



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board
30th July 2021

**Joint Report of the Head of Planning and Public Protection –
Ceri Morris and the Head of Streetcare – Mike Roberts**

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected All

NPT Bee Friendly Scheme

Purpose of the Report

To consider and agree the proposed 'NPT Bee Friendly Scheme'.

Executive Summary

In line with other council's across Wales, the proposed scheme aims to increase the area and extent of wildflower grassland (i.e. roadside verges and larger meadow areas which are managed to encourage wildflowers and pollinating insects) in Neath Port Talbot, in support of the Council's Biodiversity Duty Plan and the NPT Nature Recovery Action Plan.

The NPT Bee Friendly Scheme includes grassland areas in council owned/managed sites and roadside verges, and expands on the previous 'Conservation Verges Scheme', which has been in operation since 2004.

This report seeks endorsement of the NPT Bee Friendly Scheme and the adoption of procedures. Please note that there is an All Members Seminar scheduled for Thursday 22nd July at 10am to raise awareness of the scheme.

Background

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced a duty (the S6 Duty) on public authorities to maintain and enhance biodiversity, thereby promoting the resilience of ecosystems in the exercise of its functions.

The Authority manages a significant amount of land as roadside verge through mowing and there is a significant opportunity to enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems in the County Borough through a change in management of some of this area.

This scheme expands on the previous 'Conservation Verges Scheme' which has been in operation since 2004.

This scheme adopts the management of the sites from the Conservation Verges Scheme and proposes a change of management on additional sites to encourage wildflower grasslands to develop. The NPT Bee Friendly Scheme brings together these sites into a cohesive scheme.

NPT Bee Friendly Scheme

The proposal for the NPT Bee Friendly Scheme is included in full in **Appendix 2**. The scheme has been prepared jointly by the Neighbourhood Services and Countryside and Wildlife Teams, in consultation with other sections across the Council, with the aim of increasing the area and extent of wildflower grassland in Neath Port Talbot.

It is proposed that by 2026 all verges along adopted roads and all Council owned/managed grassland areas will be categorised and managed as Nectar Cut, Conservation Cut, Meadow Cut, Visibility Splay or Amenity Cut. Further explanations of these categorisations are available in **Appendix 2**.

Advice and guidance on implementation of the scheme will be undertaken by the joint working group of Neighbourhood Services and Countryside and Wildlife Team.

Implications

There will be a change of approach to the management of certain council managed sites and this will have certain implications on council services and operations, for example, slightly increased workloads at certain times of year and additional machinery costs. There is a phased approach to the scheme (outlined in **Appendix 2**), allowing time to adapt to changes in staff practices and to adopt a gradual process of change of machinery as replacement becomes necessary.

The public will notice a change in certain areas to a more diverse display of

wildflowers. Expectations will be managed through publication of the scheme online, which includes Frequently Asked Questions and details of species to look for.

The intended outcomes will be subject to monitoring in line with standard monitoring methodology.

Adoption and Publication Procedures

If approved, the NPT Bee Friendly Scheme would be made available on the Council's website. In accordance with the Council's Welsh Language Standards Policy, the document would be made available in Welsh.

Hard copies of the NPT Bee Friendly Scheme will also be available for purchase at a reasonable charge. In common with previous practice, it is suggested that the price be based on the cost of printing together with post and package at the prevailing cost. Electronic copies will be made available at no cost.

Financial Impacts

The scheme will be limited to ensure that it works within current Streetcare budgets or available grants. It is not anticipated that there will be a financial burden on the Council caused by the changes proposed in the initial phases of the scheme. However, this will be monitored and kept under review. As the scheme progresses sites will be added gradually in phases, with learning from the initial phases informing the suitability of adding further sites and avoiding financial burden.

External funding was secured for the purchase of one of the required cut and collect machines in 2020. Additional funding has been offered to purchase another machine in 2021. If the scheme expands in future years, it is possible that additional machinery may be required. These will be purchased through further external funding if required, or as alternative equipment to any no longer needed.

