



South
Derbyshire
District Council

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE BIODIVERSITY TRAINING

- GARETH PRICE
- BIODIVERSITY OFFICER

South Holland's towns and villages will become a "weed-infested wilderness" if Lincolnshire County Council doesn't backtrack on a money-saving decision to stop cutting grass verges.

The council announced last year it was to end routine cutting of verges in built-up areas from this April and with summer growth now in full swing the result is starting to become clear.

Retired Graham Petts (68), of West Elloe Avenue, who regularly litter picks the length of his road to keep it looking nice, said: "Spalding is going to turn into a weed-infested wilderness if they don't cut the grass this year.

"Thousands of dandelions are going to seed and the whole lot will be weeds instead of grass.

"I feel quite aggrieved about it. It's just spoiling the whole look of the town.

"I cut in front of my house and several other people have been doing the same but there are a number of bits not in front of houses or where people won't.

"It's all to do with quality of life. West Elloe, for instance, is one of the main thoroughfares into town and scruffy grass verges just detract from it. The trees take a lot of maintaining too, what will be next? Will they chop them down?"

In rural areas, two summer safety cuts of verges are to continue to a width of one metre either side of the road and footpath. And at junctions and some bends, verges will be cut to the highway boundary to improve visibility. The first cut will be either this month or next.

Reduction in tree maintenance has also been agreed to save £38,000.

A highways spokesperson said: "The council can no longer afford to do everything it's done in the past.

"As a result, we will now only be funding two cuts a year at locations where overgrown grass could cause safety issues. In addition, we'll be carrying out weed control once a year.

"We believe this new approach strikes the right balance – it keeps our roads safe, while ensuring the service remains affordable.

"In some areas, the work will be taken on by the district or parish council, who may also carry out additional cuts at their own expense.

"This will save the council £750,000 annually, helping protect other vital areas like the pothole budget."

It had initially been hoped to save £850,000 a year.



Resident Graham Petts with an overgrown verge in West Elloe Avenue, Spalding

Towns and villages 'spoilt' by council decision to stop cutting verges



Hi, I was so loving the flowers that were appearing daily along Hearthcote Rd. & Handsacre Cl. whilst out walking my dog. There were lots of insects bobbing about too! Today, I see the mower has visited, gone are the flowers, grasses & insects, just sterile mowed grass! Having just grass is a bonus nowadays, but it could have been so much more diverse! Even the sign saying South Derbyshire supports the bees has been chucked aside the mowed part!

Actually, feel sad, annoyed, disappointed and wondering when we'll let wildlife flourish! You can do better SDDC!!!



I am emailing to express my concern about the state of the green area by Montgomery Close and Pegasus Way in Hilton. A sign has been placed for it to be a pollination area, but I am concerned along with several other residents, at the eye sore of this. Could I check if residents were consulted about this initiative?

Children have been observed struggling to play on the green due to the length of the grass, along with dogs fouling on there. It has the recipe for a disaster. Could I ask is this a cost cutting exercise for the council to place a pollination sign up and then stop cutting the grass

Could I request that the grass is cut as a matter of urgency?

- This is a message to be passed to the grounds team I believe.
- Please can a request a 1 meter fire break.
- There are lots of weeds and dried grass immediately to the left of my garden fence that is a fire risk. Please can I request that this is cleared and cleared ongoing when the grass is cut, according the 1 metre fire break.

CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

WHY THE EMERGENCY



South Derbyshire District Council passes eco-emergency motion

- Half of our 27 bumblebee species are in decline
- Three of these bumblebee species have already gone extinct
- Seven bumblebee species have declined by more than 50% in the last 25 years
- Two-thirds of our moths and 71% of our butterflies are in long term decline.
- Across Europe 38% of bee and hoverfly species are in decline; only 12% are increasing



Unpredictable/extreme weather resulting from our changing climate

Intensive farming, which has fragmented and isolated flower-rich habitats and affected the quality of much that remains.

Pesticide use – intended for the ‘troublesome’ insects but killing the beneficial ones too

Loss of flowery habitat to urban growth and the associated sanitising of the nearby countryside

Inappropriate tree planting on flowery habitats

Loss of and damage to brownfield sites.

Imagine living in a desert with barely any food, water or shelter. That is what much of the modern British countryside is now like for many wild pollinators.

Public pressure over road verge management has ramped up in recent years, largely thanks to Plantlife, which has been campaigning for wilder road verges since 2013. Where tidiness was once seen as a mark of civic pride, plastic lawns and shorn roadsides are now reviled by conservationists and many members of the public

Councils have reported that they had made changes in response to public pressure – both positive and negative. Lambeth is trialling a new management regime on one road at the request of residents

CHANGES

At least 35 councils responded that they had reduced their number of annual cuts; a handful of others had introduced new wildflower projects or had increased the number of conservation areas. Manchester was the sole council to change the height to which they mowed the grass; Birmingham mentioned that it had reduced the number of cuts after buying new equipment that could deal with longer grass. Only one council – Barnsley – reported that it had increased the number of cuts, from two to four times per year

“Complaints had historically been related to us not cutting enough and the verges looking untidy – complaints were now much more geared to overcutting and loss of habitat. The system that we have implemented ensures that the highway is safe to use but also allows the verges to be managed with a keen eye on biodiversity, pollinators and habitat.

Worcestershire has become a “pollinator-friendly county” following a shift in complaints from members of the public.



