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To mow or to grow?

How halving the cut will get our town verges buzzing

The Council's Environment Service is responsible for managing a massive 75 hectares of 'urban verges' across Cornwall. These are the verges you see within 30mph zones.

Typically, urban verges would be mown around eight times a year to a consistent standard right across Cornwall, starting in Spring. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that we weren't able to carry out any maintenance works on verges. That allowed many of the verges to grow naturally, creating a wonderful display of native wild flora. The wildflowers attracted insects and other wildlife and benefit pollinators and our planet in general.

Whilst the coronavirus was without doubt difficult and distressing, there were some unexpected benefits to lockdown. During the pandemic we have seen nature take back control and thrive. Not being able to maintain and mow roadside verges has allowed the Council time and space to draw up new maintenance plans to help create a greener Cornwall.

Wildlife verges

We have introduced a new [wildlife verges](#) cutting policy in our towns and villages to encourage wildflowers and pollinators to thrive and allow more natural growth without compromising road safety. Our new verge maintenance plans are for:

- Annual cuts to be more than halved from eight to only two or three times a year
- Cutting will be done AFTER the flowers have finished and seeds are set

- Creating the space and conditions for more abundant, productive and healthier habitats, species and natural systems
- Creating green spaces for people to enjoy.



Fast-growing grass and other vegetation can create road and footpath hazards during the summer growing months. We will of course still be ensuring visibility for safety reasons, cutting verges on junctions and bends. We will also be tidying path edges, cutting around benches and fixtures, and removing noxious weeds. But we also understand that people appreciate the wild natural beauty of Cornwall and want that reflected in its townscapes.

We intend to strike that delicate balance between ensuring road safety while leaving ecology and biodiversity undisturbed wherever possible. Less grass cutting means more opportunity for wildflowers to flourish, and more food for bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects.

Pollinator Action Plan

We have adopted a 'Pollinator Action Plan' which alongside our 'Environmental Growth Strategy' looks at how we manage our whole estate. Our Pollinator Action plan will make sure we work in a more pollinator friendly way. Not cutting developing wildflowers and species-rich grasslands on our urban verges, will allow plants to seed and the natural rhythms of nature to take charge. Our grounds maintenance teams are switching to a more ecological cutting and mowing approach. And our new plans have earned an enthusiastic thumbs up from many partner organisations, for maximising biodiversity and encouraging wildflowers and pollinating insects.

The benefits of this new approach will be significant and align well with the Council's plans for tackling climate change.

Like lots of people I really enjoyed seeing the wildflowers during lockdown and knowing that bees and other pollinators are benefiting. I'm really glad we can

build on this positive. I hope this will be one of many areas where we can learn from our lockdown experiences and do things differently and better.



You can join us in making Cornwall better and greener for pollinators by:

- Letting native plants thrive in your garden – flowering ‘weeds’ are nature’s own supply of colour, refuge and food
- Planting pollinator friendly plants to boost food
- Avoiding garden pesticides including aphid spray, slug pellets and weed killers; and buy organic fruit and veg
- Leaving areas of your garden undisturbed and naturally messy – make space for log piles, compost heaps and rough, grassy areas.
- Reducing the frequency of lawn mowing – let daisies, buttercups and clover come through and flower especially in early spring
- Helping thirsty pollinators – A bird bath or sunken bin lid are ideal watering holes for parched bees and bugs.

There’s more information about helping nature to grow on the Council’s [Grow Nature Toolkit](#)

If you would like to find out more about wild verges, the Council’s Pollinator Action Plan and Environmental Growth Strategy please use the links below:

- [Wildlife verges](#)
- [Pollinator Action Plan](#)
- [Environmental growth strategy](#)