](#). The scheme is called Bee Friendly, but it encourages us to take action to help all pollinators, not just bees.

Find out how you can help pollinators at [Bee Friendly \(Wales Biodiversity Partnership\)](#).

What is the Action Plan for Pollinators?

We launched the [Action Plan for Pollinators](#) in 2013. It aims to reduce, and reverse, the decline in pollinators. It was developed with a wide range of interested people across Wales. The actions seek to:

- provide diverse and connected flower-rich habitats to ensure healthy pollinator populations
- raise awareness of their importance and management

We have formed a Roadside Verge and Amenity Grassland Taskforce Subgroup. Its aim is to establish a community of good practice. If you are involved with roadverges or amenity grassland, you are welcome to join this group. Contact: NatureConservation@gov.wales.

What is Local Places for Nature?

Local Places for Nature is our initiative to create Nature on Your Doorstep. It is designed to restore and enhance nature where people:

- live
- work, and
- access public services

It provides funding, together with help in implementing specific projects. It works with local communities to take forward projects.

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What are Local Nature Partnerships?

Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs):

- provide biodiversity advice
- maximise funding opportunities and collaborations
- empower community groups to take action
- target community engagement activities by drawing on skillsets
- support nature recovery in Wales
- are a crucial point of contact for advice and expertise

Local Nature Partnerships have LNP coordinators in all parts of Wales. You can find out more at [Wales Biodiversity Partnership](#).

From 2019 to 2022, we funded LNP Cymru to facilitate a nature recovery network across Wales. You can read more about [Local Nature Partnerships and their projects \(on Inp.cymru\)](#).

We also help organisations to buy cut and collect equipment. The equipment enables local authorities to:

- change mowing practices
- expand the areas where they can enhance biodiversity

Local Places for Nature continues to improve grassland areas for biodiversity. It will provide funding for projects across the not-for-profit sector including:

- local authorities
- community and town councils
- housing associations
- schools
- NHS

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- others who manage not-for-profit grassland

For more information, contact your [LNP coordinator](#).

What is 'It's for Them'?

'It's for Them' is a campaign that aims to increase awareness that changing mowing is about saving wildlife.

Reducing mowing on road verges and amenity grasslands creates a better habitat for 'Them':

- wildflowers
- invertebrates
- birds
- mammals
- amphibians
- reptiles

If you manage road verges or amenity grasslands, we would like you to get on board. We need your support to make 'It's for Them' a success. We have created a stakeholder toolkit with assets for you to use. Add your own logos and details to:

- infographic template
- printable sign templates
- short leaflet with a some frequently asked questions

We would like your help to spread the word about 'It's for them'. The stakeholder toolkit includes suggested social media messaging. Please share social media posts with your networks. With your support, we can encourage more people to reduce mowing and help save our wildlife.

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'It's For Them' assets can be found on our [It's for Them campaign: stakeholder toolkit](#).

Are there any other useful websites and resources to access?

- [Managing Road Verges for Nature, the Environment and People \(on ecosystemsknowledge.net\)](#)
- [The Denbighshire Wildflower Project \(arcgis.com\)](#)
- [Denbighshire's Wildlife flower Project \(on YouTube\)](#)
- Plantlife: [A comparison of monitoring meadow methods \(on YouTube\)](#)
- Plantlife: [How to make a meadow \(on YouTube\)](#)
- Plantlife: [How to make a mini-meadow \(on YouTube\)](#)
- Plantlife: [Making Meadows, Creating Communities \(on YouTube\)](#)
- Plantlife: [other webinars \(on YouTube\)](#)
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC): [Let's Talk Wildflowers \(on Let's Talk RCTCBC\)](#)
- [Wales Biodiversity Conference 2020 sessions \(on Biodiversitywales.org.uk\)](#)

Creating Nature-friendly Verges and Amenity Grasslands: Practicalities, Issues and Solutions

- [Plantlife's Road Verge Campaign: transforming the management of Welsh road verges for biodiversity Kate Petty Plantlife \(on YouTube\)](#)
- [Invertebrate diversity of wildflower verges in Rhondda Cynon Taf Liam Olds Colliery Spoil Biodiversity Initiative and Richard Wistow Rhondda Cynon Taf Council \(on YouTube\)](#)
- [Joint Q&A session \(on YouTube\)](#)
- [Machinery for managing roadside verges and wildflower grasslands](#)

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**Kathleen Carroll, Welsh Government and Rose Revera NPT Council/
RCT Council (on YouTube)**

- **Monmouthshire County Council's Nature Isn't Neat Project Mark Cleaver and Kate Stinchcombe Monmouthshire County Council (on YouTube)**
- **Mapping biodiversity on the verge Liam Blazey and Joel Walley Denbighshire County Council (on YouTube)**

Connecting Communities to Nature: building capacity in the community

- **Bee Friendly Lucy Arnold-Matthews Newport City Council (on YouTube)**

Nature Based Solutions to address the nature and climate emergencies

- **Restoring Wales' Magnificent Meadows in partnership – Plantlife & National Trust Lucia Chmurova Plantlife Magnificent Meadows and James Roden National Trust (on YouTube)**
- **Wales Biodiversity Conference 2022 sessions (on Biodiversitywales.org.uk)**
- **5 October WBP Conference Day 3 afternoon session**
 - Urban Communities Taking Action for Nature Recovery and Improving Biodiversity with Local Places for Nature
 - Local Places for Nature - Local Nature Partnerships: The path to a more natural approach to grassland management – “It's for them!”
- **Amenity grassland (RSPB)**
- **Barnsley Biodiversity Trust**
- **Dwr Cymru / Welsh Water: Guidance for the Amenity Sector (on corporate.dwrcymru.com)**

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- PestSmart Booklet - Guidance for the Amenity Sector
- PestSmart Printable best practice A4 poster
- **Buglife B-Lines**
- **Buglife: B-Lines - Managing Green Spaces in B-Lines for Pollinators - Guidance for Welsh Local Authorities**
- **Buglife Habitat Management**
- **Caring For God's Acre**

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