

A highways verges management pilot project in the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Parishes of Little Malvern and Welland and Castlemorton

Purpose of this note

This note informs you of a small pilot project which commences in Autumn 2019 to improve two highways verges in the above area. The note contains information on the purpose of the project and how it will be implemented, together with contact details for those involved.



Worcestershire's pollinators support our agricultural industry and help our gardens thrive!

Background

The Malvern Hills AONB

The Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1959. The purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. An AONB Partnership exists to help meet this purpose through the delivery of an AONB Management Plan. For more information on the AONB and the work of the partnership see: <http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/>



. This Wood white is a nationally rare species occasionally seen foraging on roadside verge flowers.

The ownership and management of highways verges

Worcestershire County Council (WCC) is the highway authority for Worcestershire and as such is responsible for all adopted highways, (with the exception of Motorways and Trunk Roads) within the county. WCC's contractors Ringway, carry out maintenance on the majority of the verges in the county, however some areas are maintained by third parties.

Project purpose and rationale

What is the aim of the project?

To allow flowers and grasses in highways verges to grow and so benefit pollinating insects and other wildlife in the area which will use this habitat for food and refuge.

Why is the project needed?

Many pollinating insects are in decline across the UK. Reasons for this are varied but the loss of flower-rich habitats and intensive farming practices are often cited as key causes. This is bad news for the agricultural economy with many fruit, vegetable and cereal crops being entirely or largely insect pollinated. The economic value of

honey bees and bumble bees alone as pollinators of commercially grown crops in the UK has been estimated at over £200 million per year.

In October 2015 Worcestershire County Council recognised the significance of this problem and designated Worcestershire a 'pollinator friendly county' to promote the



Flower rich verge, Worcestershire

protection of pollinating insects and their habitats. With this commitment the County Council sought to make a direct difference to pollinators, for example through the management of Council-owned and maintained land.

Highways verges also provide food and refuge for many other types of wildlife. Verges can serve as wildlife corridors, connecting areas of high conservation value and thus helping to bolster populations of many species which may be in decline locally.

The pilot project

In two small areas of verge at Drugger's End Lane (in Castlemorton parish) and below Little Malvern Priory (Little Malvern and Welland parish) existing vegetation and nutrient rich top soil will be removed from the verges. The sub soil - which contains fewer nutrients and is likely to be better able to support a more diverse range of plants - will then be prepared and sown with a wildflower and grass seed mix.

Who will be carrying out the management works during the growing season?

Contractors working on behalf of the Malvern Hills AONB Unit (hosted by Worcestershire County Council) will be carrying out the management works.

Who will meet the costs?

The costs of clearing the two road verge areas, reseeding with a wildflower seed mix and removing weeds next year will be met by the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership with grant support from the England European Regional Development Fund through the Natural Networks Grants Programme.¹



Greater knapweed with small skipper butterfly

When will the project happen and how long will it last?

Capital works to remove existing vegetation and top soil and to reseed the verge areas are expected to take place in Autumn 2019. In the spring/summer of 2020 maintenance works will happen to remove weeds/undesirable species which take a hold in the newly sown areas. In future years it is expected that the verge areas will be managed at least once a year, in late summer/early autumn when vegetation will be cut and removed from site.

How will you know if the project has been a success?

Baseline survey data on plant communities on the verges has been collected. Future data will be collected and compared against this baseline to show whether the diversity and abundance of plant life has increased.



Worcestershire's road verges support a diversity of wildlife. Slow-worms eat garden pests and thrive in longer grasses, newts and even glow-worms have been discovered on Worcestershire's road verges

Frequently Asked Questions

What about the health and safety of road users?

The 1m strip adjoining the highway will be managed as normal, receiving one or two cuts through the growing season depending on conditions. Any vegetation growth on the verges affecting sight lines will be monitored and cut as and when necessary.

How will this project impact on local ditches and flooding?

The impact is likely to be a neutral one at worst and may have a small positive effect. Thicker vegetation growing on the verges during the growing season may play a part in helping to impede run-off from fields onto the road network whilst the removal of vegetation at the end of the season may also be beneficial.



Spiny retharrow is listed as Very Scarce in Worcestershire and is seen here growing on a road verge amongst bird's foot trefoil.

What will happen to the soil and cut grass?

This will be deposited close by on a suitable area of the road verge network.

What will happen if any concentrations of injurious weeds arise?

Worcestershire County Council's duties in relation to such weeds on highway verges remain unchanged. Such weeds will be dealt with if this is considered necessary.

Why not try to manage all verge areas in the AONB differently?

In 2017 the Malvern Hills AONB Unit did try to initiate a project which would have seen many verge areas in the eastern part of the AONB managed more sympathetically for wildflowers and pollinating insects. Unfortunately it was not possible to find a suitable contractor to undertake this work. The AONB Unit sees the current project as a small pilot and hopes that approaches to management can be found in the future which will bring more benefits to wildlife and public amenity.

Communications and Contact details

Who is behind this project?

This is a partnership project between Worcestershire County Council Highways and the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership with grant support from the European Union.

Have you consulted locally?

Parish Councils locally are aware of the project. Pieces about the project have been/are being written for relevant parish newsletters.

Feedback

We are keen to receive feedback on this pilot work. Please send any comments or suggestions to aonb@worcestershire.gov.uk

Who do I contact if I have any questions?

If your question is not answered above please contact:

- Worcestershire Highways: 01905 845676 – if your question concerns health and safety or highways management matters.
- Malvern Hills AONB Partnership: 01684 560616 – if your question concerns the purpose or benefit of the pilot project.
- The Natural Networks grants programme (KAinsworth@worcestershire.gov.uk or LMayo@worcestershire.gov.uk) if your questions concerns the European grant support for this work.

End.



ⁱ The project is receiving up to £4,911 of funding from the England European Regional Development Fund as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme 2014-2020. The Natural Networks programme is delivered in partnership between Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. Further information can be found at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/naturalnetworks. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (and in London the intermediate body Greater London Authority) is the Managing Authority for European Regional Development Fund. Established by the European Union, the European Regional Development Fund helps local areas stimulate their economic development by investing in projects which will support innovation, businesses, create jobs and local community regenerations. For more information visit; <https://www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding>.