



Verge Cutting Trial Monitoring Analysis

Procedure Document	Verge Cutting Trial Monitoring Analysis
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Produced By	Steph Clark & Jenny Beck
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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to analyse the results from the eco-friendly initiative which saw a number of grass roadside verges in the central part of the Braintree District left uncut over spring in order to encourage the proliferation of biodiversity.

This joint initiative between Essex County Council and Braintree District Council involved the monitoring of selected verges in May, June, July and August 2020 to analyse biodiversity, safety concerns and the presence of litter. Throughout the period, litter was measured visually and categorised into three levels, low, medium and high. Ten items of litter or less which were seen within a range of five metres in length by two metres in width were classified as 'low' level of litter. Ten to twenty items of litter within this range was noted as 'medium' and a 'high' level was twenty or more items of litter.

It has been practice to cut roadside verges twice a year: a half-width cut in the spring and a full-width cut in autumn. By omitting the spring cut, this has allowed the verges to naturalise, conserving wildflowers, plants and pollinating insects, and has created important ecological corridors for rare and common species of wildflowers and animals.

This document will outline the results of the monitoring period at the fourteen selected locations in the central part of the Braintree District. It will also outline monitoring results from four locations which were chosen outside of the trial in order to compare with locations from within the trial area. This document will highlight the feedback received both during and after the trial period. When the trial was concluded, questionnaires were sent to Parish and Town Councils within and outside of the trial area, and they were also sent to Members both in and out of the trial area to ascertain their views and comments on this initiative.

2.0 Locations

Fourteen roadside verge locations were monitored and these include locations in Braintree and Bocking, Black Notley, Great Notley, Great Saling, Bardfield Saling, Shalford, Panfield, Stisted, Gosfield, Greanstead Green and Halstead Rural, Halstead, Colne Engaine, White Colne, and Earls Colne.

A variety of roadside verge types were chosen to be apart of the trial in order to collect a range of results which cover the majority of the different types of verges. These include roadside verges along straight roads, road junctions, safety splays, verges next to busier roads and more rural roads.

2.1 Map of Locations



Parishes in Area 3, which are highlighted in green, were all included in the trial.

3.0 Trial Monitoring Results

3.1 Bardfield Saling

Bardfield Saling	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	40cm	Low	Yes	Hedging/tree growth
June	75cm	Low	Yes	Hedging/tree growth
July	75cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with wildflowers and minimal bramble
August	60cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with wildflowers dying back

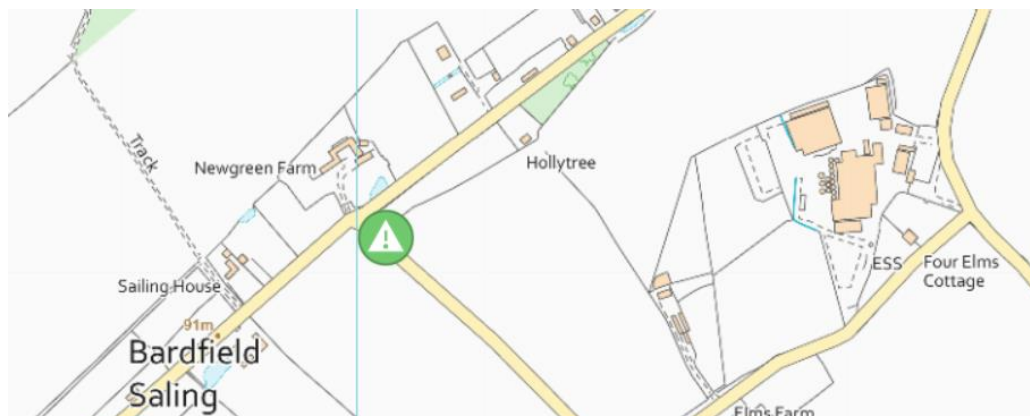
The location in Bardfield Saling was by the junction with Plums Lane down a single track road opposite Newgreen Farm. There was a significant increase in the average grass height in June, and in July wildflowers emerged before dying back down over the next month with the average grass height. There were no visibility issues recorded at this roadside verge location.



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3.2 Great Saling

Great Saling	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	60cm	Low	No	None
June	85cm	Low	No	None
July	90cm	Low	No	Healthy with wildflowers and minimal bramble
August	70cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with wildflowers dying back

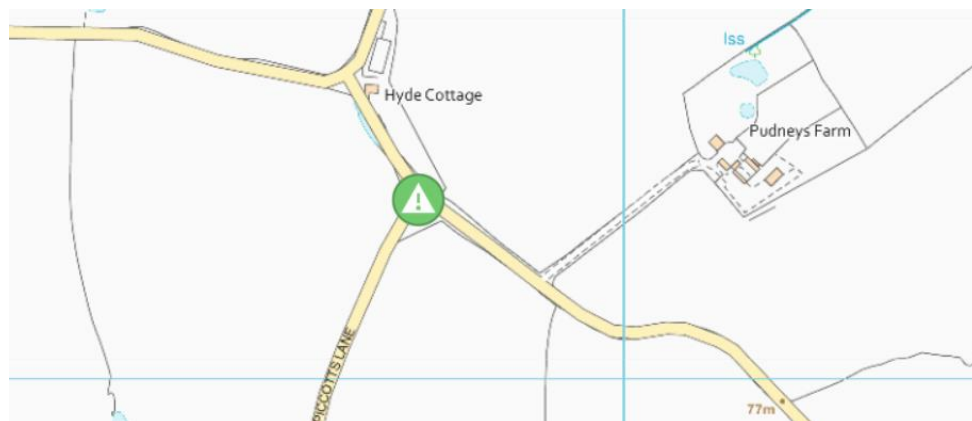
The location of the monitored verge in Great Saling was near the end of Piccotts Lane by the junction with Pods Lane. Over May and June, the verge grew similar to Bardfield Saling with wildflowers emerging. In August, the average grass height reduced as the wildflowers died back in line with the season. Also in the final monitoring month, woody vegetation began to encroach onto the carriageway.