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If you look back at old pictures, people weren't as tidy.

I think bohemian untidiness is what we're aiming for
– you don't want it to look like neglect."

You can't personally help tigers, whales
and elephants but you really can do
something for the insects, birds and plants
that are local to you,"



“The direction of travel is having a less intensive mowing and hedgerow cutting regime”

“cut less, cut later”

Leaving the grass to grow 8-10cm (3-4in) tall means clovers, daisies, self-heal and creeping buttercup can also flower



GETTING THE RIGHT HEIGHT





Short grass doesn't have to be sterile: ankle-length lawns can support species such as clovers, trefoils, dandelions, selfheal, buttercups and yarrow. To achieve this, Plantlife recommends cutting once every four weeks to a height of around 3-6cm

© Rose Revera



- This unassuming road verge supports at least 31 species, many of them characteristic of calcareous grassland habitat, including fairy flax, rough hawkbit, wild marjoram, sheep's fescue and upright brome. Other parts of the same verge supports common spotted, pyramidal, bee and fly orchids.



sowing seeds that
provide a “good visual
display”



A flourishing road verge is a thing of beauty: a trove of botanical jewels, a feast of nectar, a burst of colour to brighten tarmac roads

PREVENT
DAMAGING
BEHAVIOUR

STOP NEEDLESS
PRACTICES

ALWAYS WANT
YOUR FEEDBACK?

IF YOU SEE
FLOWERING PLANTS
AND YOU DON'T
THINK A CUT IS
REQUIRED OR YOU
WANT TO AMEND
HOW YOU DO
THINGS YOU CAN
ALWAYS TALK TO
BOBBY OR THE
GREEN SPACES
TEAM



The relationship between plants and their pollinators is an ancient one



Encased in the fragment of amber, approximately 99 million years old and recovered from a mine in northern Myanmar, the tumbling flower beetle, exhibited a suite of evidence suggesting its role as a pollinator.

Pollination is how flowering plants reproduce. Pollen needs to travel from the flower's male part, called the anther, to the flower's female part, called the stigma. Pollen is full of genetic information needed to fertilise a plant. Once fertilised, plants can make their seeds.



Without bees, hoverflies and other insects visiting flowers, there would be no strawberries, apples, avocados, chocolate, cherries, olives, blueberries, carrots, grapes, pumpkins, pears, plums or peanuts.... And very few flowers in our gardens and countryside.

84% of EU crops (valued at £12.6 billion) and 80% of wildflowers rely on insect pollination

The biodiversity of England's road verges will depend on how they are managed – in particular, how often and when the grass is cut



Just as roads allow humans to get from place to place, these adjacent ecosystems provide mammals and insects with safe passage across the country, alongside food and shelter.

Road verges cover 1.2 percent of the land in Great Britain; already, they support almost half of the UK's wildflower species, including 29 species of orchid.

These verges essentially act as mini-meadows, depending on human intervention for their annual displays of colour. Cutting too regularly will prevent wildflowers from setting seed; equally, never cutting will smother species diversity by allowing coarser plants to take hold. Counterintuitively, wildflowers prefer to grow in nutrient-poor soil, which is achieved by cutting and removing the clippings

There are 240 species of dandelion in the UK.



If dandelions were rare, people would be fighting over them. Because they're common, people pull them out and spray them off and all sorts of horrible things. Just let them flower

The dandelion's peak flowering time is from late March to May, when many bees and other pollinators emerge from hibernation. Each flower in fact consists of up to 100 florets, each one packed with nectar and pollen. This early, easily available source of food is a lifesaver for pollinators in spring.

The young leaves are edible and loaded with vitamins and antioxidants, the roots can be ground into a (quite tasty) coffee substitute, and the flowers can be made into wine

Their flowers develop into seeds, creating the dandelion clocks that I used to play with as a child. These seeds are an exact replica of the parent plant and use the wind to disperse.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), was named after the French *dent de lion*, meaning lion's tooth, which refers to its toothed leaves. Other names for dandelion include *wet-the-bed* and *pissy-beds*, which refer to its effectiveness as a diuretic



Hounslow Council says it has been significantly reducing the use of herbicide for the management of weeds throughout the borough

There has been a call for a ban on the weed killer glyphosate. Some local councils have outlawed it

Removing herbicides does present operational challenges, herbicides have always been considered a cost-effective solution due to their less labour-intensive results. Hence, they are requesting residents to remain patient as non-chemical treatments generally take longer to impact weeds, usually an additional two to three weeks.

