

LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

ROAD VERGES

(Line Drawing of Habitat)

Summary

Road verges support many different semi-natural habitats but assume particular significance as relicts of semi-natural grassland and as wildlife corridors. They may also retain features of landscape, historic or archaeological importance.

There are numerous factors affecting this habitat including fertilizer run-off from adjacent farms, structural disturbance from development and severe and extensive cutting of verges which can prevent flowering and seeding of interesting species.

Action Plan Aim

To assess, monitor and improve the biodiversity of road verges throughout Lancashire.

Habitat Description

Grasslands probably constitute the majority of habitat types found on Lancashire's road verges. There is little lowland semi-natural grassland left in Lancashire and, in an urbanized or intensively agricultural landscape, road verges assume particular significance as relicts of semi-natural grassland and as wildlife corridors.

There are UK Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) for lowland calcareous grassland, lowland neutral grassland and lowland dry acid grassland, and Lancashire HAPs for calcareous grassland and species-rich neutral grassland. Other minor habitats associated with road verges include hedges, ditches and scrub, and some run through areas of ancient woodland or wetland. They may also retain features of landscape, historic or archaeological importance.

National Status

Grass verges are recognised as contributing to the UK semi-natural grassland resource.

Species of flora or fauna protected under the terms of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) may grow, dwell, breed, feed or hibernate in road verges and their associated structures.

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“Noxious weeds”, as defined by the Weeds Act 1959, may grow in road verges or their associated structures.

Local Status

No length of road verge in Lancashire has any national statutory nature conservation designation in its own right.

The only complete Phase One Habitat Survey of Lancashire (NCC/English Nature, 1988-92) did not consider road verges as a separate category.

Lancashire County Council manages the majority of roads throughout the Action Plan area. The county's roads have not been systematically surveyed for their biodiversity resource. However, in 1992 anecdotal information from naturalists and others led to a survey of sites identified as potentially valuable botanically. No comparable survey of fauna has been undertaken.

Verge ownership is complicated. Those on motorways and trunk roads are owned by the Highways Agency. Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council or Blackpool Borough Council owns most other verges, though some remain in private ownership.

The existing management of verges lies largely with the relevant highways authority – the Highways Agency, Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council or Blackpool Borough Council. The Highways Agency covers the management of the verges of the M55, M58, M6, M61 and M65. The other authorities concentrate on cutting main (“A” and “B”) road verges, and those of minor roads where road safety is an issue. Most cutting is contracted out. All the highways authorities also undertake salt storage and spreading as appropriate. This may also be contracted out. Certain aspects of management may be devolved to district councils and some parish councils may employ lengthsman.

The Lancashire Highways Partnership (<http://www.lancashirehighwayspartnership.gov.uk/contact.htm>) provides a single point of contact for administrative Lancashire. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Blackpool Borough Council are the contacts for their respective Boroughs, except in the case of the relevant lengths of the M65 and M55 respectively, where the Highways Agency is responsible.

Indicators of Habitat Quality

Road verges support many different semi-natural habitats. Generalised indicators of quality are, therefore, inappropriate.

Current factors affecting the habitat

- Fertilizer rich run-off from adjacent farms, causing eutrophication.
- Management regimes that prevent flowering and seeding of interesting species or that lead to the growth of coarse vegetation and scrub, due to poor timing of cuts and/or failure to remove cuttings.

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- Risk of storage of materials on verges supporting key biodiversity resources, e.g. hay/silage bales, salt heaps.
- Laying of pipelines and servicing of utilities, including failure to retain and replace topsoil.
- Road widening, repairs, culverting and other major structural disturbance.
- Accidental or deliberate introduction of species that are inappropriate to the locality.
- The death of barn owls (*Tyto alba*) through collision with vehicles.
- Losses of plants to pesticides as a result of blanket spraying of Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), or other “noxious weeds” as defined by the Weeds Act 1959; and erroneous destruction of plants of superficially similar species.
- The loss of Cinnabar Moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*) colonies through removal of Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*).
- Severe and extensive cutting of verges by contractors, where management is contracted out.
- Disturbance or injury to species specially protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) during verge, ditch or boundary management.

Important Sites

Road verges in Lancashire may support a variety of semi-natural habitats. These include calcareous grassland, neutral grassland, acid grassland, heathland, open water (ditches), broadleaved woodland, scrub, hedgerows and walls. They may also support populations of scarce or declining species of flora and/or fauna, some of which enjoy statutory protection.

Although many sites were identified in the 1992 report as anecdotally important for their vegetation communities or individual flowering plant species, no assessment was made for fauna, fungi or non-vascular plants.

Current Action / Mechanisms

- *Policy*

None specific to road verges.

- *Site Safeguard*

No road verge has been specifically identified as a cSAC, SPA or SSSI. None has been specifically identified as a Biological Heritage Site. Many were identified as Special Verges between 1990 & 1992.