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3.3 Shalford

Shalford	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	6cm	Low	No	None
June	20cm	Low	No	None
July	30cm	Low	No	Healthy with wildflowers and grass
August	30cm	Low	No	Healthy with minimal wildflowers due to the season

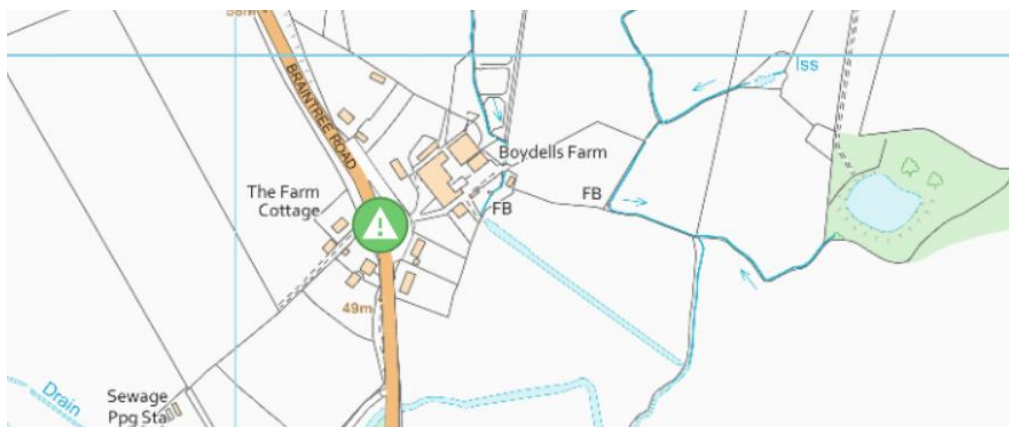
The location in Shalford along Braintree Road near Boydells Farm, was cut by a third party prior to the start of the trial. As a result the grass height did not increase like other locations such as Bardfield Saling and Great Saling. The images below show the difference of the roadside verge between May and August. Even with the verge being cut prior to the trial, this is not apparent in August where the area which was cut is indistinguishable to the rest of the verge which was not cut.



May 2020



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3.4 Panfield

Panfield	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	10cm	Low	No	None
June	15cm	Low	No	None
July	6cm	Low	No	No wildflowers
August	8cm	Low	No	No wildflowers

The location monitored in Panfield was by the junction with Church End and Hall Road. The roadside verge was cut by a third party before the start of the trial, was further cut again in July and appeared to be cut for a third time in August, resulting in very low average grass height throughout the trial period and a lack of wildflowers or other notable vegetation.



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3.5 Great Notley

Great Notley	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	6cm	Low	No	None
June	20cm	Low	No	None
July	20cm	Low	No	Wildflowers and grass but verge partly worn
August	20cm	Low	No	Predominantly grass and minimal wildflowers

The monitoring location in Great Notley was by the junction of London Road & Bakers Lane. Similar to the locations at Shalford and Panfield, the verge was cut by a third party prior to the start of the trial. Though wildflowers were present in July and August, the verge was predominantly grass and part of it was worn by vehicles mounting the verge.



May 2020



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3.6 Black Notley

Black Notley	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	60cm	Low	No	None
June	85cm	Low	No	None
July	90cm	Low	No	Healthy with wildflowers but vegetation encroaching carriageway
August	80cm	Low	No	Healthy with vegetation encroaching onto carriageway

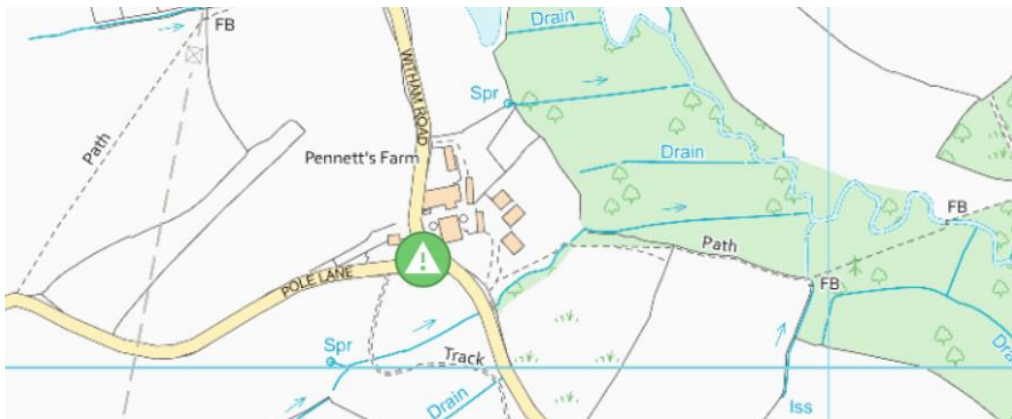
The location in Black Notley was by the junction of Witham Road & Pole Lane. The verge was healthy throughout the trial with wildflowers emerging in July similar to other locations across the central part of the district. It was noted during July and August that vegetation was encroaching onto the carriageway and was suggested that this verge should be cut due to the junction in order to improve visibility.



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3.7 Braintree & Bocking

Braintree & Bocking	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	80cm	Low	Yes	None
June	95cm	Low	Yes	None
July	95cm	Low	No	Healthy with wildflowers
August	85cm	Low	No	Healthy with vegetation encroaching onto footway

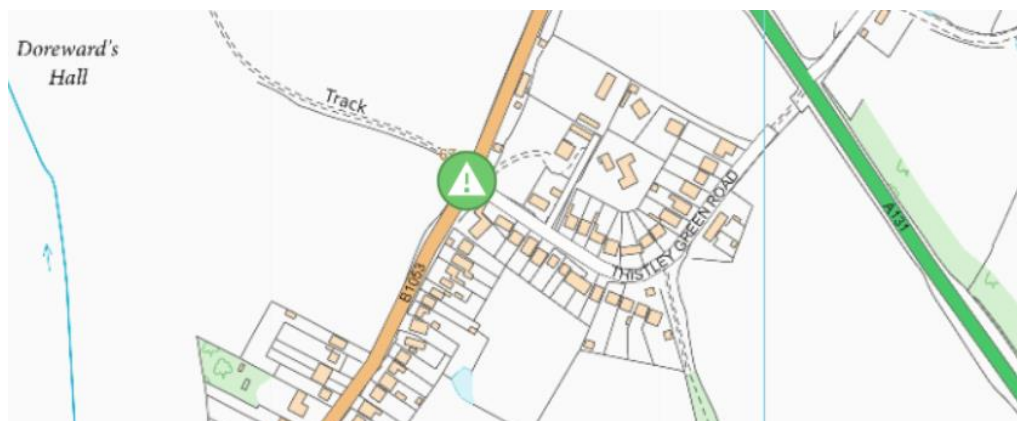
The roadside verge location in Braintree & Bocking was along Broad Road (B1503) opposite Thistley Green Road. The verge had a very consistent average grass height throughout the trial, with wildflowers appearing in July. Vegetation did begin to encroach onto the footway causing safety concerns for footway users and did not reach the carriageway.



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3.8 Gosfield

Gosfield	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	40cm	Low	Yes	None
June	45cm	Low	Yes	None
July	50cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with only grass
August	40cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with only grass

The roadside verge which was monitored in Gosfield was located on a bend opposite the turn off to Harmas Farm past Gosfield Lake. The verge was thin and predominantly grass, and the hedge by the verge is owned by a local landowner. The location remained at a similar height throughout the trial period with little variation in vegetation or biodiversity.