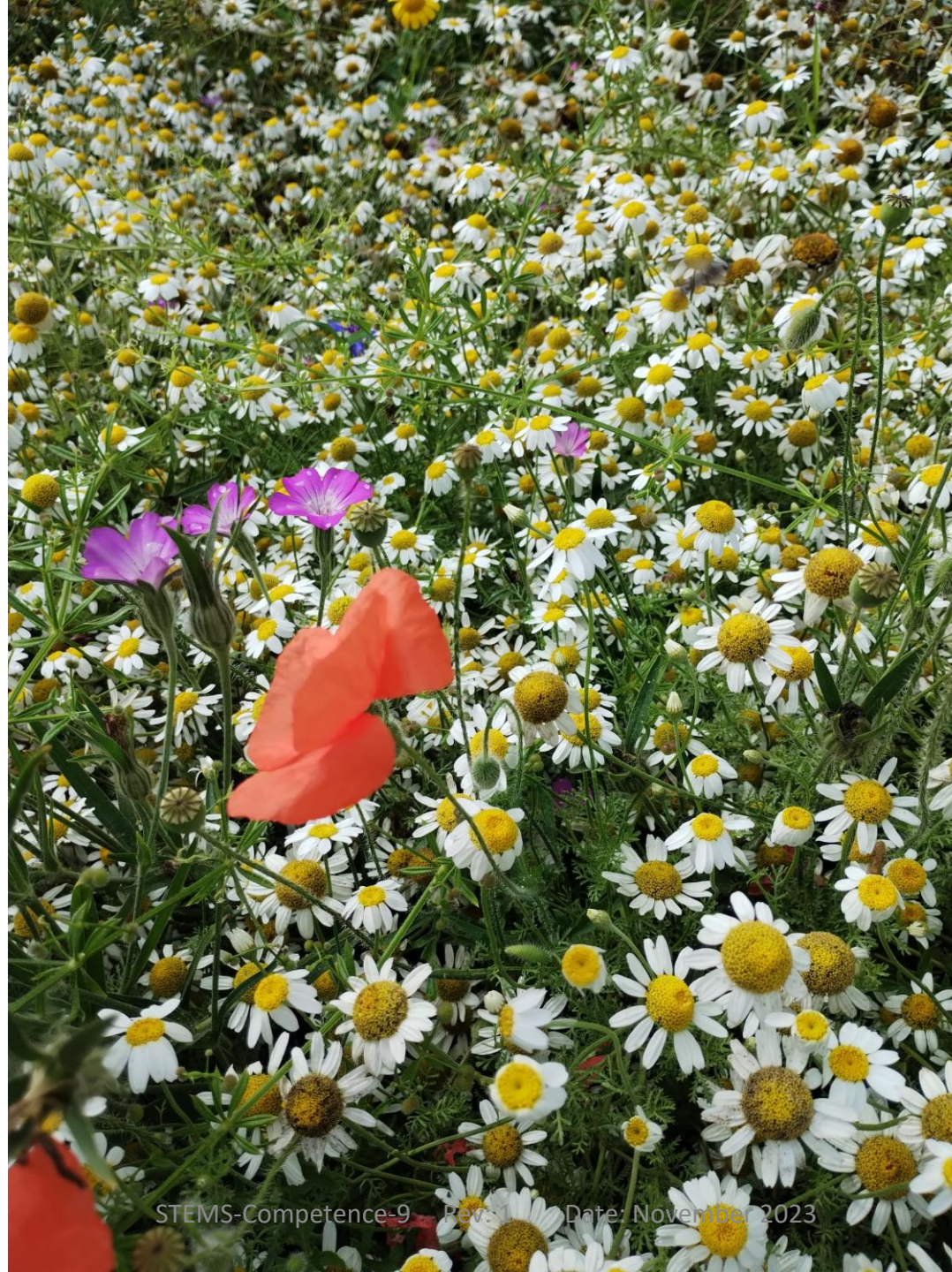


MANAGING ROAD VERGES FOR SAFETY AND BIODIVERSITY GUIDANCE

The way in which verges are cut will affect their value for wildlife (biodiversity), and positive steps can be taken to enhance this:

Start cutting as late as possible in the season,

Where possible do not cut flowering plants, and plants which have yet to flower.



Many plants are low lying and once biodiversity increases, it is unlikely to interfere with visibility. The commoner or coarser plants tend to be the taller growing

Where the verge is heavily shaded and vegetation growth is sparse avoid cutting or cut light and high.

Outside settlements cut vegetation within one swathe width of the carriageway edge along straight stretches. NB Neatness is not a priority – the verge that is left is a valuable habitat for wildlife and a valuable seed source.

Road Verge Management Principles

- Undertake a full cut in late-Feb/ March prior to the nesting bird season. Increasing the height of cutter bar slightly will also lower the risk to small mammals and amphibians.
- Allow wildflowers to set seed prior to the second annual cut in September/ October.
- Ensure all arisings are collected and removed, either off-site or to a sacrificial area of the verge to
- Create a compost or habitat pile. This prevents nutrient enrichment and increases botanical diversity.
- Where additional cuts are required for safety purposes, cuts should avoid the main flowering period
- (July-Aug) where possible.
- All verges should be monitored for litter and litter picks undertaken where necessary to reduce the risks to wildlife and increase the aesthetical value of the verges. Where it is safe to do so, it might be possible to engage local residents in volunteer litter picks.



VERGES AND ASSOCIATED HABITATS - HEDGEROWS AND DITCHES

In some areas the verge is very narrow or may not exist at all. Here it is general practice to cut the vegetation on the hedgebank to maintain visibility. Cutting of the shrubby growth (the hazel, hawthorn etc.) in the hedge itself may be unavoidable

If this is absolutely necessary, this should be done as lightly as possible outside of the bird breeding season. There should be no need to cut into the woody material of last year's growth.

Some verges abut drainage ditches which, being wet, can support additional plants and animals. Ideally some vegetation alongside these ditches should be left un-cut, perhaps on the far side of the ditch away from the road. Where there are plants in flower, or yet to flower, aim to leave at least a proportion of these un-cut where this does not affect visibility, for example where these are more than one swathe's width from the road.



Leave un-cut some vegetation on the banks of ditches, particularly where this includes flowering plants or plants, which have not yet flowered.

