

Shaftesbury Town Council Wildflower Management Policy



Adopted: December 2024

Review date: February 2027

Introduction

Shaftesbury Town Council is committed to enhancing biodiversity and creating sustainable green spaces within our community. This policy outlines our approach to wildflower management, emphasising the importance of balancing ecological benefits with aesthetic considerations and public amenity.

Our Vision

“One mile of flower-rich verge can produce 20kg of nectar sugar per year, enough to feed millions of pollinators ... [and] can support over 1,400 species of invertebrates.”

(Plantlife, The Good Verge Guide)

Statistics show that Britain faces a biodiversity crisis, and the species at critical risk are the pollinators (bees, butterflies, beetles, flies and others) which require a wide range of wild plants in order to thrive. 97% of their habitats have been destroyed as traditional wildflower meadows have come under the plough or turned over to grazing, and much land has been lost to the expansion of urban development for much needed housing and commercial infrastructure. Insects are key species in the maintaining of healthy ecosystems, and pollinators are critical for the production of our food.

Shaftesbury can make a vital contribution to the recovery of a diverse range of pollinator and other insect species by utilizing its open spaces and road verges to nurture our native wildflowers to supply food and shelter to support a greater biodiversity of wildlife. Our green spaces can be managed to allow the flourishing of these plants in place of the current regularly mown grass strips. Opportunities include our road verges, public open spaces, public and private gardens.

Objectives

- Increase biodiversity and support pollinators
- Enhance the visual appeal of public spaces and show Shaftesbury as a progressive Nature Friendly Town.
- Reduce maintenance costs and carbon emissions



- Educate the community about the importance of wildflowers

Wildflower Area Establishment

Site Selection

Suitable areas for wildflower meadows will be identified based on:

- Soil conditions
- Sunlight exposure
- Existing vegetation. Areas most suitable for wildflower management will be selected
- Areas Proximal to residential areas and public amenities will be prioritised for re seeding to ensure strong aesthetic appeal.
- An initial target of 25% of council owned grassland area to be put into wildflower management.

Preparation and Seeding

- Heavy scarification or topsoil scraping will be used as appropriate to remove existing vegetation and prepare the soil
- Existing Ecological features will be identified, retained and protected. Measures will be put in place to ensure no harm to protected wildlife species
- Select native wildflower seed mixes appropriate for local conditions. Emorsgate wildflower seeds are currently the only approved supplier
- Sow seeds in autumn or spring, depending on species requirements

Maintenance Practices

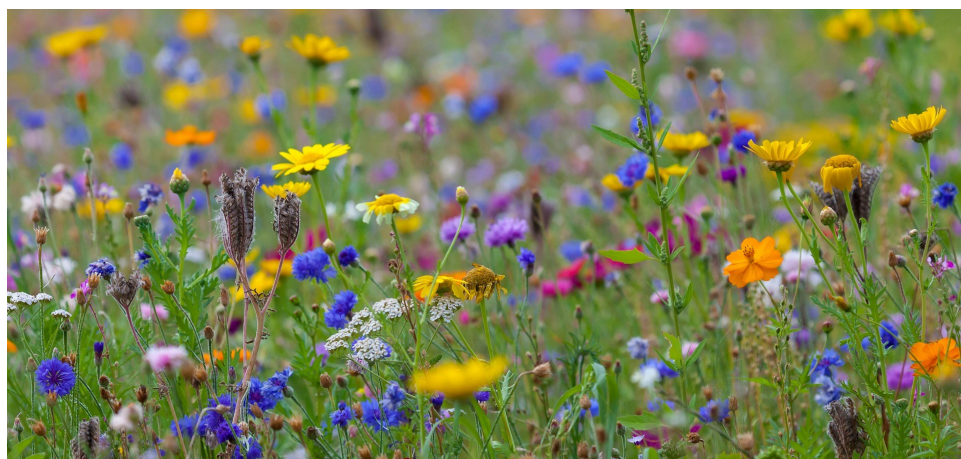
Cut and Collect Approach

Shaftesbury Town Council will implement a 'cut and collect' management strategy for wildflower areas. This approach involves:

1. Allowing wildflowers to grow and bloom throughout the spring and summer
2. Cutting the meadow in late summer or early autumn
3. Removing the cut material from the site

The cut and collect method is essential for maintaining healthy wildflower meadows and maximizing biodiversity benefits:

1. Nutrient Management: Removing cut material prevents nutrient enrichment of the soil. Wildflowers thrive in low-nutrient conditions, while excessive nutrients favour more aggressive grasses
2. Seed Dispersal: Cutting after flowering allows wildflowers to set seed, ensuring natural regeneration and maintaining species diversity
3. Weed Control: Regular cutting and removal of material helps suppress unwanted species and prevents the meadow from reverting to scrubland



4. Habitat Creation: The cut material can be used to create habitat piles for insects and small mammals, further enhancing biodiversity
5. Aesthetic Appeal: A well-managed wildflower meadow maintains its visual appeal throughout the seasons, benefiting both residents and visitors.

Timing of Cuts

- Main cut: Late August to September, after most wildflowers have set seed
- Optional spring cut: If necessary, to control vigorous growth or problem species
- Timing of cuts for different types of meadow can be established for each area as set in the Management plan. Some variation in the regimen is desirable from year to year as this will favour higher species diversity.

Equipment

- Use appropriate cutting equipment such as flail mowers or reciprocating bar mowers or strimmers
- Employ rakes, balers, or specialised cut and collect mower equipment to remove cut material
- Grass cuttings will be kept in agreed habitat pile locations on each site where possible to reduce transport costs and increase efficiency

Neat Amenity Grass Edges

To maintain a tidy appearance and clear demarcation between wildflower areas and more formal spaces, neat amenity grass edges will be implemented:

1. Width: Maintain a 1–2 meter wide strip of short grass around the perimeter of wildflower areas.
2. Mowing Frequency: Cut these edges regularly (every 2–3 weeks during the growing season) to maintain a neat appearance.

3. Path Maintenance: Keep pathways through wildflower areas clearly defined and regularly mown for public access.

Benefits of Neat Edges

- Improve public perception and acceptance of wildflower areas
- Provide clear boundaries for maintenance teams
- Create a diverse range of habitats within a single space
- Allow for easy access and enjoyment of wildflower areas

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Conduct annual surveys to assess species diversity and abundance
- Monitor public feedback and adjust management practices as needed
- Review and update the policy every three years

Community Engagement

- Organise educational events and guided walks
- Install interpretive signage explaining the benefits of wildflower meadows
- Encourage community involvement in seed sowing and monitoring activities

Challenges and Mitigation

Invasive Species Management

- Regularly monitor for invasive species
- Implement targeted control measures when necessary

Public Perception

- Provide clear communication about the benefits of wildflower areas
- Use neat edges and informative signage to improve aesthetic appeal

Balancing Biodiversity and Recreation

- Designate specific areas for different uses (e.g., picnic areas, wildflower meadows)
- Ensure adequate mown paths for public access

Conclusion

Shaftesbury Town Council's Wildflower Management Policy aims to create biodiverse, visually appealing, and sustainable green spaces. By implementing a cut and collect approach and maintaining neat amenity grass edges, we strive to balance ecological benefits with public amenity. This policy demonstrates our commitment to environmental stewardship and community well-being.