In places, it may be necessary to pay for additional machinery and operators to remove the cuttings from site (i.e. if there is nowhere to hide a compost heap). This cost will be covered by the Countryside & Wildlife Team if necessary. The benefits of any additional expenditure will be kept under review and site proposals amended as necessary.

Integrated Impact Assessment

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh

Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The first stage assessment (presented in **Appendix 1**) has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required. A summary is included below.

The NPT Bee Friendly scheme as proposed would make a positive contribution to biodiversity conservation and enhancement in NPT, which has knock on positive outcomes for people in the County Borough, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing. The scheme would contribute to helping the Council comply with its statutory duty under the Environment Wales Act and particularly contribute to the Resilient Wales Goal of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act as well as the Council Wellbeing objectives.

Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. Implementation of this scheme would be inclusive and as such would support equality and social cohesion. The scheme and any communications about it would be provided in Welsh as well as English. Through the conservation of biodiversity, the health and wellbeing of the people of NPT would benefit, particularly communities of high deprivation and health inequalities, for example, providing increased opportunities for people to connect with nature and access/see biodiverse green space.

Valleys Communities Impacts

There will be an improvement to the environment and health and wellbeing of Valleys Communities associated with this scheme, as there will be sites in the Valleys included.

Workforce Impacts

There are currently no anticipated workforce impacts associated with the initial phases of this scheme as there will be no staffing changes, albeit the balance and timing of work done by some staff may change. However, work impacts will be monitored and kept under review as the scheme progresses and further sites are added.

Legal Impacts

There is a potential failure to comply with the Biodiversity Duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 if the scheme is not implemented.

Risk Management Impacts

The Council will be failing to comply with the Biodiversity Duty Plan should there be a failure to adopt the proposed scheme, which would be subject to reporting to Welsh Government.

Continued decline of biodiversity and failure to respond to the nature emergency as declared by Welsh Government on 30th June 2021.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

The scheme has been the subject of internal consultation and the scheme itself includes a mechanism for consultation on individual sites with local members.

Recommendations

Having had due consideration to the Integrated Impact Assessment, it is recommended that:

1. The NPT Bee Friendly scheme as presented in **Appendix 1** is adopted, agreeing to the proposal for changes in management to increase the extent of wildflower grasslands and published on the Council's website.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

The recommendations are needed to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – First Stage Integrated Impact Assessment.

Appendix 2 – NPT Bee Friendly; Our Approach to Managing Verges and Grasslands in NPT.

List of Background Papers

Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Nature Recovery Plan for Wales 2015.

Officer Contacts

Lana Beynon – Planning Policy Manager [Tel: 01639 686320 / E- mail: l.beynon@npt.gov.uk]

Andrew Lewis – Waste and Neighbourhood Services Manager [Tel: 01639 686021 / E-mail: a.lewis@npt.gov.uk]

Rebecca Sharp – Countryside and Wildlife Team Leader [Tel: 01639 686149 / E-mail: r.sharp@npt.gov.uk]

Appendix 1

NPT Bee Friendly Scheme
Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

This Integrated Impact Assessment considers the duties and requirements of the following legislation in order to inform and ensure effective decision making and compliance:

- Equality Act 2010
- Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016

Version Control

Version	Author	Job title	Date
Version 1	Rose Revera	Local Nature Partnership Coordinator	15/06/2021

1. Details of the initiative

	Title of the Initiative: NPT Bee Friendly Scheme
1a	Service Area: Planning Policy, Planning and Public Protection and Streetcare Divisions
1b	Directorate: Environment and Regeneration
1c	Summary of the initiative: To consider and agree the proposed NPT Bee Friendly Scheme and the publication procedures to be implemented.
1d	Is this a 'strategic decision'? No
1e	Who will be directly affected by this initiative? Service Users, Staff, Wider Community
1f	When and how were people consulted? The scheme has been the subject of internal consultation and its final form reflects the outcome of that process.
1g	What were the outcomes of the consultation? Internal departments have produced the scheme together.

2. Evidence

What evidence was used in assessing the initiative?

This scheme is a requirement of the Biodiversity Duty Plan 2020-2023 under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and has been steered by the Welsh Government objectives as set out in the Nature Recovery Action Plan (2015) and The Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales.