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3.9 Stisted

Stisted	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	90cm	Low	No	Healthy with wildflowers
June	105cm	Low	No	Healthy with wildflowers
July	105cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with wildflowers and bramble encroaching onto carriageway
August	85cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with wildflowers and vegetation encroaching carriageway

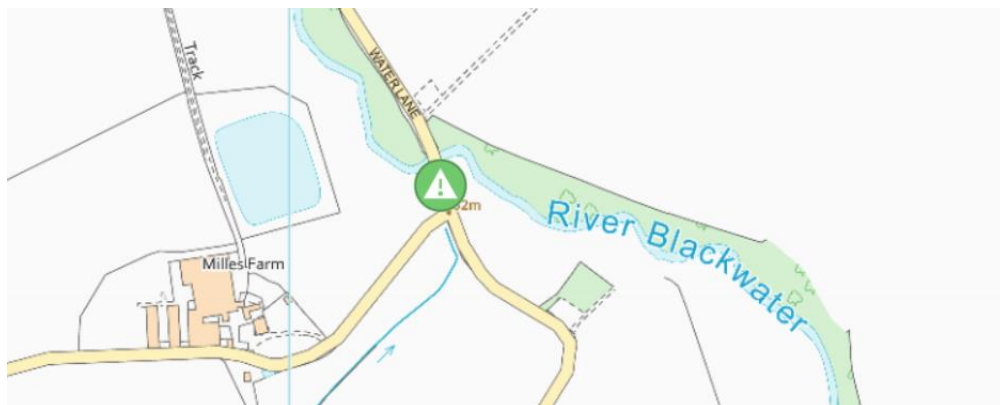
In Stisted, the location chosen was along Water Lane in between the bridge and the turn off to Miles Farm. The verge was healthy with wildflowers throughout the trial and saw a reduction of average grass height in August similar to other roadside verges. Woody vegetation began to encroach onto the carriageway in July and August.



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3.10 Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural

Greenstead Green	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	40cm	Low	Yes	Bramble present
June	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
July	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
August	20cm	Low	Yes	Previously cut, very short grass limited by the shade of the trees

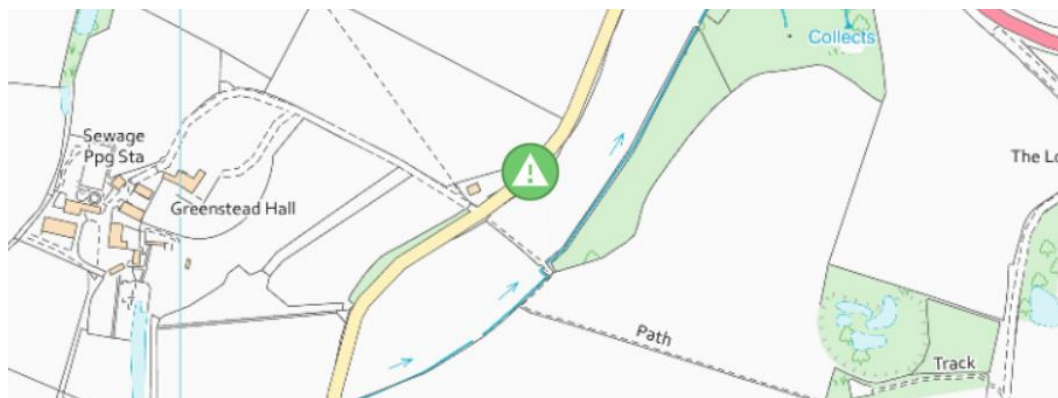
The roadside verge location at Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural was located on Church Road near the turn off to Greenstead Hall. The verge was not inspected in June and July as the site was inaccessible due to a road closure. When the location was monitored in August, the grass had been cut by a third party.



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3.11 Halstead

Halstead	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	40cm	Low	No	None
June	50cm	Low	No	None
July	50cm	Low	No	Minimal vegetation and fungi present. Verge worn by vehicles
August	30cm	Low	No	Short grass with fungi present

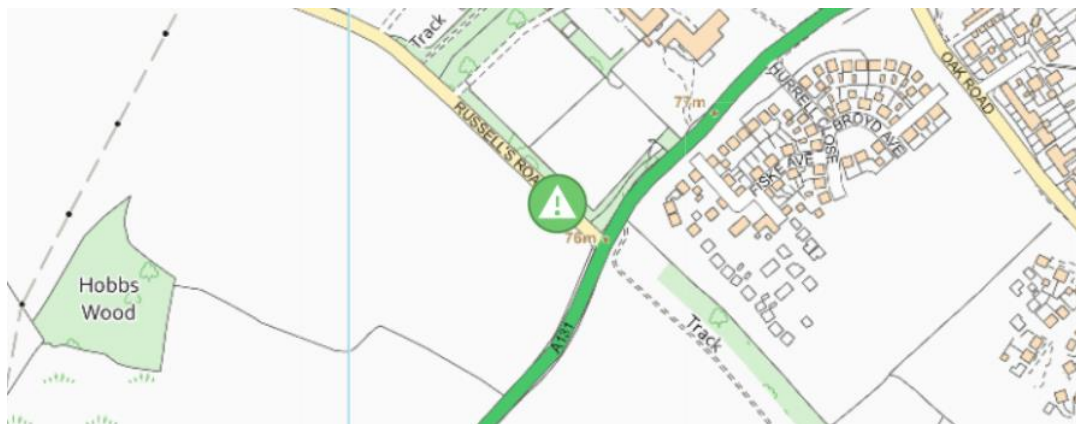
In Halstead, the roadside verge was located by the junction to A131 along Russells Road. The verge had little vegetation throughout the trial period, with the only comment of note being that fungi was present amongst the grass. Similarly to the location in Great Notley, this verge was partially worn by vehicles.



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3.12 Colne Engaine

Colne Engaine	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	60cm	Low	Yes	Bramble present
June	80cm	Low	Yes	Bramble present
July	85cm	Low	Yes	Healthy verge with minimal bramble, predominate grass and nettle
August	70cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with self-set native species of hedging/Tree Whips spreading.

