

# Wildflower & verge management in Shrewsbury.

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# Designer mixes Vs native?



Change of perception?



# Designer mixes. (what we currently have).

## ► Advantages.

- Valuable hit of pollen and nectar late in the year.
- Supports around invertebrate 40 species life cycles (feeding/laying etc).
- Has the “Wow” appeal.
- Helps to change perceptions away from tidy verges.

## ► Disadvantages.

- Requires “re-setting” annually.
- Requires spraying with Glyphosate.
- Requires rotovating with heavy equipment causing soil disturbance and compaction.
- Expensive and time consuming to manage.
- Mostly non native, Mexican sunflower, Californian poppies etc.
- Only support around 40 invertebrate species.
- Raise peoples expectations of what a meadow should look like.

# Native perennials. (what we should be doing).

## ► Advantages.

- Contains 20% wildflowers and 80% grasses, typical of a natural meadow.
- Supports 1,400 species of insect that feed on the leaves, stems and roots.
- Food and nectar source early in the year.
- Can be cut as hay in late summer and dried seed heads strewn nearby to encourage spread.
- Only needs to be sown once so less chemical/soil damage.
- Cheaper in the long term.

## ► Disadvantages.

- Contains more grasses so don't have the same "Wow" appeal as annuals.
- May look "unmanaged".

# Importance of non seeded verges.



*Managing species-rich grassland is a brilliant way to improve the biodiversity value of road verges and reduce long-term management costs.*

*Verges rich in native wild flowers support more wildlife, are more resilient to environmental change, enhance ecological connectivity and provide better ecosystem services such as pollination. (Plantlife).*

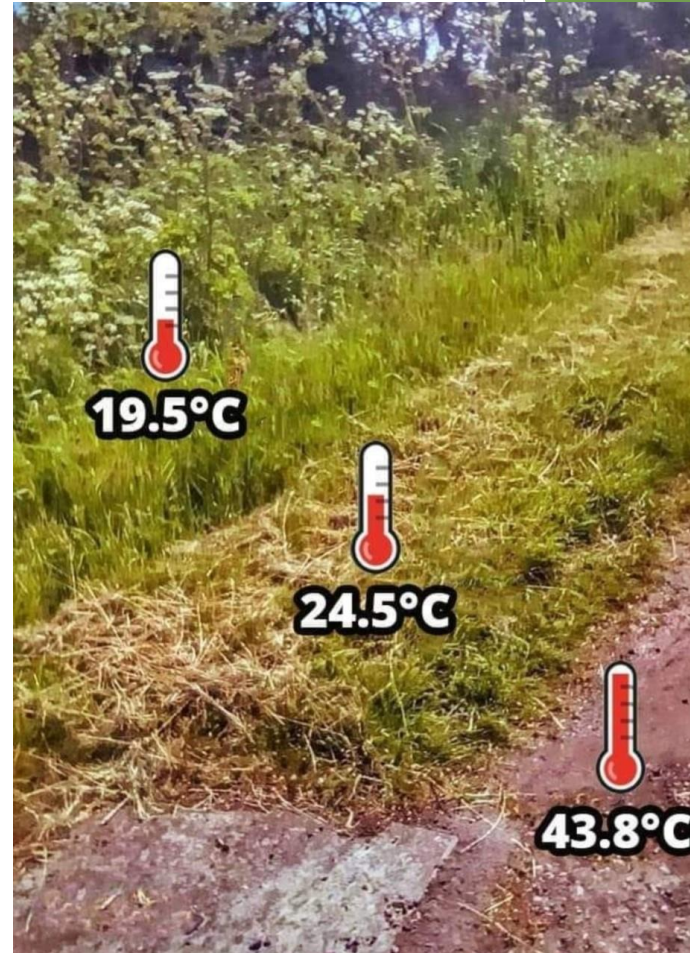
# Challenges and opportunities.

## Challenges facing verges.

- Poor management is causing decline in diversity.
- Pollution.
- Climate change.

## Opportunities of verges

- There are over 313,000 miles of rural road verge in the UK. This is equal to half of our remaining flower-rich grasslands and meadows.
- 97% meadows lost in 100 years.
- Verges support 700 species of wild flowers.
- 50% of our total flora.



# STC management of verges/grass

## Large tractor mower

Large open spaces

Dave Evans

## Grass Verges

Ride-on Grass verge maintenance,

Ian Small,  
Simon Bellingham,  
Martin Turner.

## Wardens

Strimming and small ride on grass cutting

Andy Davies  
Paul Ruscoe  
Andy Hill  
Chris Kane  
Chris Neeve

- Most verges we cut are SC owned.
- Often have 'hard' edges, highways considerations.

# Options for verge management

1. Short mown: 8-10 cuts  
April to September.

- Cutting too early and too frequently swiftly eliminates many species, reducing diversity and the value of the road verge.
- Current situation...but





# Options for verge management.

2. “Buzz cut”: increase cutting height to around 6 cm.

- Road verge vegetation doesn't have to be tall to be wildlife-friendly. Species such as clovers, trefoils, dandelions, selfheal, creeping buttercup and yarrow grow quite happily at ankle height and support a huge array of pollinators.
- We already do this as our mowers are set to around 7cm.



# Options for verge management.

3. One cut in September/October with a 1m short strip along hard edges.

It is vital that wildflowers can complete their full lifecycle - i.e., grow, flower and set seed. This replenishes the seed bank and allows populations to be maintained.

- Potential issues in practice.
- Current mowers could get bogged down with long vegetation or wet ground.
- Solution? Flail mulcher.
- Arisings creating a mess and increasing soil nutrients.



# Options for verge management.

4. Leave to grow wild.
  - Good habitat for nesting birds and some invertebrates.
  - Unsuitable for most verges.
  - If grasslands and verges are left uncut even for just one year, their composition begins to change and wildflower species begin to decline.



# Solution for verge management?

Mix it up? Different plants, insects and animals require different ecological conditions, so verges with a diversity of open areas, scrub and woodland will support more species.

Sort of what we are already doing but could we do more?

- Restricted by service level agreement.
- Our own land?



# Next steps.

- To improve the verges in Shrewsbury for wildflowers and wildlife is no simple task.
- Change wildflower planting from annuals to native perennials to reduce chemical applications (autumn 2022)?
- Any change to cutting frequency on SC land will require councillors to approach SC directly.
- Councillors to identify and consult with residents on any STC land suitable for a change in cutting frequency (STC officers able to advise on ownership).