3. Equalities

a) How does the initiative impact on people who share a **protected characteristic**?

Protected Characteristic	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
Age			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Disability			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Gender reassignment			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Marriage & civil partnership			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring

				communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Pregnancy and maternity			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Race			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Religion or belief			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Sex			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Sexual orientation			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

N/A

b) How will the initiative assist or inhibit the ability to meet the **Public Sector Equality Duty**?

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
To eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
To advance equality of opportunity between different groups			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
To foster good relations between different groups			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

N/A

4. Socio Economic Duty

Impact	Details of the impact/advantage/disadvantage
Positive/Advantage	Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature.

	Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing. As such biodiversity recovery can contribute to health inequalities in deprived areas.
Negative/Disadvantage	
Neutral	

What action will be taken to reduce inequality of outcome
N/A

5. Community Cohesion/Social Exclusion/Poverty

	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
Community Cohesion			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Social Exclusion			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.
Poverty			✓	Neutral Impact - Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. The increase in area and extent of wildflower grassland will be beneficial for all ages and will bring communities closer to nature. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Implementation of the scheme will be inclusive and will involve the Countryside and Wildlife Team (C&WT) and Streetcare working with all staff/sections throughout the Council, the wider public and a wide range of partner organisations including those from the public, private and community/voluntary sectors.

6. Welsh

	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this effect?
What effect does the initiative have on: – people’s opportunities to use the Welsh language			✓	The scheme and associated publications will be provided in English and Welsh. As all of the technical names of species and habitats are required to be translated by the Regulations, as a result, it is felt that the opportunity for people to use and expand upon their Welsh Language vocabulary has increased providing a positive impact (albeit low) on people’s use of the Welsh language.
– treating the Welsh and English languages equally			✓	The scheme and associated publications will be provided in English and Welsh. As all of the technical names of species and habitats are required to be translated by the Regulations, as a result, it is felt that the opportunity for people to use and expand upon their Welsh Language vocabulary has increased providing a positive impact (albeit low) on people’s use of the Welsh language.

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

All public communications will be bi-lingual.

7. Biodiversity

How will the initiative assist or inhibit the ability to meet the **Biodiversity Duty**?

Biodiversity Duty	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
To maintain and enhance biodiversity	✓			<p>This is an action of the Biodiversity Duty Plan 2020 - 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 6.5 Nature Conservation Sites Scheme Undertake a review of the Nature Conservation Sites Scheme to include management of all verges and of key council owned sites. <p>This action is contributing to ensure that the Authority meets its statutory duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity as set out within the Environment (Wales) 2016 Act.</p>
To promote the resilience of ecosystems, i.e. supporting protection of the wider environment, such as air quality, flood alleviation, etc.	✓			<p>This is an action of the Biodiversity Duty Plan 2020 - 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 6.5 Nature Conservation Sites Scheme Undertake a review of the Nature Conservation Sites Scheme to include management of all verges and of key council owned sites. <p>This action is contributing to ensure that the Authority meets its statutory duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity as set out within the Environment (Wales) 2016 Act.</p> <p>Increasing the area of wildflower grassland and improving the management, as prescribed through this scheme, will directly promote ecosystem resilience by improving the diversity, extent, condition and connectivity of grassland ecosystems in NPT.</p>

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Increasing the area of wildflower grassland and improving the management, as prescribed through this scheme, will directly promote ecosystem resilience by improving the diversity, extent, condition and connectivity of grassland ecosystems in NPT.

8. Well-being of Future Generations

How have the five ways of working been applied in the development of the initiative?

Ways of Working	Details
i. Long term – looking at least 10 years (and up to 25 years) ahead	Adoption of this scheme will embed biodiversity management into the council's way of working long-term. Grassland areas will be managed for biodiversity unless there is a valid reason why they shouldn't be (i.e. visibility splay/ amenity). Conserving and enhancing Biodiversity now will benefit the long term well-being of future generations.
ii. Prevention – preventing problems occurring or getting worse	The scheme requires regular meetings of a working group who will be able to identify and address problems early. The working group provides the mechanism to ensure the NPT Bee Friendly scheme is fit for purpose and responsive to changes in circumstances. Member consultation is key to the scheme and there is a mechanism for sites to be classified differently where necessary, allowing for problems to be prevented from occurring or getting worse.
iii. Collaboration – working with other services internal or external	This is a cross-boundary collaborative scheme between the Countryside & Wildlife Team and Neighbourhood Teams.
iv. Involvement – involving people, ensuring they reflect the diversity of the population	The scheme has arisen from a working group of Countryside & Wildlife and Neighbourhood staff, where issues are raised, information disseminated and best practice shared.

v. Integration – making connections to maximise contribution to:	
Council’s well-being objectives	Positive action on biodiversity is far reaching and all-encompassing and therefore will have a positive impact on the Council’s wellbeing objectives. A species and habitat-rich environment will ultimately improve the well-being of children, young people and all adults living in NPT and beyond.
Other public bodies objectives	

9. Monitoring Arrangements

Provide information on the monitoring arrangements to:

Monitor the impact of the initiative on Equalities, Community Cohesion, the Welsh Measure, Biodiversity Duty and the Wellbeing Objectives.

Monitoring of the scheme will be undertaken by the working group who meet regularly to ensure the scheme is fit for purpose and responsive to changes in circumstances.

10. Assessment Conclusions

Please provide details of the conclusions reached in relation to each element of the assessment:

	Conclusion
Equalities	Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. Implementation of this scheme will be inclusive and will involve the Countryside and Wildlife Team working with Neighbourhood Teams as well all staff/sections

	throughout the Council, members, the wider public and at times other partner organisations including those from the public, private and community/voluntary sectors.
Socio Economic Disadvantage	Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. Research states being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing. As such biodiversity recovery, such as that which will be achieved through the scheme, can contribute to health inequalities in deprived areas.
Community Cohesion/ Social Exclusion/Poverty	Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. Implementation of this scheme will be inclusive and will involve the Countryside and Wildlife Team working with Neighbourhood Teams as well all staff/sections throughout the Council, members, the wider public and at times other partner organisations including those from the public, private and community/voluntary sectors.
Welsh	All communication via the Authority's social media platforms and websites; radio broadcasts and reports etc... are translated into Welsh and the technical names of species and habitats are also translated which increases people's opportunity to use and expand upon their Welsh Language vocabulary. Any publications for the scheme will be produced in English and Welsh.
Biodiversity	<p>This scheme is an action of the Biodiversity Duty Plan 2020 - 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 6.5 Nature Conservation Sites Scheme Undertake a review of the Nature Conservation Sites Scheme to include management of all verges and of key council owned sites. <p>This action is contributing to ensure that the Authority meets its statutory duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity as set out within the Environment (Wales) 2016 Act.</p> <p>Increasing the area of wildflower grassland and improving the management, as prescribed through this scheme, will directly promote ecosystem resilience by improving the diversity, extent, condition and connectivity of grassland ecosystems in NPT.</p>
Well-being of Future Generations	The NPT Bee Friendly scheme embraces all five ways of working.

Overall Conclusion

Please indicate the conclusion reached:

- **Continue** - as planned as no problems and all opportunities have been maximised
- **Make adjustments** - as potential problems/missed opportunities/negative impacts have been identified along with mitigating actions
- **Justification** - for continuing with the initiative even though there is a potential for negative impacts or missed opportunities

- **STOP** - redraft the initiative as actual or potential unlawful discrimination has been identified



Please provide details of the overall conclusion reached in relation to the initiative

The NPT Bee Friendly scheme will make a positive contribution to biodiversity conservation and enhancement in NPT, which have knock on positive outcomes for people in the county, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing. The scheme will contribute to helping the Council comply with its statutory duty under the Environment Wales Act and particularly contribute to the Resilient Wales Goal of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act as well as the Council Wellbeing objectives.

Biodiversity affects all generations and all areas of society. Implementation of the scheme will be inclusive and as such will support equality and social cohesion. The plan and any communications about it will be provided in Welsh as well as English. Through the conservation of biodiversity and the health and wellbeing and other services the people of NPT will benefit, particularly communities of high deprivation and health equalities.

