

A590 Morecambe Bay Nature Improvement Area (NIA) Green Transport Corridors Project (GTCP) Pilot A590 Trunk Road, South Cumbria

Kier

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Large Scale Permanent

Project overview

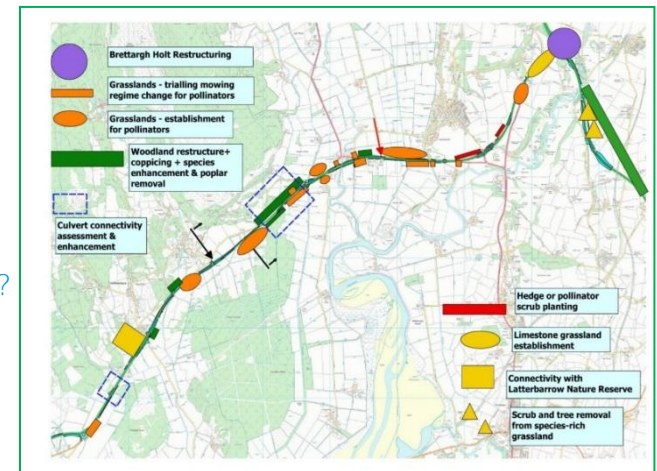
This landscape scale partnership project enhances 12km of the existing A590 verge in rural South Cumbria (within Morecambe Bay NIA). The scheme is delivered by Kier Highways in partnership with Cumbria Wildlife Trust (CWT) GTCP Officer. The GTCP is an innovative project designed to coordinate and support the trialling of new approaches to soft estate management to enhance ecological connectivity and ecosystem services, whilst enhancing the resilience and operational efficiency of the road network. The project improves grassland habitat for pollinating insects, provides woodfuel and woodland biodiversity, reduces the deer vehicle collision risk, benefits locally important species and habitats, and improves the visual landscape. Volunteers from CWT, Natural England (NE) and Butterfly Conservation Trust have been involved in the design and delivery of this scheme. The framework of the project is replicable and can therefore lead to countrywide biodiversity gains on strategic roads.

Project overview cont'd

£30,000 (2015/16 financial year) 2016/7
£200,000 funding secured to continue works.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

The GTCP Project is a 3-year pilot programme of work being led by Natural England in partnership with the Highways England, Network Rail, Humberhead Levels NIA partnership and Morecambe Bay NIA partnership. The project is helping deliver commitment 32 of the Natural Environment White paper and is also contributing to the delivery of Biodiversity 2020 and the Highways England Delivery Plan 2015-2020. The GTCP in Morecambe Bay NIA is one of only two national pilot projects backed by NE.



Summary map of scheme area showing management options at each location.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

Gathering current biodiversity condition is essential to show how management decisions are affecting each plot. The plots are not currently reaching their potential for biodiversity or ecosystem services. Baseline survey methods have been developed and implemented in 2016 after discussion with local experts to ensure survey methods are repeatable and practical.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

There are many different elements to this scheme that combine and continue with management options reflecting progress as the scheme continues. Between October 2015 and August 2016 the project has included:

- Scrub clearance from 36 grassland sites (including a Volunteer Day at plot 67 which involved specific health and safety arrangements),
- Liaison with NE, CWT, Network Rail, Butterfly Conservation Trust, Buglife, Plantlife and the Deer Initiative.
- We have organised and carried out reptile surveys in 2016 using local ecologists – the results of these are informing management decisions.
- In collaboration with CWT, we have removed rhododendron from the verge adjacent to Foulshaw Nature Reserve (SSSI and SAC – managed by CWT).
- We are better connecting roadside habitat with Latterbarrow Nature Reserve in collaboration with CWT Reserve Officer.
- We have developed and co-ordinated botanical monitoring for 20 of the sites, and arranged some monitoring by CWT volunteers, to capture baseline data.
- We have arranged for butterfly surveys to take place at 2 of the sites by Butterfly Conservation Trust Volunteers.
- We have collected and quantified all the woodchip and logs from scrub clearance works in order to gauge the amount created and to help find a sustainable and local use for the wood waste. Normally this would have been chipped and left onsite – not desirable for areas where we want to encourage species rich grassland.
- We are investigating alternative uses for grass arisings (cuttings) as biomass or as hay. Arisings are being removed (which is not current standard practice) to allow flowering herbs to grow and reduce the negative impacts of dominant grasses.



A590 Wellhead Woods Volunteer day

Cont'd

On 17th March 2016 12 volunteers from CWT, Butterfly Conservation, NE and Kier helped clear scrub on the A590 verge (see photos above). The self-sown ash, hawthorn, sycamore, larch and bramble was cleared to allow wild flowers to flourish on the sunny bank. The work promotes high quality grassland habitat for butterflies and pollinating insects (bees). Two butterflies that need oak and elm trees for their life cycle (purple hairstreak and white-letter hairstreak) will also benefit. As well as bringing people together to carry out practical conservation work, this kind of community engagement and partnership working helps to share knowledge and expertise.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement

Further information

The scheme has committed funding through the Highways England Road Investment Strategy and the Highways England Biodiversity Plan (published June 2015). The scheme helps to meet commitments Highways England has made to adopt the National Pollinator Strategy.

Baseline surveys have been undertaken and environmental management techniques have been implemented to meet various aims, including:

- To increase the resilience of the transport network i.e. improve safety and increase performance
- To reduce the impact of transport infrastructure on the landscape – from the visual impacts to run off from pollutants
- To increase connectivity of wildlife habitats – creating natural corridors
- To increase wildlife-richness, or biodiversity, of the transport corridors.

The scheme is a trial and therefore will have useful outputs that can be shared and be recommended (or not) for use elsewhere. Lessons learnt are being fed back in reporting as well success stories in order to facilitate the delivery of future management.



Baseline botanical monitoring is underway to show the impact management changes have on the verge

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

My personal motivation comes from a desire for a more robust, joined up and diverse roadside habitat that is sustainable in the long term. I enjoy sharing knowledge and learning from local groups to produce management plans and monitoring methods together. This scheme provides an example of what can be achieved by working with volunteers on our network and by challenging the normal way of working.