

Introduction

This report summarises recommendations for management of 8 verges within the village of Ninefield. The verges vary in condition and specific recommendations are outlined below for each verge.

Importance of species-rich meadows

It took around 6,000 years to create the species-rich grassland for which the UK is globally famous. Yet in less than a century we have lost 97%. For a start it's now rare, covering less than 1% of UK land. Yet these remaining isolated fragments are home to an unprecedented richness of species; hundreds of different wild flowers and fungi have co-evolved over millennia with farmers managing the land as hay meadows and pasture. This unparalleled plant diversity provides the life support for our invertebrates, birds, mammals.



Download - Plantlife Grassland Action Plan

https://www.plantlife.org.uk/download_file/force/2271/2218

Downloads - Plantlife Grassland Plant Identification guide - http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/assets/pdfs/Meadow_ID_Leaflet.pdf

Plant finder - <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/plant-fungi-species>

The map below shows the verges visited during the site visit followed by some management recommendations.



The tab



Location map showing verges with potential for enhancement in Ninefield village.

Common Name
Common Knapweed
Common Sorrel
Red Clover
Meadow Buttercup
Dandelion
Creeping cinquefoil
Oxeye Daisy
Birdsfoot Trefoil
Hawkbitt
Creeping buttercup
Yarrow
Ragwort
Ladies Mock

Management Recommendations

The following principles will help to improve wildflower diversity on all grassland verges. Regular annual cut and remove is essential. Over time this can reduce the vigour of grasses and create more space for wild flowers. Wildflowers should be left to flower and set seed. Therefore cutting times should be from August to September, or a later cut if the verge contains later flowering species. Depending on the vigour of the grasses and second cut and remove between Feb-Mar could also be beneficial. The table below illustrates one and two cut management options and ideal timings for these cuts.

Management option		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
One cut									full cut				
	Summer and autumn cutting								partial cut		full cut		
Two cuts	Late winter and autumn cutting		full cut							full cut			
	Dry verges (short vegetation)		regular cuts							regular cuts			
	Species-rich verges with mown edge		1m strip							full cut			

Verge	Description	Recommendations
1	This verge is relatively species rich and the species identified above are mainly from this verge and verge number 2. The verge is currently cut too early in the year, which is stopping the majority of wildflowers from flowering and setting seed	Initiate a two-cut management regime . Cut edge and any sight lines where necessary

2	This is the most species rich verge identified, which species listed above.	Initiate a two-cut or one-cut management regime . Cut edge and any sight lines where necessary. It may also be possible to take green hay from this verge to enhance others in the village.
3	This is currently a species poor verge, which may have been re-seeded in the past as part of road improvements.	Soil testing is recommended before attempting to enhance this verge. If soil phosphorus is below index 3. And long term management can be assured, the verge could be enhanced with Yellow rattle and other species tolerant of higher fertility. (See Appendix) Once enhanced, ideally initiate a two-cut or one-cut management regime .
4	This verge is small and clearly has some existing flower species and finer grasses, which suggest it has potential to be improved through management	Initiate a two-cut or one-cut management regime . Cut edge and any sight lines where necessary. It may also be possible to take green hay from this verge to enhance others in the village. Then carry out annual species survey of the verge for at least 3-5 years. If still fairly species poor then consider enhancing with green hay from verge 2 or using WNOS.
5	This verge is next to the village recreation ground and is one of the most publicly visible in the village. It is currently mowed on a regular basis throughout the growing season. There are a small number of wildflowers present, such as Yarrow. However these never get a chance to flower and set seed.	It's recommended that this area be enhanced with Weald Native Origin Seed (WNOS) See suggested restoration timetable below.
6	This verge is currently fairly species poor	Initiate a two-cut or one-cut management regime . Cut edge and any sight lines where necessary. It may also be possible to take green hay from this verge to enhance others in the village. Then carry out annual species survey of the verge for at least 3-5 years to judge success.
7	This verge has occasional wild flowers and would benefit from a change of cutting times.	Initiate a two-cut or one-cut management regime . Cut edge and any sight lines where necessary. It may also be possible to take green hay from this verge to enhance others in the village. Then carry out annual species survey of the verge for at least 3-5 years, to judge success