11. Actions

What actions are required in relation to obtaining further data/information, to reduce or remove negative impacts or improve positive impacts?

Action	Who will be responsible for seeing it is done?	When will it be done by?	How will we know we have achieved our objective?

12. Sign off

	Name	Position	Date
Completed by	Rose Revera	LNP Coordinator	15/06/21
Signed off by	Ceri Morris	Head of Service/Director	07/07/21

Appendix 2

NPT Bee Friendly Scheme
Our Approach to Managing Verges and Grasslands in NPT



Caru Gwenyn CNPT NPT Bee Friendly



www.npt.gov.uk

Cymraeg
Our approach to managing verges and
grasslands in NPT

Contents

A new approach to managing verges and grasslands in NPT	3
How grassland ecosystems function	4
How our management is changing	5
What to expect	7
What not to expect	8
The Benefits	9
Branding	10
Who manages the verges?	10
Working with communities	10
Frequently Asked Questions	11
Monitoring	13
Complaints & compliments	13
Contacting Us	13
Reviewing the scheme	13
References and further sources of information	13



Figure 1. Orchids which appeared in a verge in Longford when mowing was paused due to COVID restrictions. June 2021.

A new approach to managing verges and grasslands in NPT

In recent years, the loss of wildflower grassland habitat and the pollinating insects they support has become an issue of public concern. NPT Council has a responsibility to address the nature and climate emergencies and is also committed to *protect, conserve and enhance our natural environment* under the terms of the Corporate Plan, Biodiversity Duty Plan, NPT Nature Recovery Action Plan and Wales Pollinator Action Plan.

A new approach to managing the verges and grasslands of NPT has been approved by the County Council's Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board on 30th July 2021 and is being progressively implemented as resources allow.

The principles of this approach are:

- To increase the area and extent of wildflower grassland (i.e. roadside verges and larger meadow areas which are managed to encourage wildflowers and pollinating insects) in Neath Port Talbot County Borough, in support of the Council's Biodiversity Duty and the NPT Nature Recovery Action Plan.
- To favour change of management over seeding or planting where possible, in order to encourage the native seed bank to flourish without introducing non-native species or those which would not naturally occur in the area
- To classify all verges in NPT by 2026 under one of the following categories. More information on each category is provided later on in this document.
 - a. Nectar Cut
 - b. Conservation Cut
 - c. Meadow Cut
 - d. Visibility Splay
 - e. Amenity Cut
- To keep the local communities of NPT informed and updated

The NPT Bee Friendly Scheme includes grassland areas in publically owned sites and roadside verges, and expands on the previous 'Conservation Verges Scheme', which has been in operation since 2004.



Figure 2. The Harbour Way verges past TATA Steelworks

How grassland ecosystems function

High quality (i.e. high species diversity) wildflower grasslands exist naturally on low nutrient soils, where management ensures that the soil nutrients do not allow more competitive plants such as nettles and grasses to dominate. The exact nature of these grasslands depends on a number of factors, including soil type and water content. In NPT, we have a number of different grassland habitats, including neutral grassland, marshy grassland and acid grassland.

Wildflower grasslands require management, traditionally through cutting or grazing, to prevent them from becoming rank (nutrient enriched) and eventually succeeding to woodland.

In order to ensure that a wildflower grassland has high species diversity, the arisings (cut material) need to be removed following cutting to keep the soil nutrients low and the grassland needs to be left to flower for the entire flowering season until seeding is completed, usually between April and August. The arisings can be piled into compost heaps to create habitat for species such as grass snakes, made into hay or taken away for green waste recycling.



Figure 3. Neutral Grassland Maerdy Playing Fields



Figure 4. Marshy Grassland



Figure 5. Ragged Robin and Meadow Buttercup overlooked by the Steelworks

How our management is changing

Traditionally, our roadside verges in NPT are all cut every 2-3 weeks during the growing season i.e. late March to end September and the arisings are mulched and dropped on top of the grass. This fertilises the soil, encouraging further grass growth. As of 2021, at certain locations with the Streetcare Services Section, we will be changing this management and instead encouraging the growth of wildflowers and reducing the frequency of required cuts through the use of 'cut and collect' machines.



