

Highway Verge and Vegetation Management policy

1. Oxfordshire County Council, as the Highway Authority, is ultimately responsible for the maintenance of grass verges alongside the carriageway network throughout Oxfordshire excluding motorways and trunk roads.
2. This policy encompasses Oxfordshire County Council's corporate vision, objectives and embraces the nine priority themes of the Council. The policy is also informed by the Local Transport Connectivity Plan, the Highway Asset Management Plan, the Energy Strategy, and the Carbon Management Plan. The priority themes include
 - i. Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
 - ii. Improve access to nature and green spaces
3. This document relates to Oxfordshire County Council's Policy of verge and vegetation management only.

Policy: RVP1

The Council will conserve and enhance the natural environment.

Policy: RVP2

The Council will maintain footways and cycleways free and clear from intrusive vegetation. Where resources are limited, priority will be given to those areas.

Policy: RVP3

The Council will undertake verge management on all roadside verges in both rural and urban areas on a cyclical basis in line with our statutory requirements

Policy: RVP4

The Council will maintain visibility at junctions and other high-risk areas, (excluding visibility splays at entrances to residential or commercial premises) and ensure cycle and footpaths are effectively managed.

(Visibility splays are areas of adopted grass verges at locations where roads connect)

Policy: RVP5

Where cutting activities are considered appropriate, liaison with other organisations (such as District Councils) will be undertaken to ensure a co-ordinated approach in maintenance activities (such as litter picking).

Policy: RVP6

Where vegetation from adjoining land/properties encroaches and significantly hinders safe passage of highway network users, enforcement notices to remove and make safe will be issued to the riparian owner. Where they do not undertake action within the given timeframe, works will be carried out under instruction of council officers and costs recovered through legal process.

Policy: RVP7

Management of roadside verges (including those areas the county council has identified as Roadside Verge Nature Reserves) will prioritise the promotion of biodiversity where possible with reference to existing management specifications and to publications from Plantlife (www.plantlife.org.uk) and Oxford University Biodiversity leaflet (<https://www.biodiversity.ox.ac.uk/project/hero/>) as best practice guidelines, taking into account resources and location.

Policy: RVP8

The Council will manage grass verges within of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to further the aims of the AONB management plans.

Policy: RVP9

The Council will target additional resources where available to those areas which will have the best biodiversity outcomes, including identifying and managing new RVNRs

Policy: RVP10

The Council will support communities and initiatives to manage verges for biodiversity wherever feasible and subject to agreement with OCC, including ensuring the right species are in the right locations

Service Aims:

1. Ensure cost-effective maintenance of new verges to maximise biodiversity impact, is affordable and budgeted for future years
2. To undertake a nature led and risk-based approach to verge maintenance with the following minimum levels of service
 - 1 cut per year on visibility splays dependant on growth
 - 1 cut per year for fully adopted highway urban verge areas
 - 1 cut per year, utilising a 1m wide swathe cut along the roadside edge in rural verge areas
 - 1 cut per year, utilising a 1m wide strip to the rear of the footway /cycleway/shared use facility and a full width cut between the footway/cycleway/shared use facility and the carriageway
 - 1 cut per year on roads with a speed limit of 50mph or more (including all dual carriageways). Minimum standard is a 1m swathe cut.
 - 1 cut per year, at the end of the growing season or such time to maintain their habitat value, on Road Verge Nature Reserves
 - Full width cut-backs on a cyclical basis of ½ of the adopted verges in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty every year at the end of the growing season.
 - Wildlife refuges 1m wide at the rear of verges 3m or more, to be cleared in rotation every 5 years.
3. Full width cut-backs on a cyclical basis of ¼ of the adopted verges outside of AONB every year
4. Where District, Town and Parish Councils wish to cut their highway grass, cutting regimes should seek to enhance biodiversity
5. Over time build up a digital map and database of our biodiversity assets relating to verges and vegetation.

Reference & Supporting Documents

- Grass and Cutting procedure
- Climate and Natural Environment Policy Statement (emerging)
- Tree Policy
- Highways Safety Inspection Policy
- Highways Asset Management Plan
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Schedule 9)
- CROW Act 2000
- Plantlife documentation (Managing_grassland_road_verges_Singles.pdf (www.plantlife.org.uk)
- Plantlife : Road Verges: last refuge for some of our rarest wild plants
- Plantlife : Good Verge Guide: your go-to guide for transforming local verges into wildlife havens
https://roadverges.plantlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Managing-grassland-road-verges_2020.pdf
- AONB Management Plans
- Environment Act 2021
- Nature recovery strategy
- SUDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) Strategy / policy
- General biodiversity –
- Climate and Nature Strategy
- Design guide
- Urban meadow and verge guidelines
- Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study and District Landscape Character Assessment