



# Managing grassland road verges: a best practice guide

## Case study: Sheffield Living Highways Project

*A case study from:* Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust

*Partners/Funders:* University of Sheffield (research partner), Amey plc (delivery partner and funder), Sheffield City Council (delivery partner)

Sheffield Living Highways is a partnership project involving Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust, the University of Sheffield, and Amey who are delivering the Streets Ahead programme for Sheffield City Council. The aim of the project is to enhance the wildlife on road-side grass verges throughout the city by adapting management practices.

In 2016 and 2017 a mowing trial was conducted on **17 urban roads in Sheffield**. On one side of each road, mowing proceeded as normal (every 3-4 weeks) but was reduced by half on the other side of the road (every 6-8 weeks) during the entire mowing season (April - October). Grass cuttings were left on grass verges after mowing took place. Plant and insect surveys were conducted by the University of Sheffield on these trial roads to measure the impact on biodiversity, the results of which are still being analysed. Roads were a mix of residential streets and non-residential key transport links. The mowing trial was **communicated to the public** through a press release, signs on lamp posts and leaflets delivered to every house on the mowing trial roads. Research also examined the **public perception of the mowing trial**; preliminary results suggest that although local residents do not always like the appearance of unmown grass, there is some appreciation that it is better for biodiversity.

In 2018, Amey (outside of the partnership project) implemented plans to conduct one annual grass cut in late summer on **20% of the urban road verge network**. This resulted in swathes of dandelions flowering and setting seed in addition to localised displays of cowslips, cuckoo flower and cats-ear during the spring. However the **visual appeal and diversity of the majority of verges reduced** during the summer as a result of the fertility and productivity of the majority of sites, leading to some complaints to Streets Ahead. The results of this 'one cut a year' approach suggest that high soil fertility will limit the capacity of many urban verges to support biodiverse swards and that at least one additional cut may be required for wide-ranging public acceptance. The experience of 2018 also confirms the earlier research that **public education is critical** to the long-term success of altered road verge management in a city context. Therefore, the final consideration when selecting verges is the **level and costs of public relations work** that would need to be undertaken.



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**Above:** Brochum Parkway  
*LEFT* Before (2015) and  
*RIGHT* After (2018)

**Right:** Mowing trial on  
 either side of urban roads



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