8	This verge is mainly dominated by coarser grasses such as Cocks foot and False oat grass and some hog weed. This would suggest it's the most fertile of the verges visited.	Initiate a two-cut or one-cut management regime . Then monitor for any changes in the species for 3-5 years. If still fairly species poor then consider enhancing with green hay from verge 2 or using WNOS, provided soil fertility is low enough and long term management can be maintained.
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Sourcing Seed for enhancement of Riverside meadow

The table below sets out Plantlife's best practice for sourcing suitable wildflower seed. In the High Weald it is possible to purchase Weald Native Origin Seed (WNOS) locally harvested seed from existing wildflower meadows through Dawn Brickwood at the Weald Meadows Partnership and Services, Mob: 07863 081281, email: meadows@highwealdlandscapetrust.org. WNOS is always in limited supply, so it is strongly recommended to pre-order well ahead of sowing.

Table 2 - Seed sourcing

Natural seeding: natural seeding methods can be used to introduce wild flowers by transferring green hay or locally-harvested seed collected from a local species-rich meadow (the donor site) to the meadow being created (the recipient site). This ensures species will be naturally present and better adapted to local conditions. In this way, the local character and genetic diversity of our meadows is preserved and more species will become established more quickly than by using a generic, non-specialist seed mixture, which invariably contains fewer (sometimes inappropriate and non-native) species and often includes more grass seed than wildflower seed.

Enhancing Existing grass verge with Weald Native Origin Seed (WNOS) - timetable

The table on the following pages sets out the suggested steps and times for carrying out enhancement using purchased Weald Native Origin Seed (WNOS).

Month(s)	Activity
May - July 2021	Carry out wildflower survey of meadow to establish baseline for monitoring of success of any future enhancement.
August - Sep 2021	Create at least 50% bare ground (if possible 75%) by scarfing after grass has been cut and removed. Carry out these operations when the weather has been dry and the soil is not damp. Machinery suitable for creating bare ground is listed in appendix I. https://youtu.be/lajPcLLhLpM
August - Oct 2021	Sow Weald Native Origin Seed mix hand at a seeding rate of 4g per metre. The seed should be mixed with an inert carrier such as sharp sand or sawdust to aid even distribution. Trample the seed in by walking across the area. This will help to push the seed onto the soil surface to aid germination.
Oct 2021 - Feb 2022	Intermittently cut and remove on the area sown through the autumn and winter. The aim is to keep the grass as short as possible and keep open the gaps created before sowing as long as possible. If the grass is not controlled during this period wildflower struggle to germinate.
March - Mid July 2022	Stop cutting and leave everything to grow. This will enable the wildflowers to flower and set seed.
Mid July - Aug	Cut and remove the grass, flail collectors are very effective for cutting and removing cutting in a single operation.
Aug - Feb 2022	Ideally take another cut and remove in the autumn or early winter before shutting up the meadow again at the end of February for the grass and Yellow rattle to grow. Take another hay cut from mid-July or whenever the Yellow rattle has set seed.
Beyond 2022	Continue the two-cut management outlined above.



Web links to further technical guidance:

Creating bare ground for meadow restoration - http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/assets/pdfs/Creating_bare_ground_for_meadow_restoration_-_examples.pdf

Restoring species-rich grassland using a wildflower and grass mixture - http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/assets/pdfs/Restoration_using_a_seed_mixture.pdf

Enhancing with Green Hay collected from a nearby verge or meadow - timetable

Month(s)	Activity
May - July 2021	Carry out wildflower survey of meadow to establish baseline for monitoring of success of any future enhancement.
Jul - Aug 2021	Create at least 50% bare ground (if possible 75%) by scarfing after grass has been cut and removed. Carry out these operations when the weather has been dry and the soil is not damp. Machinery suitable for creating bare ground is listed in appendix I.
Jul - August - 2021	Cut, transport and spread green hay from existing species rich verge within 1-2 hours of cutting. Cut carefully using a brush cutter or Allen Scythe, trying to avoid too much of the seed dropping. Then transport and spread by hand onto prepared bare ground on verge to be enhanced. https://youtu.be/erIzAnMojR8
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Appendix I - Small Machinery for creating bare ground



Pedestrian Scarifier (Hire for £30-50 a Weekend)



Result of Scarfing Existing Grass To Create Bare Ground Before Seeding



Sowing Seed Mixed With Sand by Hand