

## Northamptonshire Protected Wildflower Verges

### Highways verges, Northamptonshire

#### KierWSP, Northamptonshire Highways

**BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Maintenance & Management Award**

#### Project overview

On behalf of Northamptonshire County Council, KierWSP maintain and manage the Highways of Northamptonshire. Since the beginning of the Northamptonshire Highways partnership KierWSP have recognised the value rural highways verges have in terms of ecology and biodiversity. These verges provide crucial refuge and habitat for many wildlife species and can be used as corridors linking areas rich in biodiversity. Over the past 7 years KierWSP have been working closely with the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust to identify, manage and maintain 31 Protected Wildflower Verges. These verges may also be protected as local wildlife sites or county wildlife sites. They cover a total 168,451m<sup>2</sup> of the highways verges of Northamptonshire. Located throughout the county these verges are maintained at an approximate cost of £18,000 annually.

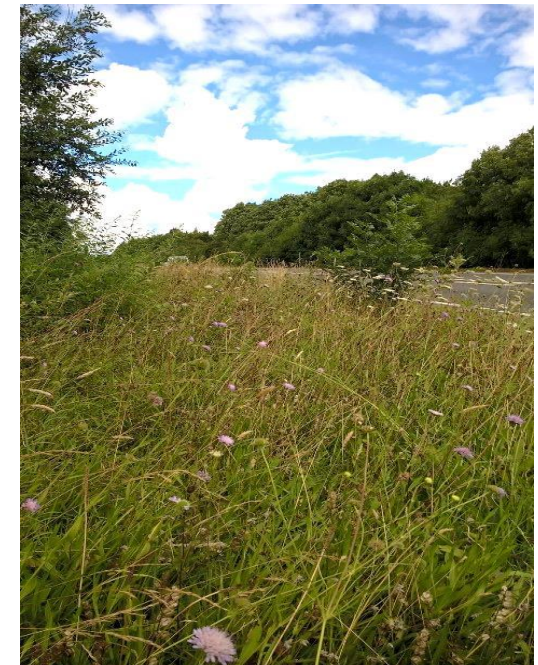
#### What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

Typically roadside verges are made up of 4 to 5 species of grasses and have limited biodiversity value. Wildflower verges are rich in species and their

selection and management takes into account threats, such as scrub encroachment, declines in certain species, national priorities and local distinctiveness.

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

Given the nature of the work KierWSP carries out on the highways there is potential for the works to have a negative impact on the environment. By maintaining, managing and enhancing the county's wildflower verges we can offset some of the negative impacts our works may have on local biodiversity. Working with the local Wildlife Trust, areas with a significant percentage of indicator wildflower species or local wildlife sites have been identified for protection. Management schedules were put in place to ensure these areas



*Wildflower verge: Bozeat, Northamptonshire*

flourished and over the past 7 years KierWSP has actively managed these designated verges.

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Northamptonshire County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan includes actions to ensure Protected Wildflower Verges are suitably managed to enhance biodiversity of roadside verges as part of the counties wider commitment to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity.

Currently 95% of the wildflower verges and local wildlife sites in Northamptonshire are undergoing positive management to increase biodiversity on our network whilst improving the aesthetics of the road network creating a more enjoyable experience for road users.

Working with the local Wildlife Trust, who survey the wildflower verges and provide specialist advice on management regimes, we are able to ensure they continue to thrive. Typically management of the verges would consist of a full width mow at the end of the summer with the cuttings removed to reduce the nutrient load, minimising weed and grass ingress, allowing the flowers to flourish without competition. Additional work such as scrub clearance may be required on occasions depending on the verge in question.

The verges provide ideal, largely undisturbed areas where a rich variety of grass species and wildflowers can flourish and add significant ecological value to the local area. The verges provide the perfect environment for commuting pollinators as well as habitat and corridors for a wide variety of wildlife. Wildflowers have also been proven to be effective at absorbing emissions from vehicles hence reducing pollution in the local area and are also aesthetically pleasing. This being said, managing the wildflower verges not only contributes towards the local biodiversity but also the health and wellbeing of the people in the local area.



*Wildflower Verge: Hartwell, Northamptonshire*

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Managing the verges has been proven to enhance the species variety and helps the local biodiversity to flourish. Moving forward KierWSP will continue to work with the local Wildlife Trust to identify new sites for management and enhance those we already have.

### How would you best describe the project?

An Enhancement (Maintenance and Management of an enhancement)

### Further information

This is a long-term maintenance/management plan. In line with Northamptonshire's Biodiversity Action Plan, KierWSP and The BCN Wildlife Trust have been identifying, enhancing, managing and maintaining the Protected Wildflower verges and local Wildlife sites across Northamptonshire. With guidance and advice from the Wildlife Trust, KierWSP has adjusted the standard maintenance schedule for grass cutting to include the protected sites and ensure they are managed as advised.

This summer KierWSP are working with the Wildlife Trust on a new management plan 'scrub off' for two of the protected local wildlife sites. Additional maintenance will take place to stop excess scrub encroachment on the verge. The extra maintenance will consist of an additional earlier cut to help restore the verge. In terms of lessons learnt this may not have been required if more of the verge width had been cut back annually preventing encroachment.

Another lesson learnt would be verge identification. Over time the identification posts on the verges have been damaged or removed. This makes it difficult to clearly demonstrate where members of the public shouldn't walk, park vehicles or take it upon themselves to cut verges. This summer, with a new contractor taking on the maintenance of the verges a survey will be completed to ensure that any missing posts are replaced.

Moving forward KierWSP hope to identify more protected sites and where possible plant more of Northamptonshire's verges with wildflowers to encourage biodiversity and help protected/endangered species to thrive in our county.



*Wildflower verge: Bozeat, Northamptonshire*

### What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

To manage and maintain wildflower verges and local wildlife sites not only to enhance the beauty of the county's road network but also provide rich habitats for species driven out of natural meadows through farming and development.