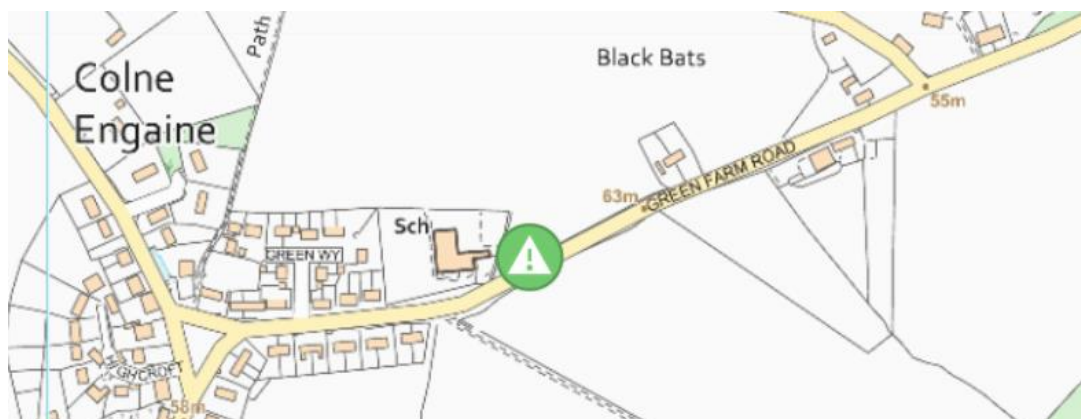
The location chosen in Colne Engaine was along Green Farm Road next to Colne Engaine Primary School. Minimal vegetation was present throughout the trial but this did not encroach onto the carriageway. This healthy verge was predominantly grass and nettle with self-set native species of hedging and Tree Whips spreading.



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3.13 Earls Colne

Earls Colne	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	90cm	Low	Yes	None
June	95cm	Low	Yes	None
July	95cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with wildflowers and bramble
August	80cm	Low	Yes	Healthy with wildflowers, vegetation leaning

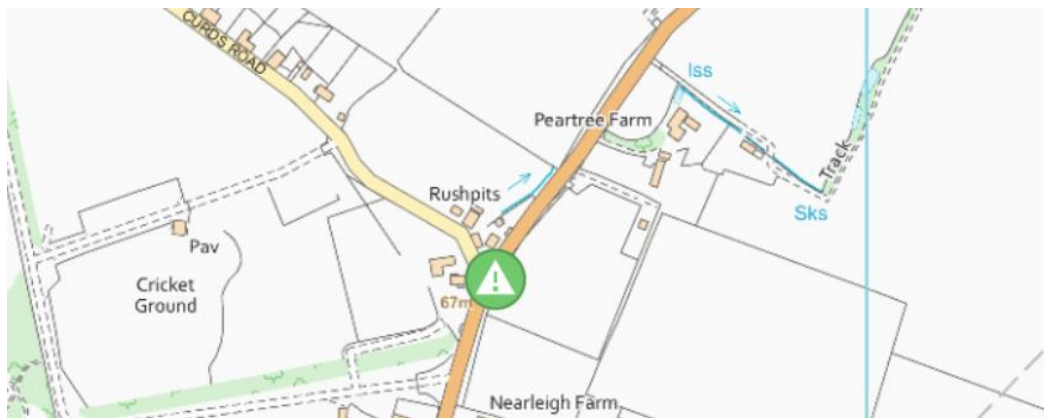
The roadside verge selected in Earls Colne was along Coggeshall Road opposite the junction with Curds Road. The verge was located next to a busy carriageway and was healthy throughout the trial period, with wildflowers emerging in July and dying back down in August. The final monitoring month also saw vegetation leaning into the carriageway.



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3.14 White Colne

White Colne	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
May	130cm	Low	No	Healthy verge
June	145cm	Low	No	Healthy verge
July	150cm	Low	No	Healthy with wildflowers which are encroaching onto layby
August	75cm	Low	No	Healthy with wildflowers and vegetation which are dying back which reduces encroachment

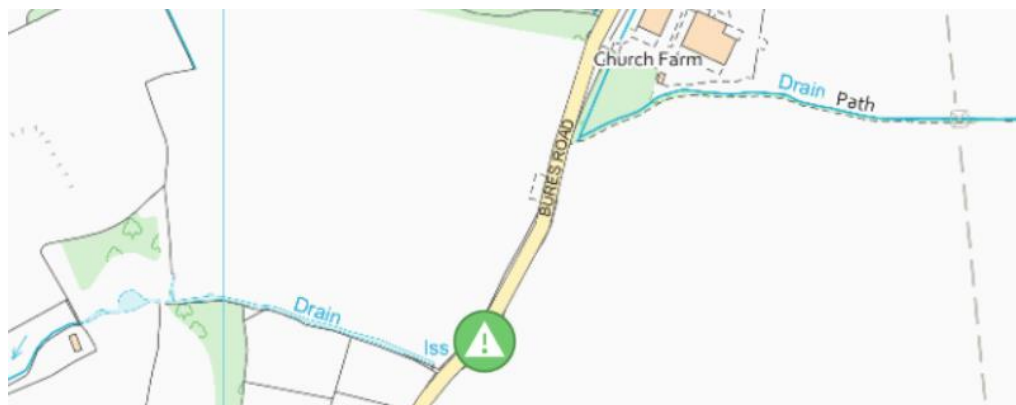
In White Colne, the selected verge was located on Bures Road off Colchester Road. This healthy verge had the highest vegetation and average grass height of all the locations monitored within this trial. Similar to other verges, wildflowers emerged in July and there was a natural reduction of vegetation in August which decreased the issues of encroachment into the layby.



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4.0 Non-Trial Area Monitoring Results

Four locations were chosen outside of the trial area in order to compare with the verge locations which were inside the trial. These four locations were monitored before the autumn cut and then after the autumn cut in order to access the level of litter, average grass height and biodiversity comments.

4.1 Steeple Bumpstead

Steeple Bumpstead	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
September	60cm	Low	No	Non-trial, mostly grass

The location chosen in Steeple Bumpstead which was outside the trial area was on the B1064. The roadside verge was reasonably tall in places, but the amount of litter post-cut was low. There were plastic drink bottles at the side of the road, with some drinks cans and old, degraded crisp packets in the verge.



Pre-autumn Cut



Post-autumn Cut



4.2 Wickham St Paul

Wickham St Paul	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
September	30cm	Low	No	Non-trial, mostly grass

In Wickham St Paul, the selected verge was located on the A131 at the junction with Lodge Farm. This was a non-trial verge, selected to compare with the trial verges. The verge was quite short to begin with, containing mostly grass. The amount of litter post-cut was low.



Pre-autumn Cut



Post-autumn Cut



4.3 Silver End

Silver End	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
September	40cm	Low	No	Non-trial, mostly grass

In Silver End, the selected verge was located at Parkgate Farm Cottages. This was a non-trial verge, selected to compare with the trial verges. The verge contained mostly grass. The amount of litter post-autumn cut was low, although the verge cutting had shredded one piece of litter, which had spread to look worse. The litter was predominantly plastic bag and plastic food wrappers.



Pre-autumn Cut



Post-autumn Cut



4.4 Faulkbourne

Faulkbourne	Average Grass Height	Level of Litter	Presence of Woody Vegetation	Biodiversity Comments
October	35cm	Low	No	Non-trial, mostly grass

In Faulkbourne, the selected verge was located at Home Farm Cottages. This was a non-trial verge, selected to compare with the trial verges. The verge was a mixture of weeds and grass. The amount of litter post-cut was low, with some crisp packets and plastic bags caught up in the bushes.



