



Road Verge Management Guidance – Case Study



Saving our Magnificent Meadows – restoring and expanding species rich road verge throughout the Fermanagh and Omagh Council area



Fermanagh and West Tyrone host the largest blocks of species rich grassland in Northern Ireland. Much of the area is designated as both an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for their component habitats. The species rich grassland in the area comprises mainly lowland meadow and purple moor grass or rush pasture habitat types as well as some localised calcareous grassland complexes. These habitat types are found frequently along road verges in the area but were historically cut regularly.

Along with Transport NI and Roads Service, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC) was a key partner in the project and are responsible for cutting many of the rural road verges in the county. The council

was aware of the importance of rural verges and accordingly included Grassland and Roadside verges collectively as a habitat type into their 2016 – 2020 Local Biodiversity Action Plan. This gave both parties plenty of scope to work together on roadside verges and reach satisfactory solutions.

The first task was to survey the verges and establish a shortlist of those that were most species rich, using rapid condition assessments alongside input from the recently published Flora of Co. Fermanagh and one of the books co-authors Robert Northridge. Ulster Wildlife presented the data to the relevant biodiversity and roadside management teams and identified those sites that were not health and safety risks.

The project encountered no issues with litter, although there were some concerns from the council regarding the perceived “tidiness” of the verges.

This was overcome by allowing the cutting of narrow strips around the verge, framing the verges inside. This then gave the perception of tidiness that offset any potential negative feedback on a lack of management around verges.

Other than framing, the verges were untouched and were cut once a year from mid-August onwards. A management plan was created and agreed with the council to this effect. These arrangements were supported by the provision of GPS coordinates which were fed into the council’s mapping system to illustrate the custom management arrangements in place, ensuring that appropriate management was undertaken. In addition, signs were erected for the totality of the council cutting season designed to a) raise awareness of the concept and b) inform contractors and sub-contractors as a last ditch failsafe to maintain sympathetic management.



This project has protected roadside verges of real ASSI quality. Priority plant species such as fragrant and bee orchids, and blue

eyed grass have been protected as well as priority fauna such as the dingy skipper butterfly, of which some strongholds occur along the roadside verges in this project.

The project has also been a great way of engaging the local community. Members of the public have approached the project to get advice on converting gardens into wildflower meadows, to volunteer with seed harvesting and even to create a green roof on their house using native wildflower seed.



The project itself had a significant reach on social media with over 6 million impressions in tweets and retweets on Twitter.

Ulster Wildlife are now looking to undertake investigatory research to ascertain whether or not there are benefits to roadside verges that can be quantified, for example the reduction of flooding which is a problem in the area. Equally, discussions with FODC are ongoing as to issues such as what cutting machinery is best fit for purpose and as to whether grass cutting collection is feasible, at least on some key sites.

For more information contact Ulster Wildlife Trust:

Tel: 028 9045 4094

Email: info@ulsterwildlife.org

