

Caring for York's Roadside Verges – Statement for Landowners and Farmers

The Council publishes maps that show the extent of the adopted highway <https://www.york.gov.uk/RoadAdoption>, which means it is the Council's responsibility to maintain it.

The Council has a contract to cut a 1 metre wide strip of grass along the kerbside on grass verges of 'A' and 'B' roads. On other rural roads, grass cutting is restricted to priority locations, such as road junctions, bends and corners, areas where grass may obstruct the line of sight, leading to a hazard. The remaining areas in the verge are left long to help natural habitats to form which help to enhance biodiversity. Subject to weather conditions, the Council aim to cut this 1 metre wide strip of grass in rural areas twice per year; the first cut is in June/July and the second cut in September/October.

All vegetation within the adopted highway, including verges, are the responsibility of the Highway Authority who can determine how it should be maintained. Trees in hedges and boundaries are usually the responsibility of the landowner/occupier whose property abounds the highway. Trees on land adjoining the adopted highway are the responsibility of the owner/occupier but the Highway Authority has a duty, and powers of enforcement, to ensure that such trees do not endanger the highway or its users.

Some farmers and landowners, across the local authority area, mow grass verges but there are no specific arrangements in place which cover this. The Council recognises that farmers and landowners play an important role in the management of field edges, of which roadside verges are an integral part. Sensitive management ensures that these important wildlife habitats are maintained in good condition and we are keen to work with farmers and landowners to help the Council meet its climate, environmental and flood management policy objectives and to manage verges in an environmentally sensitive and responsible way, to maximise natural habitats and enhance biodiversity.

Below we outline some draft recommendations for roadside verge management. We commit to consulting with farmers and landowners during Spring 2024, to draw on the experience and knowledge that farmers and landowners bring, and to co-develop a robust set of guidelines.

Draft guidelines

- Only cut verges when necessary. Removing arisings will help to create a suitable environment for wildflowers and increase the wildlife value of verges.
- Leave a 1 metre uncut strip along a boundary/hedge edge to provide refuge for wildlife and encourage natural habitats to form.
- Allowing thick hedges to flower and fruit provides birds with nest sites and winter food. Uncut hedges also provide essential shelter for overwintering insects and their larval young. Rotational management can help support this.

- Avoid cutting all hedgerows at once. Consider a 3 to 5 year rotation to allow flowers and berries to grow in alternate sections.
- Avoid or reduce the use of herbicides (spot spray only).
- Do not cut hedges between 1st March and August (bird nesting season).
- Avoid driving on verges, especially in wet conditions when machinery may rut the verge.

Some areas of verge are being actively managed for biodiversity and climate resilience, with wildflower management and/or tree planting. The Council will install signage to alert farmers and landowners to areas of wildflower management and ask that these areas are left un-mowed. Trees will be demarked using tree guards. Care needs to be taken when mowing or flailing near trees. No trees are to be removed without consultation with the Council first. We welcome farmers and landowners adopting sections of the verge and extending the wildflower and tree planting programme.