Pre-autumn Cut



Post-autumn Cut



4.5 Conclusion of Non-Trial Area Monitoring

In conclusion, it appears that longer verges attract a similar amount of litter as the verges which were cut twice. There was no discernible difference between the two. It is easier for litter pickers to pick litter from shorter grass and verges with lower vegetation, as it is easier to spot and easier to disentangle from the vegetation. The verges themselves do not seem to encourage more littering if left to naturalise.

5.0 Feedback Received During Trial

Throughout the trial period, feedback was received from a number of Parish Councils, Councillors and local residents. The main issue raised was regarding reduced visibility for road users and the safety concerns that arise from this.

Clerk to Rayne Parish Council -

"Whilst we are fully supportive of natural verges and indeed have some protected verges within our village, Queenborough Lane is a busy rural thoroughfare for the reasons previously mentioned and there are regular occurrences of minor vehicle damage due to the narrowness of the road, therefore allowing the verges to grow long could well compromise driver safety and lead to more incidents or accidents."

Cllr Iona Parker -

". . . there is a move not to cut them at all the allow wild flowers to grow. There are a number of junctions however where this results in reduced visibility which can be quite dangerous, e.g. the turn from the Hedingham/Sudbury to Gestingthorpe coming from the Sudbury direction."

Cllr Stevie Hicks -

"Just looking at the array of vegetation and colours galore as such not seen for many years until now, it is in my opinion a great money saving experiment that can be seen by everyone, even down the centres of dual-carriageways, so many wild flowers and where once stood old premises now long gone to progress and faster roads, remnants of old garden flowers popping they're heads above the long grass in defiance. By all means keep a view across a junction clear for ease of visibility, especially roundabout lead ins and exits, but as for the actual roundabouts leave them to nature to control. . ."

Chairman of Foxearth and Liston Parish Council -

". . . as a result of not cutting the verges in spring the resulting profusion of wildflowers has been a joy to behold. I can confirm that we will require the autumn cut."

Clerk to Rivenhall Parish Council -

"Glad to hear that the above proved successful this past season. If it's possible Rivenhall Parish Council would appreciate being included in any expanded scheme for 2021 with the inclusion of Park Road up to the junction with Western Road, and Church Road from its junction with Park Road up to Rivenhall Church, apart from the farm accesses."

Clerk to Borley Parish Council -

“ . . .As you know Borley is small and most of the lanes are pretty tiny. Each year I make a judgment as to when the verges should be cut because it really depends on the weather! This is the same for Borley Green. This year was quite exceptional, it was wet early on then dry and sunny. The wild flowers did amazingly well and the verges looked magnificent for a long time. . . It can become dangerous if we don't get them cut and the edges become a real mess. We will not do another cut this year, but that is very unusual. . . So I suppose what I'm say is that I have to judge it year by year balancing the desire to leave them for sustainability with keeping the lanes safe and clear. Occasionally we might be able to get away with one cut but that is very unusual.”

Local Historian Janet Gyford -

"I was delighted to read that your Council was updating its treatment of grass verges. As you will know, this means not mowing them at all until late July. This allows the flowering plants to bloom, and the bees and other pollinating insects to thrive. In particular, the dandelions, which appear in about April, provide much of the earliest pollen of the year for bees. (and bees play a large part in sustaining life on earth). Then if left alone for long enough, the plants on the verges can set seed for the following year. Then, and only then, they can be mown, sometime from late July onwards. . . .But this year, the grass verges in St Nicholas Road in Witham have been mown at least three times already, and we are only just into July ! So they shouldn't have been cut at all yet. What's more, the last was a very severe cut, done by two people and a very large machine. If this was done all over Witham, what can the cost have been ? The whole exercise was expensive, unnecessary, and environmentally and visually damaging. . .”

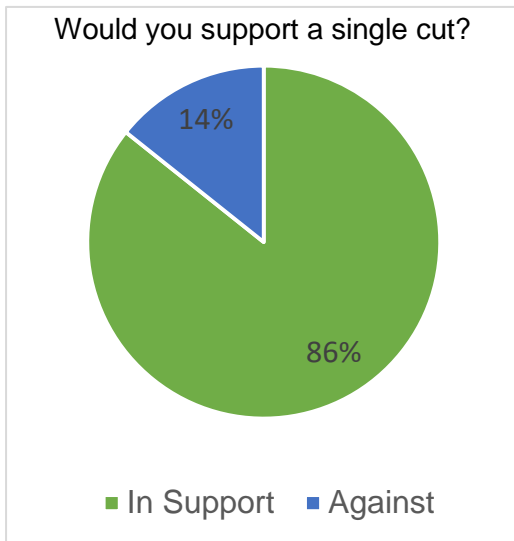
Support for the initiative was also given by Cllr Peter Schwier, the Clerk to Finchingfield Parish Council, and the Clerk to Sturmer Parish Council.

During the monitoring in August at the Shalford location, a local resident enquired about the trial and stated they were in support of wildflower growth and also raised safety concerns if the verges get too high.

A resident from Stisted also raised safety concerns if the verges get too high and further mentioned that the longer verges often encourage road users to slow down.

During the monitoring in July at the Bardfield Saling location, a local resident of twenty-eight years enquired about the trial. They requested that the trial should continue, the verges shouldn't be cut as the area has not looked as good before and that it's beneficial to wildlife.

6.0 Feedback Received After Trial



After the trial was concluded in August, questionnaires were sent out to Parish and Town Councils within the trial area, and the remaining Parish Councils around the District which are outside of the trial area. Questionnaires were also given to Members inside and outside of the trial area. A total of twenty-one questionnaires were received overall.

Five questionnaires were returned from Parish Councils within the trial area and seven questionnaires were returned from Parish Councils outside the trial area.

Two questionnaires were returned from Members inside the trial area and a further seven questionnaires were returned from Members outside the trial area.

All recipients of the questionnaires were asked the following question:

>>> Would you support a single cut of the verges in the autumn as a permanent arrangement going forward?

Out of the total twenty-one returned questionnaires, eighteen were in support of a single cut of the verges in the autumn as a permanent arrangement going forward, and three were against a single cut of the verges in the autumn as a permanent arrangement going forward.

6.1 Parish Councils Inside the Trial Area

Five questionnaires were returned from Parish Councils within the trial area which include The Salings, Great Notley, Panfield, Stisted and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural. Below are the responses from these five Parish Councils.

Q1 - *Are there any specific areas where a road safety (visibility) issue has been identified?*

Three replied no and two replied yes.

Q2 - *Those that replied yes were asked to state the locations.*

Panfield Parish Council -

"Has now been dealt with using local and private arrangements."

Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural -

"Around Stansted Hall and the entry on to the A1124. Several other junctions in the area of Burtons Green and Greenstead Green. Bends in the lanes around Greenstead Green. Very often dangerous for cyclists, motor cyclists & vehicles that are not large 4 x4's. Sloe Hill. Star Stile Lane through to Colne Engaine."

Q3 - *Has your Council noticed any difference in the levels of littering during the trial?*

Four replied no change, one replied there is more litter.

Q4 - *Within your parish boundary, do you consider that a single cut of the verge has had any impact on the quality of the local environment?*

Three replied no, two replied yes.

Q5 - *Those that replied yes were asked to tell us what impact the single cut of the verge has had.*

Great Notley Parish Council -

"It improves the visual appearance of the verges."

Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural -

"Some road junctions have restricted visibility and so become dangerous due to the increased growth of vegetation. This is a serious safety issue. It has made walking in some parts of the parish harder, specifically those without pavements."

Q6 - *Do you have any other comments regarding the trial?*

The Salings Parish Council -

"We feel that it is important for wildlife/biodiversity to leave verges long wherever possible."

Great Notley Parish Council -

"The Parish Council has no objection to having just one verge cut a year. A wish was expressed by Councillors that wild flowers are planted on the verges to improve the visual appearance."

Panfield Parish Council -

"Need to gain support from landowners on this initiative."

Stisted Parish Council -

“The Council would like to see clarification on whether a second cut can be requested where there may be a need due to road visibility/safety?”

Greenstead Green & Rural Parish Council -

“How much is saved by not cutting the verges? Overhanging grass and vegetation on narrow roads is a hazard when driving especially if animals dodge out to cross the road.”

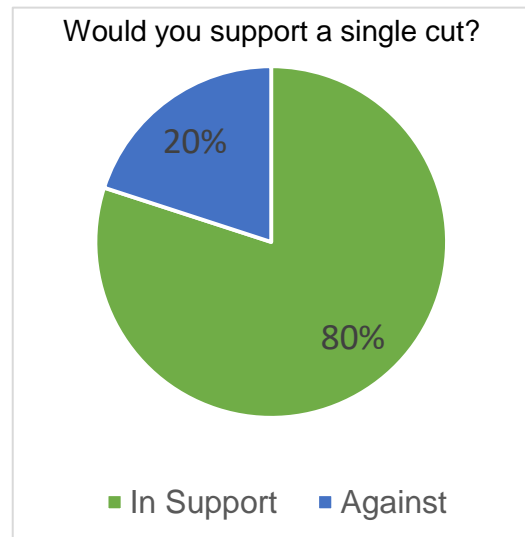
Q7 - *Would your Parish Council support a single cut of the verges in the autumn as a permanent arrangement going forward?*

Four Parish Councils were in support and one was against.

Q8 - *Those that replied no were asked to tell us why you would not support this arrangement.*

Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural -

“Because of the danger caused in narrow bendy rural roads. As stated before in a Rural Parish overhanging vegetation on roads causes problems when driving.”



6.2 Parish Councils Outside of the Trial Area

Seven questionnaires were returned from Parish Councils outside the trial area which include Rivenhall, Bures Hamlet, Ashen, Coggeshall, Belchamp Walter, Bulmer and Castle Hedingham. Below are the responses from these seven Parish Councils.

Q1 - *Does your Council support the aims and objectives of the trial (i.e. to protect/support wildlife and improve biodiversity at a local level)?*

Six replied yes and one replied no.

Q2 - *Do any of your members or staff travel through the central part of the district?*

Six replied yes and one replied no.

Q3 - *Those that replied yes were then asked whether they've noticed any difference in the levels of littering of the verges in the trial area.*

Five replied no change and one replied there is more litter.

Q4 - *Those that replied to the previous question were asked whether they aware of any specific areas where road safety (visibility) was an issue.*

Five replied no and one replied yes.

Coggeshall Parish Council -

"The Parish Council does have concerns regarding road safety. Particularly the junction of the A120 leaving Coggeshall - the central reservation becomes hazardous if hampered by overgrown vegetation. The junction Colchester Road/Feering Road can impact on vehicles moving safely. The Council does support these proposals but firmly believe they should not be allowed to impact on road safety."

Q5 - *What are your Council's thoughts about a reduction in verge cutting?*

Rivenhall Parish Council -

"A good thing in the correct locations."

Bures Hamlet Parish Council -

"Bures Hamlet does not have a large amount of roadside verge. However what we do have would benefit from less cutting. If verges could be "cultivated" with wild flowers etc together with signs notifying the verges as biodiversity areas this would help prevent parking of vehicles along side the road. Parking of vehicles are a problem here particularly in summer, mainly due to the proximity of the River Stour. Because of this verges become muddy and unsightly. Less cutting would undoubtedly preserve the appearance as well as a haven for wildlife."

Ashen Parish Council -

"We would support the adoption of reduced verge cutting as a general principle unless in a particular area more frequent verge cutting is desirable. There should be a further review after the first year. Subject to a review after the first year to assess the effect in this area and with the exclusion of areas where twice annual cutting is desirable because of particular amenity or safety reasons we would support the general reduction to once a year."

Coggeshall Parish Council -

"The Council considers the reduction in verge cutting to be a positive step."

Belchamp Walter Parish Council -

“The Council does not support the proposal. Our Parish is rural with some very small single track roads. Whilst the Council supports all efforts to reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity it is concerned that no cut in spring will significantly reduce visibility on corners and will have a negative impact on road safety. The council proposes a partial cut in spring. Under a partial, straight roads would be left uncut and the insides of corners would be cut. The Council thinks this compromise approach would achieve the conservation objectives without a detrimental effect on public safety. The Council has conducted a review of all roads in the parish and has developed a map showing the areas that should be cut.”

Bulmer Parish Council -

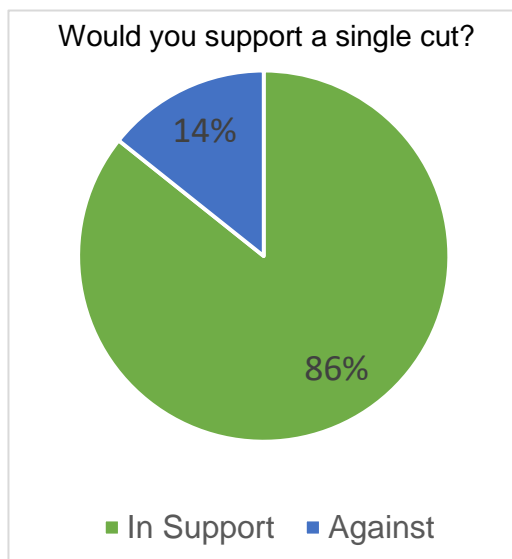
“Majority support once a year if it is protective to plant species. Some are concerned about danger to traffic: Trying to get out of lanes in summer when the undergrowth has grown is hard you can not see oncoming traffic. I know it saves money but if it saves a life its well worth it.”