BEST PRACTICE – AVOIDING GREEN DESERTS

If you feel an area/verge needs to be cut, make this a high light cut, as late in the season as possible. Ideally for nature conservation, such areas should only be cut every 2-3 years.

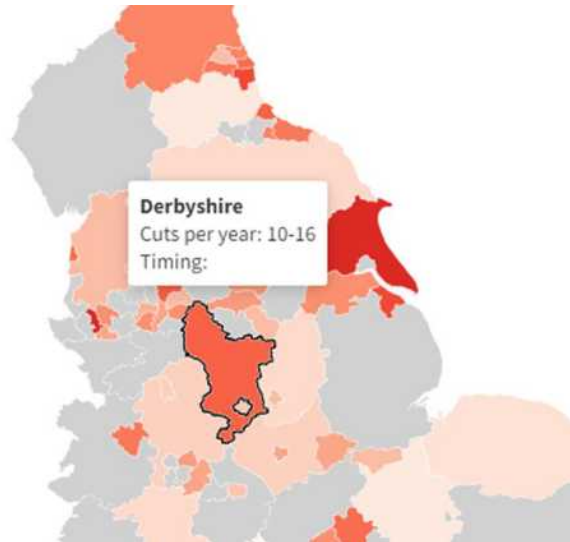
Avoid cutting mossy banks, this will only damage the vegetation and may result in erosion of the bank and slippage onto the road.

Enhancing the biodiversity of the county's road verges is a task included for performance monitoring by the Council's Environmental Management System, which is accredited to ISO14001 standard. Habitat Action Plan for verges recognising their importance in the county and setting out how the verges should be conserved. The District Council will be instrumental in implementing this plan, and to be successful on the ground it will rely on the high level of skills provided by the flail operators, and your willingness to implement the above recommendations.



WAYS FORWARD/ALTERNATIVES/ USEFUL EXAMPLES

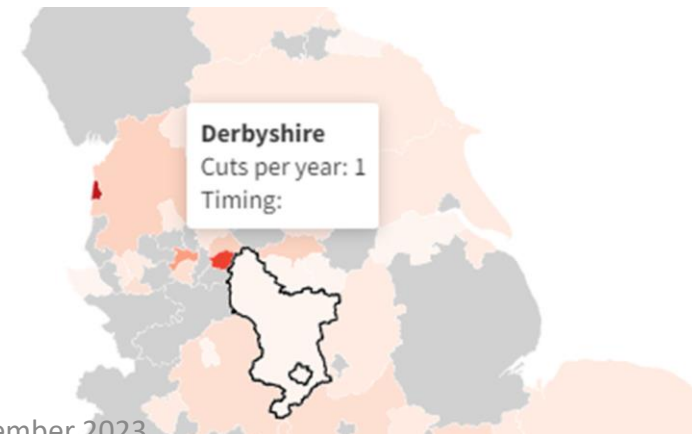
An ideal regime includes a first cut between mid-July and the end of September, with one additional cut before Christmas.



In a recent study by Inkcip out of 81 councils who responded to this question, 53 were cutting their rural verges either once or twice per year; only 10 councils cut their verges more than four times per year.

Only nine councils (Buckingham, Hertfordshire, Middlesbrough, Sheffield, October, Redbridge, Wakefield, Wokingham, West Berkshire and West Sussex) delayed road verge cutting until July or later. Hartlepool, Havering, Hillingdon, Rutland and North Yorkshire also followed Plantlife’s guidelines by cutting earlier in the year, before wildflowers have had a chance to set seed

These responses seemed promising; however, most councils began cutting their rural verges too early in the year. From the 68 councils who responded with specific details of their regimes, at least 35 were cutting throughout May – despite a high-profile campaign by Plantlife to prevent this – with many starting to tackle their verges in April.





One objection to tall grass on road verges is safety: motorists need sightlines to be around junctions, corners and roundabouts. But this needn't be an obstacle to broader improvements across the network. Many councils stressed that they mow essential areas when needed, while leaving the rest of their grassy verges to develop throughout the summer months.



Birmingham

“The grass cutting programme changed from 12 cuts to 10 cuts per annum in April 2019 following a large investment in new rotary and flail mowing machinery which can cut longer grass.”

West Sussex

“Urban grass cutting has been reduced from 7 cuts to five, in addition this year we are trialling a new initiative of Community Road Verges. On rural verges we have reduced the number of 1m wide cuts from 2 to 1, so we now only cut visibility areas early in the season.”

Telford & Wrekin

“We have started to review grass cutting in winter each year and where possible changed from 14 cuts to 4, 2 or 1 cut and collect for the next season.”

Manchester

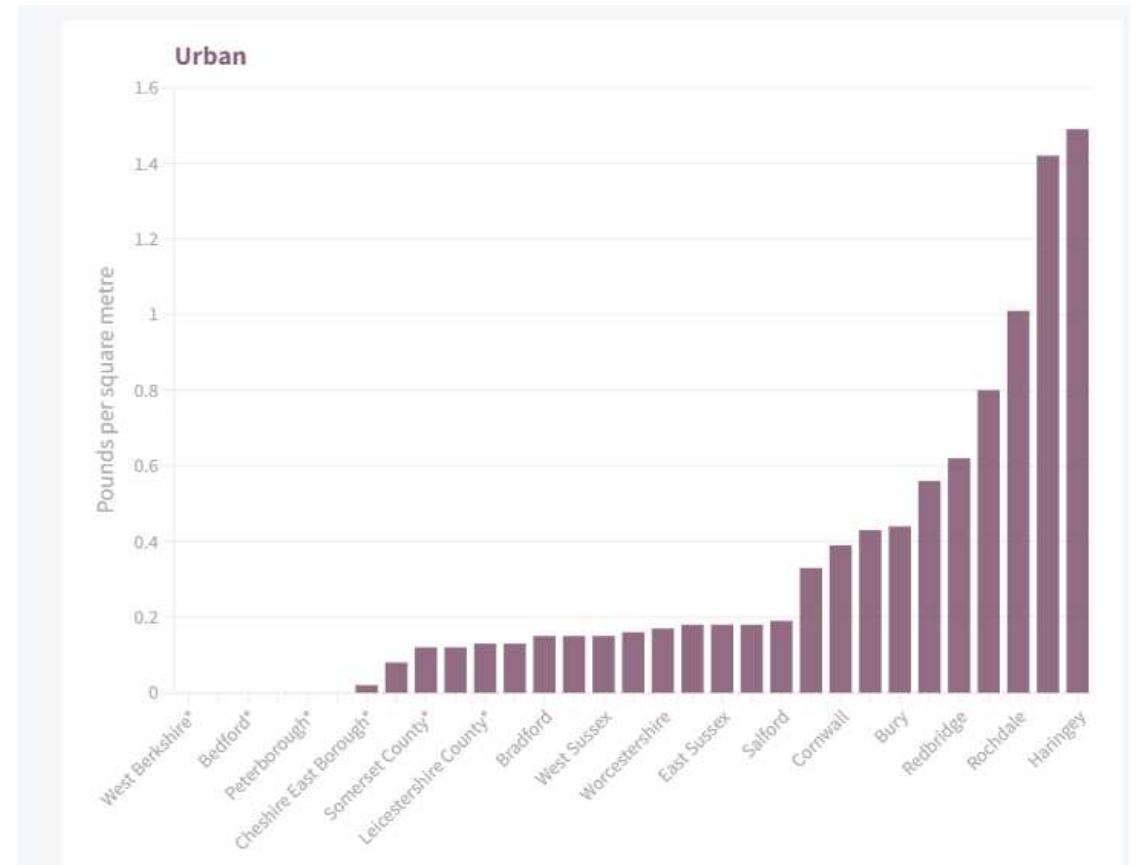
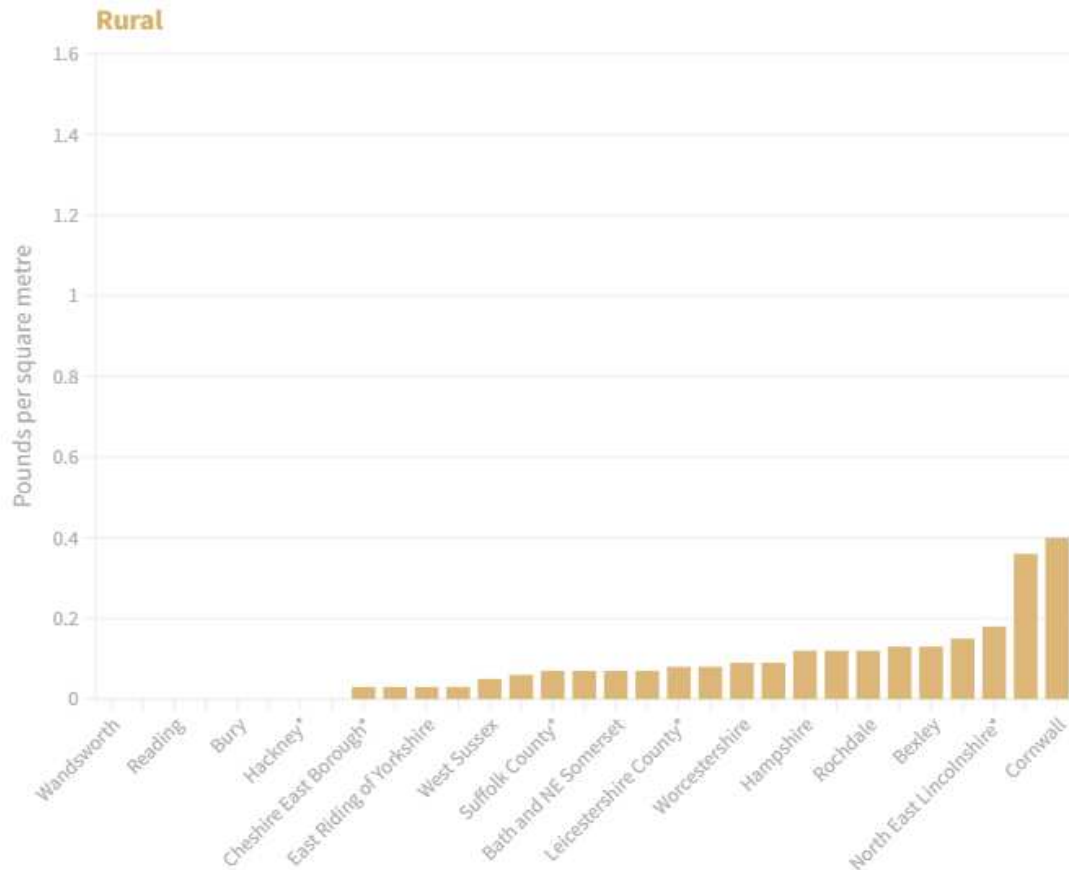
“The cut height has been increased to 2 inches.”

West Berkshire

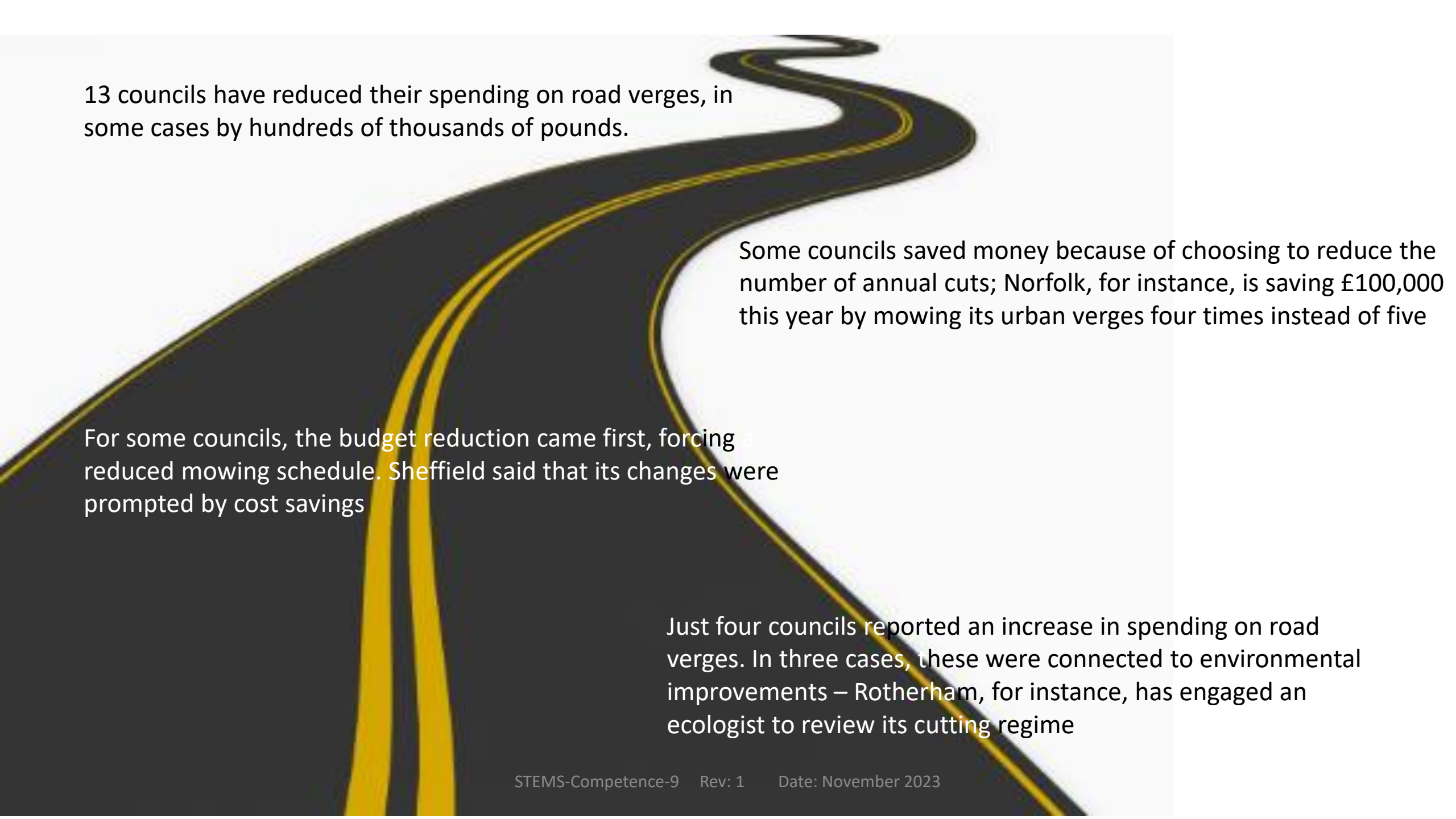
“The A4 which runs from east to west through the district is managed as a wildlife corridor and cut before March and after August. We also have 8 designated roadside nature reserves, which are managed on the same regime”



how councils might make savings by relaxing their mowing regimes, particularly in urban areas where spending is generally much higher



We excluded Tower Hamlets from this graph because its costs were so high that it rendered all other areas invisible by comparison. The borough spends £10,000 per year to maintain 0.12 miles of grass verge – roughly £52 per square metre – which it mows every 14 days between April and October. Tower Hamlets is also London’s poorest borough, which raises the question of whether a fortnightly war on wildflowers is the best use of this money



13 councils have reduced their spending on road verges, in some cases by hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Some councils saved money because of choosing to reduce the number of annual cuts; Norfolk, for instance, is saving £100,000 this year by mowing its urban verges four times instead of five

For some councils, the budget reduction came first, forcing a reduced mowing schedule. Sheffield said that its changes were prompted by cost savings

Just four councils reported an increase in spending on road verges. In three cases, these were connected to environmental improvements – Rotherham, for instance, has engaged an ecologist to review its cutting regime

Protected Species

BADGER (*Meles meles*)

- Badgers and their setts are protected by The Protection of Badgers Act, 1992. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage or destroy a badger sett, to obstruct access to any entrance or to disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett.
- It is also illegal to allow or cause a dog to enter a badger sett or for any person to kill, injure or take a badger. It is an offence to cruelly ill-treat a badger, to dig for or to snare a badger.
- This legislation means that badgers are protected, and that any planned activity, which may affect them, requires prior consultation with the appropriate statutory nature conservation organisation and potentially a badger licence.

