

**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 commenced in Summer 2018 to improve two highways verges in the above area. The note contains information on the purpose of the project and how it was implemented and contains contact details for those involved. NB This note will be updated at intervals.



Worcestershire's pollinators support our agricultural industry and help our gardens thrive!
image credit: [Creative Commons Zero - CCO](#)

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 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.



Flower rich verge, Worcestershire

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 timeline

Two small areas of verge at Druggers End Lane (Castlemorton parish) and below Little Malvern Priory (Little Malvern and Welland parish) were selected for this pilot. Key stages in the project were as follows:

- I. **June 2018** – baseline botanical survey of verges completed.
- II. **Autumn 2019** - existing vegetation and nutrient rich top-soil was removed from the verges and deposited close by. The sub-soil - which contains fewer nutrients and is likely to be better able to support a more diverse range of plants – was scarified, prepared and sown with a commercial wildflower and grass seed mix.
- III. **Spring/summer 2020** – spot treatment of weeds which emerged in the reseeded areas.
- IV. **Summer 2020** – green hay collected from a nearby, species-rich site was added to part of the Little Malvern verge where uptake of plants was low.
- V. **Autumn 2020** – verge areas were cut and arisings removed.
- VI. **Spring/summer 2021** – weeds on edge of the Druggers End verge were controlled.
- VII. **Autumn 2021** – verge areas cut and arisings removed.
- VIII. **Autumn 2022** – verge areas cut and arisings removed.
- IX. **June 2023** – repeat botanical survey of verges completed.
- X. **Autumn 2023** – verge areas cut and arisings removed.



Reseeding subsoil, Autumn 2019



Oxeye daisy display, Summer 2021

Who carried out the management works?

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

Who has paid for the works?

The costs of clearing the two road verge areas, reseeding with a wildflower seed mix and removing weeds in 2020 was met by the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership with grant support from the England European Regional Development Fund through the Natural Networks Grants Programme.¹ Subsequent works were funded by the AONB Partnership.



Greater knapweed with small skipper butterfly

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

See timeline above. The project is ongoing.

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

There are two possible measures of success in respect of the plant communities: abundance and diversity. Baseline survey data on plant communities on the verges was collected in June 2018. A repeat survey was carried out in June 2023. A separate report on this survey work is available on the AONB website but in summary:

- I. **Druggers End Lane** – species diversity increased by 60% (from 26 in 2018 to 42 in 2023)
- II. **Little Malvern Priory** – species diversity increased by 33% (from 30 in 2018 to 40 in 2023)

Future data will again be collected to show whether the diversity and abundance of plant life has increased.

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.

What happens to the soil and cut grass?

This is 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 were made aware of the project when it commenced. 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 pesrich@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 Unit: 01905 845057 – 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.



European Union

European Regional
Development Fund

- i. *The project has received 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>.*



Druggers End Lane verge, July 2018



Druggers End Lane verge, July 2023