

Understanding Road Verges for Nature

A short guide aimed at environmental community groups, parish councils and town councils in Cambridgeshire.

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-What is a road verge, and who is responsible for looking after it?

A verge refers to a strip of land that forms part of “The Highway”. The “Highway” is defined as: Carriageway, Footway and Verge. This can run adjacent to other boundaries such as hedgerows, fences and ditches. These fragmented patches of grassland can be important spaces for wildflowers, and habitats for insects and small mammals, but as they are also part of the highway space, they must be managed safely in a way that considers the road and other land usage, with safety taking precedent above all else.

Responsibility for verge management involves different levels of local authorities: Cambridgeshire County Council, the District and City Councils, and Parish and Town Councils. The management that takes place must comply with the highway safety requirements. For Cambridgeshire, the information on grass cutting responsibility can be found [here](#).

-Verge maintenance

- A breakdown of what verges are cut and when can be found [here](#). Dates on the website are updated as they are cut, but approximately there are 2 Rural and 2 Village cuts with additional junction cuts.
 - “Rural” generally refers to the 60mph roads that join villages and towns together;
 - “Village” refers to the inner roads contained within said villages and towns.
- Further verge cuts can be requested if growth back is rapid. This can be done through the report it tool found [here](#).
- For weed spraying, a full list of what has been completed can be found [here](#). Cambridgeshire County Council uses EU standard Glyphosate, which can take several weeks to work into the plant's system and kill the plant.

-Visibility through road verges – visibility splays

Visibility splays are areas of verges to be kept clear at junctions, bends, and access points, where drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists need to be able to see other road users to ensure safety. These areas must always be kept clear of tall vegetation or other obstructions taller than 1 metre high.

In most built-up areas, such as residential roads, sightlines should be clear for a distance of 2.4 metres back into the verge and at a distance of up to 160m for the approaching vehicle, depending on road speed. The distance of 2.4m into the verge is used as it represents the maximum reasonable distance between the front of a car and the driver's eye.

-Managing a verge next to your property (Section 142)

Under Section 142 of the Highways Act (1980), residents may apply for a “Licence to Plant Within the Highway”, which can grant permission to maintain an area of highways verge adjacent to their premises. Any planting or improvements for biodiversity must still comply with road safety requirements such as visibility splays.

The form to apply for a S142 can be found [here](#).

-Verge cutting schedules

Verge cutting schedules balance safety, biodiversity, and other maintenance needs. Grass close to junctions and other critical areas is monitored and cut as needed to maintain clear visibility.

For Cambridgeshire the verge cutting programme, including a map of county-maintained verges, can be found [here](#).

-Trees affecting the highway

The council is responsible for all trees on the adopted highway, and we have a duty of care to protect the public from the risk of trees within falling distance of the highway.

A full breakdown of what will and will not be attended to can be found [here](#).

-Riparian ownership

A riparian owner is anyone who has any type of watercourse running through, beneath, or next to the boundary of their land or property. Please see the information [here](#) on riparian rights and responsibilities to find out more about riparian ownership.

In the context of the highway, roadside ditches are also included as water courses that will have a riparian owner responsible for their maintenance.

More information on watercourses and how to manage them can be found [here](#).

-Verge management for biodiversity

Some examples of good practice for biodiversity-friendly verge management:

- More appropriate cutting regimes – this will depend on the type of grassland and the underlying soils
- Annual management is key to maintain a rich habitat
- Cut-and-collect mowing to reduce soil nutrient deposition and to maintain a more species-rich vegetation
- Creating habitat mosaics where possible – different wildlife requires different ecological conditions, so creating open grassy areas, scrubby areas, or wooded areas where possible and safe can be an excellent way to encourage a more biodiverse verge

For lots more information on wildlife-friendly verge management, Plantlife have created some excellent resources to support this ([here](#)).

-Protected Road Verges (PRVs)

A PRV is a road verge that has been designated by Cambridgeshire County Council because of their high biodiversity value. These verges are also maintained by Cambridgeshire County Council and are managed in a specific way to protect the biodiversity, whilst not compromising road safety.

There are specific criteria that road verges must meet in order to be designated as a PRV; this information can be found [here](#) on the Cambridgeshire County Council website.

-Invasive species

Cambridgeshire County Council's Highways Team only attends to reports of Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), which are both Schedule 9 Invasive Species in the UK. All other species are not attended to.

Reports of both species should be reported [here](#).