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- *Land Management*

Management prescriptions were recommended for Special Verges in 1992 and incorporated by LCC into road verge management contracts. The Wildlife Trust does not know if these are still in effect. A response is awaited from LCC.

- *Advisory*

The Wildlife Trust has proffered no advice to road verge owners and managers other than that previously offered to LCC. LCC has not contracted any external advice since 1992, nor sought any internally.

- *Research and Monitoring*

No monitoring has been undertaken on Special Verges for many years.

- *Public Relations*

No public relations initiatives have been undertaken by any party since 1992.

Habitat Targets

Target	Area	Measure	Timescale
Secure resources for road verge biodiversity action project(s)	Lancashire	Resource secured	2008
Assess the road verge biodiversity resource	Lancashire	Biodiversity resource assessed	2009
Maintain and, where practicable, expand the road verge biodiversity resource	Lancashire	Biodiversity resource maintained and expanded	2010
Increase awareness of the biodiversity resource of road verges	Lancashire	Awareness increased	Ongoing

Proposed Actions

Action (priority: H, M, L)	Area	Measure / Milestone	Partners	Timescale
<i>Research and monitoring</i>				
Undertake a full survey of road verge vegetation at a basic ("Phase One") level	Lancashire	50% of road verges surveyed	LCC, BwDBC, BIBC, HA, TWT	2010
Issue health & safety guidelines for	Lancashire	Guidelines produced	LCC, BwDBC,	2006

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biodiversity surveyors working adjacent to the highway (H)		and issued	BIBC, HA, TWT	
Devise provisional special road verge site selection criteria	Lancashire	Site selection criteria established.	LCC , TWT, EN	2006
Devise a methodology, and undertake a full road verge survey of the county during the spring and summer, to identify important sites and key species and to reassess sites identified in the 1992 register (H)		Methodology established and undertaken.	LCC, BwDBC, BIBC, HA, TWT , EN, AONBs, NHSs	2008
Set up a road verge database (H)		Database created.	BwDBC, BIBC, LCC , HA	2008
Site safeguard and monitoring				
Prepare management plans, with landowners, for the best road verge plant communities (M)	Lancashire	100% landowners contacted / management plans prepared	BwDBC, BpBC, LCC, AONBs (where relevant)	2008 / 2010
Investigate the possibility of changing road verge specifications on tender documents, to benefit nature conservation (including the design and siting of salt bins) (H)	Lancashire	Tender documents altered where appropriate.	BwD, BpBC, LCC, HA	2008
Work with the Lancashire Quiet Lanes Initiative to integrate management for biodiversity with its other actions (M)	Lancashire	Biodiversity actions integrated.	LCC , AONBs, TWT	2010
Habitat protection and management				
Investigate government funding available to highways authorities (H)	Lancashire	Funding options identified.	BwDBC, BIBC, LCC , HA, EN	2008
Investigate government, corporate and charitable trust funding available to non-governmental organisations/voluntary sector (H)	Lancashire	Funding options identified	TWT , EN	2008
Work up a costed project proposal (M)		Project proposal with	LCC , TWT , BwDBC,	2008

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		full costs produced.	BIBC, HA	
Submit applications (M)		Applications submitted	LCC, TWT, BwDBC, BIBC, HA	2009
Undertake detailed surveys of sites identified as being important (include fauna and flora, hedges, ditches and the presence of salt bins) (M)		100% of important sites surveyed.	BwDBC, BIBC, LCC, HA, AONBs, TWT, NHSS	2010
Advisory				
Provide advice to site owners on grants, schemes and current research (M)	Lancashire	80% of site owners contacted and advised.	BwDBC, BpBC, LCC, HA	2010
Ensure contractors are aware of sites of importance and are supplied with clear plans showing location of managed sites (M)		100% of contractors aware of important sites	BwDBC, BIBC, LCC, HA	Ongoing
Publicity				
Assist and advise Parish Councils about adopting & managing important roadside verges (L)	Lancashire	100% parish councils contacted and advised.	BwDBC, BIBC, LCC	2010

Related Action Plans

Calcareous Grassland; Species-Rich Neutral Grassland; Broadleaved & Mixed Woodland; Water Vole; Great Crested Newt; Mountain Whorl Snail & Wall Whorl Snail; Common Frog; People

References and additional reading

Web Sites:

Highways Agency Biodiversity Action Plan:

<http://www.highways.gov.uk/aboutus/corpdocs/biodiversity/index.htm>

Lancashire Highways Partnership:

<http://www.lancashirehighwayspartnership.gov.uk/contact.htm>

Quiet Lanes Initiative:

<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/policyandquality/quiet.asp>

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Abbreviations

AONBs = Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Lancashire (Arnsdale & Silverdale, Forest of Bowland)

BwDBC = Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

BIBC = Blackpool Borough Council

HA = Highways Agency

LCC = Lancashire County Council

NHSS = local Natural History Societies

TWT = The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside