

Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project

Bishop's Castle and surrounding villages would like to see the roadside verges are restored and managed as long linear meadows, with the aim of creating connectivity and habitats for wildlife.

This means the highways contract could change **from:**

- Frequent cut (often in spring/summer, at the wrong time for wildlife) and leave the arisings to rot down, thus continually raising the fertility of the soil and increasing the dominance of coarse grasses, nettles and hogweed.

To

- Cut after 16th July, and collect & remove the arisings. Start restoration work by initially planting yellow rattle and following up with intentional seeding of wild flowers and green hay collected from existing wildflower meadows in Shropshire (and supported by RSVP volunteers where possible).

Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project suggests the following regime:

Year one

- One metre cut for road safety reasons.
- Where necessary one early cut and removal of arisings to prevent the continued raising of fertility of the soil.
- A late cut after July 16th and removal of arisings.
- Scarification and seeding with yellow rattle to suppress grass growth.

Year two onwards

- Ongoing one metre safety cuts.
- A late cut after July 16th and removal of arisings.
- Additional seeding / planting for restoration with native flora utilising the existing community capital of wildflower meadows, volunteers and expertise of local communities.

Supporting evidence

- During the 2022 UN biodiversity conference, COP15, countries reached a landmark agreement that aims to reverse the unprecedented destruction of nature.
- One of the UK agreement's 2023 targets, known as 30x30, aims to protect at least 30 percent of the planet's land and water by 2030.
- Across Shropshire roadside verges could make a significant contribution to towards this target by changing the management regime in any new highways contract.
- The potential for cost savings over time is significant. Savings could be used for roadside maintenance and the development of a strategy to replace missing

hedges along roadside verges and the restoration of our ditch network – all significant contributions to mitigating the effects of climate change.

- The engagement of willing local communities and volunteers in proactive community capital building.
- The enhancement of Shropshire's status as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty capitalizing on visitors and residents alike who are increasingly appreciative of the landscape and wildlife.
- Shropshire Council has just been named as the lead authority for Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Nature Recovery – adopting roadside verge restoration could feature as one of the key strands in the future strategy and policy across the county.
- Finally, Shropshire Council has the opportunity to lead the way nationally on this via its contract to proactively **restore** the roadside verges to native flora creating a 'win-win' situation

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