

B-LINES CASE STUDY

Garvagh Verge, Dumcrown Road, Northern Ireland

Enhancing road verges for pollinators by changing management



The site

This 0.1 ha (c.10m by 200m) road verge on the northbound verge of the Drumcrown Road, near Garvagh in Northern Ireland, is now managed with an annual late summer hay cut to improve biodiversity.

What happened?

In 2015 the site was selected to become part of the 'Don't Mow, Let it Grow' initiative managed by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, in partnership with The Department For Infrastructure (DFI) Roads and Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), with National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Land Fill Communities Fund (LCF) support. It was identified as an area which would benefit from an annual cut and lift to encourage more wildflowers to flower, set seed and provide improved habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.

Background

This verge was identified by a local volunteer in 2012 as requiring improved management to increase its biodiversity value. At this time the verge was being managed by DFI Roads with two or three cuts a year. Contractors were not able to collect cuttings so instead left them on site. This resulted in cuttings smothering less competitive wildflower species and the nutrients returning to the soil, encouraging vigorous grass growth. The verge was grass dominated and species-poor when local volunteers identified this verge as likely to benefit from an annual hay cut, which removes the arisings helping to lower nutrients and improved conditions for wildflowers to flourish.

Volunteers

Volunteers were instrumental in the '[Don't Mow, Let it Grow](#)' initiative. They identified road verges likely to benefit from management changes and acted as verge guardians, carrying out botanical surveys on verges and promoting the improved management of these areas in the local community. Using social media, they shared photos of wildflowers and insects found on the verges to promote the project and its purpose. Although not all local residents supported the changes in management, social media posts encouraged constructive dialogue and amplified the positive responses from people who enjoyed these flower-rich habitats.



Garvagh Verge in summer showing abundant orchids under new management © Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

What was done?

Volunteers liaised with a local farmer, who kindly agreed to pay a contractor to harvest the hay from the verge at the end of each summer. He then uses this species-rich hay to feed farm livestock. From 2015, the Garvagh Verge gradually became more flower-rich, simply with reduced cutting and the removal of those cuttings to use as hay.

In addition to the cut and lift management, Yellow Rattle has supported the restoration of this verge to more species-rich grassland. Yellow Rattle seed was not added to the site but began to appear naturally on the site in time, with the reduced cutting frequency allowing it set seed and spread. This plant, often called the meadow maker, is a hemi-parasite of some grasses and other plants. It reduces the growth of grasses, giving more space and opportunities for less competitive wildflowers to thrive. No addition of plug plants or seed were needed; a simple change in management was sufficient to support the natural regeneration of this grassland community, which now supports over 29 grassland plant species.

When possible we aim to enhance larger sites which can support more robust, diverse invertebrate populations; however, even small areas can harbor valuable biodiversity and inspire others to replicate these beautiful, flower-rich habitats.

BEFORE



Grass dominated verge under previous management
© Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Before changes in management

Managed with a regular cut and drop.
Plants recorded included:

- **Hawkbit** (*Leontodon sp.*)
- **Cat's Ear** (*Hypochaeris radicata*)
- **Common Sorrel** (*Rumex acetosa*)
- **Creeping Buttercup** (*Ranunculus repens*)
- **Crested Dog's-tail Grass** (*Cynosaurus cristatus*)
- **Dandelion** (*Taraxacum officinalis agg.*)
- **Common Knapweed** (*Centaurea nigra*)
- **Marsh Thistle** (*Cirsium palustris*)
- **Red Clover** (*Trifolium pratense*)
- **Ribwort Plantain** (*Plantago lanceolata*)
- **Sweet Vernal Grass** (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*)

AFTER



Flowering road verge under new management
© Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

After changes in management

Managed with an annual August hay cut, through a verbal agreement with a local farmer and managed by a volunteer. Plants recorded included:

- **Autumn Hawkbit** (*Leontodon autumnalis*)
- **Common Bird's-foot Trefoil** (*Lotus corniculatus*)
- **Black Medick** (*Medicago lupulina*)
- **Bugle** (*Ajuga reptans*)
- **Cat's Ear** (*Hypochaeris radicata*)
- **Common Sorrel** (*Rumex acetosa*)
- **Common Spotted Orchid** (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*)
- **Creeping Buttercup** (*Ranunculus repens*)
- **Crested Dog's-tail Grass** (*Cynosaurus cristatus*)
- **Daisy** (*Bellis perennis*)
- **Dandelion** (*Taraxacum officinalis agg.*)
- **Eyebright** (*Euphrasia sp.*)
- **Fescue sp.** (*Festuca sp.*)
- **Field Speedwell** (*Veronica persica*)
- **Germander Speedwell** (*Veronica chameadrys*)
- **Common Knapweed** (*Centaurea nigra*)
- **Lesser Stitchwort** (*Stellaria nemorum*)
- **Marsh Thistle** (*Cirsium palustris*)
- **Meadow Buttercup** (*Ranunculus repens*)
- **Meadowsweet** (*Filipendula ulmaria*)
- **Oxeye Daisy** (*Leucanthemum vulgare*)
- **Red Clover** (*Trifolium pratense*)
- **Ribwort Plantain** (*Plantago lanceolata*)
- **Selfheal** (*Prunella vulgare*)
- **Sweet Vernal Grass** (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*)
- **Tufted Vetch** (*Vicia cracca*)
- **White Clover** (*Trifolium repens*)
- **Yellow Rattle** (*Rhinanthus minor*)
- **Yorkshire Fog** (*Holcus lanatus*)



Species-rich grassland under new management
© Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

**A SIMPLE MANAGEMENT CHANGE ENABLED
NATURAL REGENERATION, NOW SUPPORTING
OVER 29 GRASSLAND PLANT SPECIES.**





Local resident enjoying the flowering verge © Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council



Wildflower-rich grasslands are one of the most important and biodiverse habitats in the UK.

Common Tiger Hoverfly (*Helophilus pendulus*) © Liam Olds

Ongoing management

A local farmer now pays a contractor to cut the verge annually at the end of the summer. A volunteer, who carries out the botanical surveys, liaises with the farmer to ensure a suitable cutting time for both the grassland and the farmer.

Each year, as sites are cut in the late summer with arisings removed, the soil fertility will gradually decrease, resulting in grasses becoming less dominant and wildflowers finding more space to flourish.

Any orchids, or other plants or animals of interest recorded on site are shared on social media with the local community, encouraging pride in these flower-rich green spaces.

This verge and other sites have been added to the B-Lines map as they contribute to increasing connectivity of flower-rich habitat across Northern Ireland, allowing pollinators and other wildlife to move through towns and the surrounding countryside.

Benefits from management change

Biodiversity

Wildflower-rich grasslands are one of the most important and biodiverse habitats in the UK. Species-rich grasslands can support a huge range of wildlife including wildflowers, fungi, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals and birds. A fifth of all priority species for conservation in the UK are associated with grassland habitats. Creating and managing native wildflower-rich grasslands on B-Lines is contributing to the creation of a UK-wide network of connected habitats, allowing species to move across landscapes.

Wellbeing

Changing management to allow wildflowers to grow tall, flower and set seed, provides more food for insects and birds and increases wildlife for local residents to enjoy. Access to green space is linked with cognitive benefits and improved mental and physical wellbeing. Evidence has shown that

looking at a wildflower meadow for just six seconds can lower your blood pressure and make you feel happier - find out more [here](#). Walking in nature, including grasslands, no matter how big or small can improve mental health by reducing stress, anxiety and depression as well as reducing risk of physical illnesses such as cardiovascular diseases.

Ecosystem services

Green spaces with long grass and flowers have an increased capacity to capture rainwater in flood events, reducing run-off and flooding on hard surfaces like roads and footpaths. In drought conditions, these green spaces also retain more water than short mown grassland, helping to support trees and hedgerows and keep the 'green' in green spaces.

Lessons learnt

- 1 Working closely with local volunteers and farmers can help with community buy-in and support the legacy of work if other funding comes to an end.
- 2 Not everyone will always be on board with supporting changes but try to take as many with you on the journey as possible.
- 3 It isn't always necessary to add costly wildflower seed and plants to restore wildflower-rich spaces - simple changes on the right sites can achieve cost efficient, positive outcomes for wildlife.