Castle Hedingham Parish Council -

“Unanimously support the reduction of cutting to once a year.

Comment 1: Concerned about any areas which create road safety concerns around visibility restrictions, but not aware of any specific locations at present.

Comment 2: We have a protected lane with rare species in Castle Hedingham. Knowing the date of the autumn cut at this lane is important so volunteers can rake up the cuttings soon afterwards to protect the rare plants. We understand that some Councils have invested in equipment that cuts and rakes at the same time and wonder if this is possible at Braintree District Council.”



Q6 - *Would you support a single cut of the verges in the autumn becoming a permanent arrangement across the District?*

Six of the Parish Councils were in support and one Parish Council was against.

Q7 - *Do you have any other comments regarding the reduce frequency of verge cutting?*

Rivenhall Parish Hall -

“Specific locations in Rivenhall Parish - Park Road, from its junction with Western Road, and Church Road =, from its junction with Park Road up to Rivenhall Church.”

Ashen Parish Council -

“Our support for adopting single cutting is subject to the qualification we have made as to the exception of areas where twice yearly may be desirable for area specific reasons and a review after the first year. Our support for one annual cut is expressly subject to our earlier comments that it is subject to review after the first year and subject to the exceptions as set out above.”

Coggeshall Parish Council -

“The UK has lost 97% of its wildlife meadows since the 1930's and we have lost 80% of our insect biomass in the last 30 years. Reducing spring verge cutting is a positive step and Coggeshall Parish Council whole heartedly welcome the move. Where verges are to be managed, we favour mechanical methods and oppose chemical spraying. If wildflower growth is to be encouraged, the cuttings should be removed, rather than left. A logical next step is to identify appropriate areas on a three or four year rotational basis which can be left uncut through winter to provide year-round shelter and habitat for invertebrates that winter in egg/larval stages.”

6.3 Members Inside the Trial Area

Two questionnaires were returned from Members inside the trial area which include Cllr Peter Schwier and Cllr Paul Euesden.

Q1 - *Do you consider that a single cut of the verge has had any impact on the quality of the local environment?*

One Member replied yes and one Member replied no.

Q2 - *Those that answered yes were asked to say what the impact was.*

Cllr Paul Euesden -

“More natural looking verges. An increase in the variety of plants, more insects and more bird activity in the verges.”

Q3 - *Are there any specific areas which a road safety (visibility) issue has been identified?*

Two Members replied no.

Q4 - *What feedback, if any, have you received from local residents about the trial?*

Cllr Peter Schwier -

“Local residents are very supportive of the verges not being cut in the spring for all the reasons stated in the aims and benefits of the trial.”

Cllr Paul Euesden -

“I’ve only had feedback from residents with an interest in environment and wildlife. This has all been positive. I suspect that more feedback would have been channeled to the Parish Councils.”

Q5 - *Have you noticed any difference in the levels of littering during the trial?*

Two Members replied there was less litter.

Q6 - *Would you support a single cut of the verges in the autumn as a permanent arrangement going forward?*

Two Members replied yes.

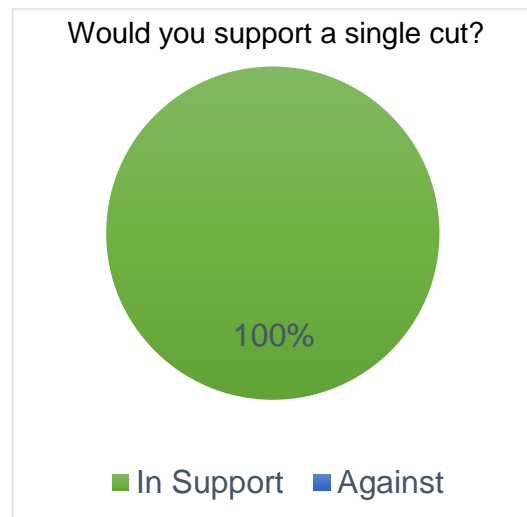
Q7 - *Do you have any other comments regarding the trial?*

Cllr Peter Schwier -

“I think this should be extended asap across BDC and other parts of Essex, it would be welcomed by a significant proportion of those who live and work in the District and Essex.”

Cllr Paul Euesden -

“I would like to see the trial extended to more verges throughout the district, coupled with Press Releases to explain what the trial is and what the hoped for outcome is. I would also like to see more Parish Council involvement in the selection of verges to be included.”



6.4 Members Outside of the Trial Area

Seven questionnaires were returned from Members outside the trial area and include Cllr Richard van Dulken, Cllr Jenny Sandum, Cllr Sue Wilson, Cllr Bill Rose, Cllr Paul Thorogood, Cllr Stevie Hicks and Cllr James Abbott.

Q1 - *Do you consider that a single cut of the verge has had any impact on the quality of the local environment?*

Five Members replied yes and three replied no.

Q2 - *Those that answered yes were asked to say what the impact was.*

Cllr Richard van Dulken -

“Allowed plants, and to a lesser extent, wildlife, to get better established on rural roadsides.”

Cllr Jenny Sandum -

“Very positive impact - much more visually pleasing as well as being good for biodiversity.”

Cllr Paul Thorogood -

“Safety must come first, so more than one cut may be required near junctions for example. But roadside verges across the entire UK equal the size of the Lake District National Park and therefore provide a large habitat for many animals and plants. <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/why-road-verges-are-important-wildlife-habitats.html>.”

Cllr Stevie Hicks -

“So much more colour of wild flowers growing along the verges and being allowed to reseed instead of being hacked / mown down at they're prime.”

Cllr James Abbott -

“A benefit. And where 2 cuts was done in 2020 (as in Rivenhall) we witnessed damage to wildflowers in verges - such as in Park Road and Church Road.”

Q3 - *Are there any specific areas which a road safety (visibility) issue has been identified?*

Six Members replied no and one Member replied yes.

Q4 - *Those that replied yes were asked to state the locations.*

Cllr Sue Wilson -

“At the junction of the A120 with the B1024,, Coggeshall.”

Q5 - *What feedback, if any, have you received from local residents about the trial?*

Cllr Richard van Dulken -

“Not in my Ward so cannot comment, but residents generally have no objections.”

Cllr Jenny Sandum -

“Very positive feedback, with people glad that the council is saving time and money by reducing the amount of cutting taking place, and demonstrating the importance of allowing biodiversity to flourish in more areas.”

Cllr Bill Rose -

“Due to possible restrictions on travel, residents may not have travelled along all the roads in the current scheme.”

Cllr Paul Thorogood -

“On social media I have read positive comments that verges that have been left to flourish look great when wild flowers are in bloom.