...ion signs:



Badger hairs are quite coarse and are basically white or whitish brownish if the sett is in sandy soil and the hairs have become stained), with a black band towards the tip. They are also oval in cross section, not round, which means that if you take a hair and roll it between your thumb and finger, it does not roll smoothly.



...nes

Badr



BIRDS

Wild birds are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA)

Under the WCA it is an offence to:

- Kill or injure any wild bird
- Capture or keep (alive or dead) any wild bird
- Destroy or take the egg of any wild bird
- Sell or advertise for sale any wild bird or its eggs
- Destroy, damage, interfere with, take or obstruct the use of the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built.



A check for breeding birds must be made if any works have potential to disturb birds on the nest.

All tree felling and removal of branches will be completed outside the main bird breeding season., unless a check for nest sites has been completed by a suitably experienced ornithologist, immediately prior to works commencing.

Should a bird nest be identified unexpectedly during works the following emergency procedure should be followed:

- Stop the activity being undertaken immediately (ensuring any nest is not removed/destroyed)
- Immediately inform a supervisor and initiate a ECoW with myself.
- A ECoW will confirm presence of nest and consult specialists.
- The activity should not resume until written approval, detailing any appropriate mitigation has been given by the ECoW
- Where work is to be carried out during the breeding season the area must be checked for nesting birds by a suitably qualified Ornithologist/Ecologist. If nesting birds are found,
- The area around the nest should be protected from disturbance by the use of an appropriate set-back buffer of at least 3m and work avoided in the area until the young have left the nest





- Here are a few tips to double check whether there are any active bird nests in your hedgerow.
- Watch the hedge for bird activity
- Constant toing and froing from birds is a good indicator of nesting activity.
- Keep watching for more than usual activity from birds entering and leaving the hedgerow.
- Use manual cutters as opposed to electric cutters
- It is much easier to control manual cutters than it is to handle electric cutters. As soon as you notice either bird activity or evidence of an active nest you can react quickly to stop cutting.

OTTER

Otters are a European Protected Species under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). As an EPS it is an offence to:

deliberately or recklessly kill, injure, capture, disturb or harass otters; or deliberately or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a breeding or resting site or an otter.



Potential hazards such as steep sided holes that could act as pitfall traps would be avoided and trenches or holes left open overnight should have a means of escape, such as a stout branch, provided for any animals that may fall in.

Any pipes and other materials stored on site will be checked for otter before being moved.

Should an otter, holt site, spraint or other signs be identified unexpectedly during any works, the following emergency procedure should be followed:

- Stop the activity being undertaken within 30m of the otter or holt site immediately
- Immediately inform a supervisor and we can start a ECoW.



REPTILES

- Reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an
- offence to:
- Intentionally or recklessly kill or injure a reptile.
- Grassland is a vital refuge for four species of reptile, with common lizard, slow worm, grass snake and adder all under pressure from fragmentation of habitat, it's important that management techniques take their needs into consideration.



- To ensure that no reptiles are killed or injured as part of any works, any reptiles identified during any works should be removed to an area of suitable habitat elsewhere within the site.
- Areas of trees, tall grassland / heather cover are to be progressively cut, strimmed and chipped to remove cover. Cleared areas are to be left for at least 24 hours prior to soil stripping.
- Any area of rocks, brick rubble or other debris that have been present for over six months are to be destructively searched before the start of any works in that area.
- Should a reptile be identified on site during works the following emergency procedure should be followed:



Stop the activity being undertaken immediately if it is within the works disturbance corridor

Immediately inform a supervisor and we can implement an ECoW.

ECoW will confirm the presence of reptiles and will consult specialists if necessary, remove the reptile to an area of suitable habitat outside any works corridor. (An adder should not be approached unless authorised to do so by the ECoW as this has poisonous venom)

The activity should not resume until written approval has been given by the ECoW.

When cutting rough or long grass it is important to take the possible presence of reptiles into account, to ensure they are not harmed. Reptiles are usually active between late March and the end of October, and the rest of the year they hibernate below ground, in banks or habitat piles.

Prior to mowing walking through areas of long grass should disturb any creatures and encourage them to temporarily move away elsewhere. It is important not to flatten grass as it makes it difficult to cut.

Working slowly with machinery allows time for animals to escape. Slow worms and grass snakes are particularly sensitive to vibration and should move away quickly. However, as these reptiles need to bask to become active they can be more sluggish when they first emerge (spring) , prior to hibernation in early autumn and early in the morning and evening.

Work in a way that offers an escape route ie from middle outwards – so that animals do not become trapped by the mowing, as shown in the diagram.

Avoid cutting too low, as slow-worms will often move about in the basal zone of grasses and could be injured. If possible, cut on a warm day when reptiles will be active and therefore readily able to move out of the way. Allow temperatures to rise and reptiles to become active. Once cut, the resulting vegetation can be used to create habitat piles that will potential hibernation sites for creatures such as hedgehogs and grass snake



BATS



Where are bats found?