Figure 6. A Cut and Collect machine in action

Traditional 'Cut and Fly' management	'Cut and Collect' management
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mower mulches as it mows, returning the nutrients to the soil 2. More grass grows, more quickly, outcompeting other species 3. Mowing needed again within 2-3 weeks 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mower collects arisings as it mows, gradually reducing the amount of nutrient that fuels grass growth 2. Grass growth is less vigorous, reducing the frequency that mowing is required and increasing the diversity of wildflowers

As well as managing grasslands on publically owned sites to encourage wildflowers, the intention is that by the end of five years, all verges in NPT will be managed in one of the following ways:

- 'Nectar Cut'

All verges where a short sward is desirable will be changed from a 2-3 weekly cycle of mowing to a four-weekly cycle, allowing short-flowering plants to complete their full flowering cycle and increasing the nectar available to insects. Where possible, the arisings will be removed to reduce the nutrient content of the soil. This is based on research by Plantlife (Plantlife No Mow May 2020NB1). Whilst this cycle will still result in short flowering species being cut, the scheme will work on the principle that there will remain a sufficient nectar source in the wider area to provide a net gain for pollinators.

- 'Conservation Cut'

Certain rural verges e.g. lanes between villages, which will not be cut inside the flowering season (April-September). We will aspire to include as many verges in this classification as possible within workforce constraints.

- 'Meadow Cut'

As conservation cut but certain sites will be cherry picked for meadow management i.e. cut using a cut-and-collect machine, arisings left in piles on site, no mowing between April and August and edge-cuts to maintain a neat appearance. Any such designation will be dependent on suitability of the verge for depositing of arisings.

- 'Visibility Splay'

Cut as regularly as required.

- 'Amenity Cut'

Verges which are used as public open space and require regular mowing.

In the first year (2021), a number of sites in each ward will be identified in order to trial this scheme. Sites are agreed between Neighbourhood Services staff and the Countryside and Wildlife Team and then approved by the local member before inclusion in the scheme.

At the end of 2021, targets will be set for increase each year, leading to the fifth year, by which time all verges will be classified and managed appropriately. Areas can be re-classified if required in response to monitoring.

The initial priority will be to increase the number of meadow cut verges and undertake trials of the Nectar Cut approach before rolling out further. We will take a phased approach to the changes, allowing time to adapt to member feedback / concern, changes in staff practices and to adopt a gradual process of change of machinery as replacement becomes necessary.

What to expect

With the adoption of a change of management to Nectar Cut, Meadow Cut or Conservation Cut, you can expect more wildflowers!

You may start to see the following wildflowers appearing in your local verge. The specific species you may see depends on factors such as soil type and time of year, and will vary across the county.



Bee Orchid
Ophrys apifera



Dandelion
Taraxacum officinale
agg



Bird's Foot Trefoil
Lotus corniculatus



Cat's-ear
Hypochaeris radicata



Black Knapweed
Centaurea nigra



Common vetch
Vicia sativa



Cowslip
Primula veris



Cuckoo Flower
Cardamine pratensis



Devil's-bit scabious
Succisa pratensis



Common fleabane
Pulicaria dysentrica



Herb-robert
Geranium robertianum



Kidney vetch
Anthyllis vulneraria



Southern marsh-orchid
Dactylorhiza
praetermissa



Ox-eye Daisy
Leucanthemum
vulgare



Teasel
Dipsacus fullonum



Yarrow
Achillea millefolium

We'd love to see what's popping up in your verges and grassland areas!

What not to expect

We will not be using seed mixes such as that pictured on the right. Whilst initially pretty to look at, these mixes have limited benefit for nature. Some of the issues with the use of these seed mixes are outlined below:



Figure 7. What not to expect- annual seed mixes

- These are annual mixes which require renewing each year, which involves repeated use of herbicide, soil disturbance and re-seeding. The use of herbicide should always be avoided when possible. This method is unsustainable in the long term.
- The large majority of the brightly coloured species in annual seed mixes are non-native species which would not naturally occur in NPT (or even in the UK!). This can displace the distinctive native wildflowers which are already in the seed bank and erode the wonderful local distinctive wildflower diversity which we are lucky enough to have in NPT. Non-native species can even become highly invasive if introduced in the wrong place, causing a significant pressure to the local biodiversity.
- Many of our special pollinators are limited in range and specially adapted to feed from specific plants. Pollinators thrive on the flowers which are native to the same region as they are i.e. those to which they are best adapted. Introducing seed mixes containing species that are not generally found in that region therefore can have little to no benefit to the native pollinators of that region.

