



Managing grassland road verges: a best practice guide

Case study: A590 Morecambe Bay NIA Green Transport Corridor Project

A case study from: Highways England and contractors Kier, Ashlea, and Ground Control Ashlea
Partners/Funders: Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Natural England

The NEWP 32 GTCP Project is a 3-year pilot programme of work being led by Natural England in partnership with the Highways England, Humberhead Levels NIA partnership and Morecambe Bay NIA partnership. The project is helping **deliver commitment 32 of the Natural Environment White paper** and is also contributing to the **delivery of Biodiversity 2020** and the Highways England Delivery Plan 2015-2020. The GTCP in Morecambe Bay NIA is one of only two national pilot projects backed by Natural England, the other is Humberhead Levels NIA.

The A590 Morecambe Bay project aims to **improve grassland habitat** for pollinating insects, provide wood fuel and woodland biodiversity, reduce the deer vehicle collision risk, benefit locally important species and habitats, and improve the visual landscape. Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Butterfly Conservation Trust, Buglife, Plantlife and the Deer Initiative have been involved in the design and delivery of this scheme. The framework of the project is replicable across the SRN, and can therefore lead to countrywide biodiversity gains.

In 2015/16 **73 individual soft estate plots were visited and identified** for enhancement works along the A590 between the M6 J36 and A590 Meathop Roundabout. These plots were not reaching their potential for biodiversity or ecosystem services. **Baseline survey methods** and were developed and implemented in summer 2016 after discussion with local experts and stakeholders to ensure survey methods were **repeatable and practical**, which then informed the management regimes for each plot.

The scheme involves **habitat management and enhancement works to 12km of verge over 4 years** (from FY 2016/17 - 2019/20) and then ongoing maintenance thereafter to ensure the habitat integrity is maintained.

Management works from 2016 to present have included clearance of scrub from grassland sites, hedge planting and laying, creating hibernacula for reptiles, wildflower plug planting and seeding, and the collection of arisings from grass cutting. Surveys were also carried out in the summer of each year to **monitor the impact** of the management. This trial scheme continues until 2020 and helps to **meet targets set in the Highways England Biodiversity Plan**, in addition to engaging the community and partners, enabling knowledge transfer and bringing people together to carry out practical conservation work.

4 year scheme development then ongoing maintenance thereafter - delivery costs so far

15/16 £30,000 preliminary costs

16/17 - 110,000 delivery costs

17/18 - £80,000 delivery costs

18/19 - estimated 115,000 delivery costs

19/20 - estimated 280,000 delivery costs

Ongoing habitat management costs estimated - less than 10,000 per year

More information on the Designated Funds Programme as part of the Road Investment Strategy can be found here: <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/designated-funds/>



Clockwise from top left: Cut and collect in action on a verges; sowing seeds; hedge planting; reptile surveys