[https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/14/on-the-verge-a-quiet-roadside-revolution-is-boosting-wildflowers-aoe.](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/14/on-the-verge-a-quiet-roadside-revolution-is-boosting-wildflowers-aoe)”

Cllr Stevie Hicks -

“In the areas i cover during driver training, one of the hazards usually identified are those of tall plants blocking lines of sight, during the trial i and my trainees have not had to deal with extremely long grass or tall plants despite the constant changes of types of vehicles used, including paramedic cars and critical patient carriers.”

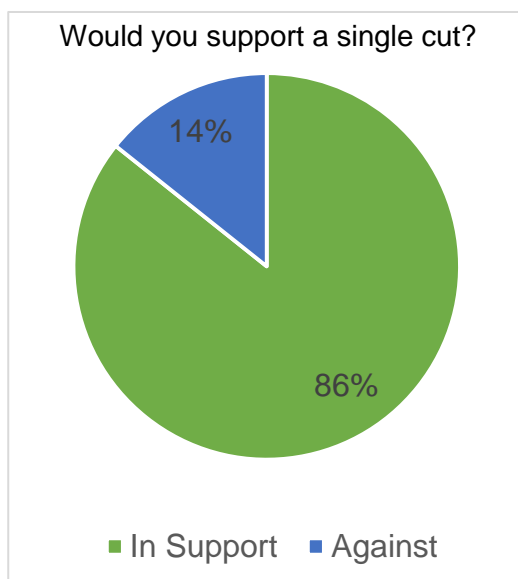
Cllr James Abbott -

“I have heard no negative comments at all. There is both support for more wildflower friendly management and for clamping down on litter. The more cuts there are, the more the litter gets shredded. If we can clamp down on littering (ie fines), maintain/increase the very good level of parish/BDC/volunteer litter picking and have just one cut per year it would be a win-win. We can focus litter cleaning ahead of the single cut.”

Q6 - Have you noticed any difference in the levels of littering during the trial?

Five Members replied there was no change and two Members replied there was less litter.

Q7 - Would you support a single cut of the verges in the autumn as a permanent arrangement going forward?



Six Members replied yes and one Member replied no.

Q8 - Do you have any other comments regarding the trial?

Cllr Jenny Sandum -

“Very keen for this to be rolled out to the rest of the District now, and for other areas such as roundabouts and the margins of parks and recreating areas to also be included.”

Cllr Sue Wilson -

“Cutting should always be undertaken to ensure there are no visibility problems for highway users, including cyclists.”

Cllr Bill Rose -

“Perhaps consider rolling out to other areas within the District.”

Cllr Paul Thorogood -

“Roundup-style weed killers containing glyphosate should be avoided at all cost. Unfortunately Highways England has habit of spraying weedkiller 10 metres either side of signs along the A120 which leaves a hotchpotch of large, ugly, brown patches of dead vegetation which takes months to recover. Cuts should be manual cuts with mowers and strimmers - not chemical.”

Cllr Stevie Hicks -

“It would be great to see some of the open spaces being cut less frequently as well, during this past trial i have noted that the large grass cutting tractors used on large open spaces have just turned up and dusted playing fields with no change in grass height from before cut to supposed after cut, even members of the public contact me saying they were only here on Tuesday and now they are heard again Friday of the same week !?”

Cllr James Abbott -

“In Rivenhall, as agreed by the parish council, we would like to volunteer to create strips of wildflowers in chosen locations to act as banks for the spread of seed along the verges. There are several people (myself included) in the village who are willing to do this and have a level of relevant knowledge and experience. The strips would be about 10 metres long each and are suggested for: Park Road, two strips one either side of the brook crossing; Church Road, one on the high straight section north of the church and one diagonally opposite the school; Oak Road, one strip near the RPC trees south of the recycling centre; Henry Dixon Road, one strip near the railway bridge and Rickstones Road, one strip on the raised bank north of Stoverns Hall.”

7.0 Feedback from Staff

Feedback was requested from the officers who monitored the roadside verges during the trial period, and feedback was also requested from Street Cleansing staff who litter pick these roadside verges in order to gage their opinion of the trial.

7.1 Feedback from Monitoring Officers

The officers who completed the monitoring for this trial are in support of a single cut of the roadside verges taking place each year in the autumn rather than two. A number of local residents approached these officers during the monitoring period to express their support for leaving the verges to naturalise in order to improve the local environment. Throughout the trial period, it was apparent that there was no significant increase in litter at the roadside verges as they were left to grow, and leaving them to naturalise does not appear to encourage litter.

7.2 Feedback from Street Cleansing Staff

Street Cleansing staff currently wait until the roadside verges are cut in spring and autumn in order to litter pick. It's not possible to work ahead and litter pick prior to the roadside verges being cut. There are health and safety concerns with slips, trips and falls working alongside the highway on uncut verges as staff would be unable to see any exposed rabbit holes, exposed manholes or unseen items within the verge growth. It may appear that the verges are clear of litter with the uncut growth, however there could be hidden litter within which would not be exposed until cut back.

8.0 Feedback from Philip Liverton Ltd.

Philip Liverton Ltd. are responsible for cutting a number of roadside verges within the Braintree District on behalf of the Council. They were asked for their feedback regarding the trial, particularly whether leaving the verges uncut has meant a significant increase in litter.

Mike Barnes – Manager of Philip Liverton Ltd.

"In some instances the verges we left were subsequently cut by local farmers/landowners, presumably to enable visibility when accessing their property. I didn't notice a significant build up of litter in these verges although there are always localised hot spots. Leaving out the spring cut did increase the vegetation level for the Autumn cut, but it may take a year or two to notice how bramble and hardwood suckers will colonise the verge as each year they become a little more established and difficult to cut cleanly. We only had a couple of comments from members of the public regarding safety for foot traffic but that could well have been that we were not around to be collared! My main concern would be the establishment of aggressive and invasive suckers within sight splays. A lot of these suckers quickly spread when given the opportunity to make strong root growth. They will quickly outgrow and smother the natural grasses, leaving only woody vegetation and brambles."

9.0 Conclusion

- There was no adverse impact on road users in the trial areas compared to the non-trial areas.
- There were clear Environmental benefits including 50% reduction of plant (tractors) and vehicle emissions for transporting litter pickers and an increased biodiversity in the trial areas. These benefits are support both BDC's and ECC's climate change objectives.
- Positive feedback was received during and after the trial for single cut in the autumn.
- Road safety i.e. visibility at road junctions was the main issue/concern raised by residents, parish councils and members, not littering. However, in the non-trial areas it was difficult to see the difference after the growth within a few weeks later following the spring cut, which raised the question around added value and benefit of the work being undertaken in the first place.
- Cost saving would be made by reducing the frequency of cuts, however, there is no guarantee that any saving would be used towards other highway improvements.