Therefore, our aim is to encourage the native seed bank to flourish through a change in management. This is the most sustainable method of increasing the area and extent of wildflower grasslands in NPT. You will often be surprised by what pops up, such as the orchids which appeared in this verge in Longford when mowing was paused due to COVID lockdown restrictions!



Figure 8. Orchids on Heol Heddwch, Longford

The Benefits



Figure 9. The benefits of a change in management to 'Cut and Collect' i.e. Meadow Cut

a. Costs

We are hopeful that over time, this approach will free up more resources to attend to other street care needs such as litter, flytipping and sign cleaning, although there may initially be initial outlays, for example, for disposal of green waste and initial machinery purchases. We have already purchased one cut and collect machine via the Welsh Government Local Places for Nature Fund. There may also be hidden dividends from this approach through redeploying our in-house teams to other Streetcare tasks such as litter picking. Financial and workforce resource requirements will be monitored and kept under review as the scheme progresses. If ultimately it leads to a saving then all the better.

b. Improved environment

As soil nutrients decrease in a grassland ecosystem, the number of plant species that can survive increases, and the dominance of coarse grasses reduces. This produces a more diverse roadside environment for wildlife and adds to the biodiversity of the area.

This can already be seen in practice in NPT on Harbour Way and Fabian Way, where this management has been in place for a number of years under the Conservation Sites Scheme. These stretches of road are attractive to both road users and pollinators. In fact, they are also likely to support populations of the endangered Shril Carder Bee, which can be found in the coastal regions of the county.

Branding

Roadside verges and grasslands included in the NPT Bee Friendly Scheme will be marked with the following logo, featuring the endangered Shrill Carder Bee.



Who manages the verges?

The NPT Bee Friendly sites are managed by our Neighbourhood Services teams with support from the Countryside and Wildlife Team, whilst policy with regard to the scheme is coordinated by the Countryside and Wildlife section and queries in relation to this scheme can be made by contacting environment@npt.gov.uk

Working with communities

We are keen to hear from any local community about how they think they can help us with the ecological approach to verge management in their area. We ask you to let us know:

- Where you think an area would benefit from less cutting or where cutting is unnecessary
- If your community would like to take on management of the verges in line with the ecological approach
- If you would like to volunteer to help us look after one of the special NPT Bee Friendly Verges
- If you know of areas in your community that we currently mow regularly that would be suitable to establish a NPT Bee Friendly Verge

Frequently Asked Questions

Do you have a question? We have done our best to answer examples of the most frequently asked questions below. If you cannot find the answer you require, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

a. *Why bother changing management, isn't it fine as it is?*

Closely mown grass unfortunately has little to no benefit for nature. Pollinators across the UK are in trouble due to pressures such as pesticide use and loss of habitat. For example, since the end of the war, 97% of wildflower meadows in the UK have been lost – a very stark statistic. We rely on pollinators for our food supply chain and we need to provide them with homes and places to feed to ensure their survival.

The council manages a significant amount of land as roadside verge through mowing and there is a significant opportunity to enhance biodiversity and provide homes for these pollinators in the county through a change of management on some of this area.

It is important to contribute to tackling the nature and climate crisis by enhancing nature where we can on public land. The council also has a duty to protect, conserve and enhance our natural environment under the terms of the Corporate Plan, Biodiversity Duty Plan, NPT Nature Recovery Action Plan and Wales Pollinator Action Plan.

Improving the extent and condition of wildflower grassland will also have benefits for wellbeing of communities, as research has proven that being close to nature improves mental health and wellbeing.