- Both rural and urban areas including woodland, farmland, parks and gardens
- Feed over marshes, lakes, ponds, canals or rivers
- Use different roosts for resting, breeding and hibernating i.e. holes and cracks in trees, in roofs, walls of buildings, under bridges, caves, railway tunnels
- Every building and mature tree is a potential bat roost



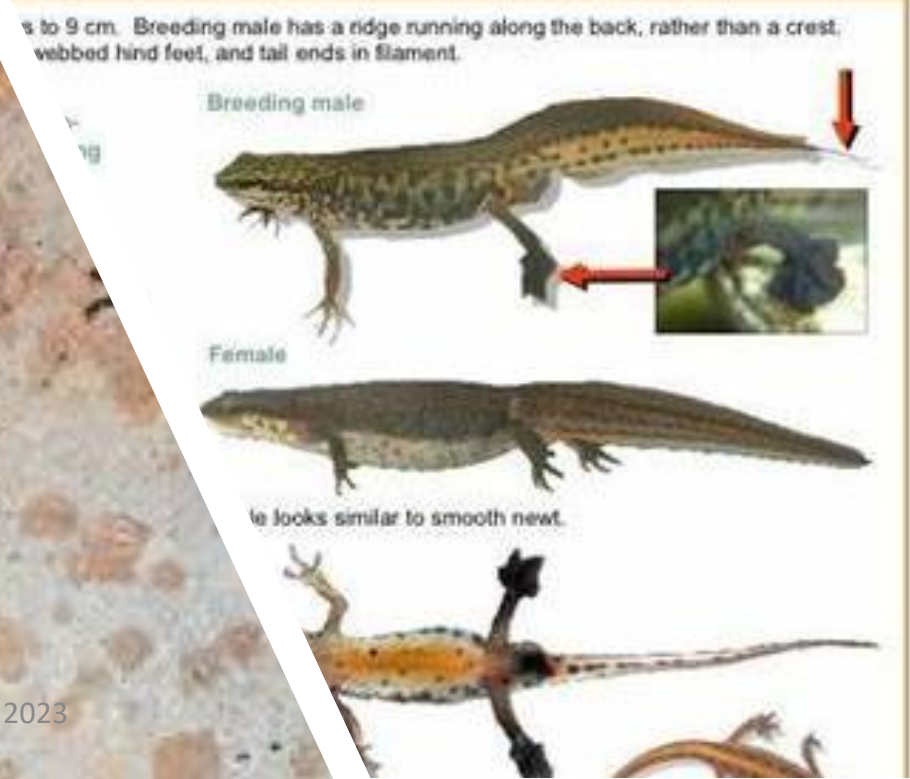
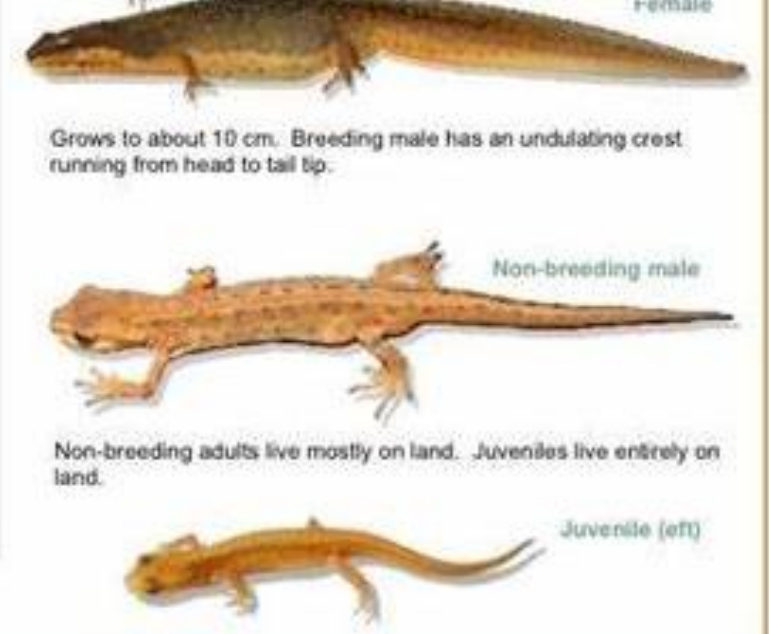
Control measures to be implemented:

- Suitable protection zones around bat roost using blue rope
~30m buffer zone
- Any works likely to encroach within 30m of the bat roost are to cease and advice sought from the Environmental Representatives

It is illegal to kill, injure, capture or disturb a bat, or to damage trees, buildings or other places used for roosting (even if bats are not currently present). If a bat or roost is discovered after works have started, cease works and seek advice

- Strimming near water bodies can pose a risk of pollution if grass clippings end up in the water. Always use a cordless trimmer with a collection bag or consider raking up the clippings afterward







Newt/ Pond Management

- Leave piles of stones or logs for cover and hibernation sites.
- Try to ensure a margin of rough grass is maintained around the pond as feeding habitat.
- Consider buffering ponds and watercourses with extended a margin of uncut vegetation up to five metres or so in width around some of the pond margins and alongside hedges, streams or other boundaries to ensure the presence of some dense cover throughout the year.
- Aim to cut ditch sides on rotation – with only one side being cut in any single year.
- Try to link ponds together with hedges and grass margins so that newts can move between ponds with ease.





INVASIVE SPECIES

- Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam are types of invasive plant commonly found on site.





Any Questions?

- Visit to Specific Sites
- Matters that you'd like help with?
- Can we do anything more?



**South
Derbyshire
District Council**

Thank you