Figure 10. Common Blue butterfly feeding on buttercup

b. *Do you have to cut and collect?*

Collecting the arisings reduces nutrient levels and prevents a thick thatch from forming. This allows wildflower seeds to germinate and prevents vigorous competitive species from dominating. Over time, removing the cuttings makes verges easier to manage as reduced nutrient levels means that slower growing flower species start to replace lush grass growth.

c. *Will road safety be compromised?*

No. Safety will always come first, which means some areas will still be regularly mown as visibility splays.

d. *Is this just a cost-cutting exercise?*

Not at all. Whilst ultimately over time this approach may lead to a cost saving for NPT Council, the reduction in frequency of required mowing should allow more resources to be focused on other street care needs, such as litter removal and sign cleaning. In the short term, although there may be a reduction in cutting in some particular areas at particular times of the year, there is still a cost involved in collecting arisings, maintaining machinery and in some cases, removing arisings from site. There will be no immediate saving to the council from the scheme.

e. *Won't it look untidy?*

Nature by definition isn't neat! For some, seeing areas being left to grow longer may take some getting used to. However, we believe that we should be doing what we can to help pollinators and we will aim to maintain 'edge cuts' on some of the areas, where path and road edges will be mown to maintain a neat appearance.



f. *Why have the flowers in an area of my community been mown?*

NPT Bee Friendly is a new scheme (since 2021) and it may just be that we are unaware of the area. Get in touch to suggest the site to us by emailing environment@npt.gov.uk

Figure 11. A neat edge cut will be maintained on many of these areas

g. *Can I plant wildflower seeds in my community?*

Due to the reasons outlined in Section 5 of this document, we favour change of management over seeding or planting where possible, in order to encourage the native seed bank to flourish without introducing non-native species or those which would not naturally occur in the area.

If after three years of management through cut and collect, the area is showing no signs of increasing in wildflower diversity, we may consider assisting the establishment of wildflowers by sourcing plug plants, green hay or seeds of local origin. Please contact the Countryside and Wildlife Team for information on this or to express an interest in assisting with this if it is required.

h. *How do I know if an area in my community is included in the scheme?*

In most cases, Meadow Cut areas will be marked with the NPT Bee Friendly Logo but if this is not present, please get in touch to check if an area is included in the scheme.

i. *I'm a hay fever sufferer, will this make it worse?*

No, hay fever is mainly caused by grasses and managing with cut and collect machinery will reduce the nutrients and lead to a reduction in grasses and an increase in wildflowers. Wildflowers are pollinated by insects rather than wind, so they do not release their pollen in the same way as grasses and trees.

j. *Can I suggest an additional site?*

Of course! Just get in touch on the email address below. Please bear in mind that there are restrictions which may prevent the area from being included in the scheme, including safety or amenity reasons. Additionally, we are only able to include local authority owned land.

k. *Can I request that a site is removed from the scheme?*

Of course, if you would like to discuss this for a particular area, please get in touch.

Monitoring

We will be monitoring these areas for biodiversity benefit in line with standard methodology. Financial and staff resource requirements will also be monitored and kept under review. The results of all monitoring will inform how the scheme develops and is implemented.

Complaints & compliments

We receive varying numbers of complaints each year from the public dissatisfied with the amount or timing of grass verge maintenance we undertake. Verge management is something of a no-win situation as some feedback is of the view that the grass is cut too little whilst other feedback is concerned the grass was cut too early for wildflowers to set seed, or was not cut early enough in the season, or the grass had been cut but the arisings left behind causing a mess.

We are open to adding new verges and grassland areas to the scheme at any point and the inclusion of a particular area in the scheme will also be reviewed if a significant number of complaints are received. It is noted however that because changing verge management can effect working and resource patterns, the introduction of new verges into the scheme may need to wait to the start of the next growing season.

Contacting Us

Please contact us via environment@npt.gov.uk – Subject Title ‘NPT Bee Friendly’

Reviewing the scheme

The scheme will be reviewed every five years.

References and further sources of information

- [NPT Bee Friendly Webpage](#)
- [Plantlife Road Verge Campaign](#)
- [Plantlife No Mow May](#)- How to get more flowers in your lawn
- [Magnificent Meadows](#)