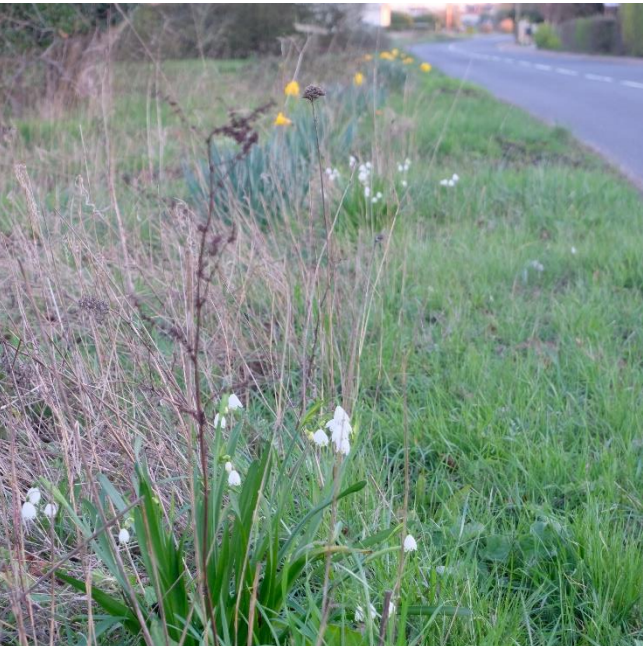

APPENDIX T ENVIRONMENT HEDGEROWS DITCHES AND TREES



Biodiversity Appendix T

Verges are incredibly important features of a rural landscape. They serve to remind the observer of the natural world and the jeopardy it is in; they can be very varied, dry, damp, nutrient-starved, nutrient-rich, flooded or parched at different times of the year. They can be sun-starved or in full sun for most of the day. What nearly all verges have in common, is that they serve as habitats, safety margins, and biodiversity depositaries, they are usually the first point of carbon capture from road vehicles, and home for some rare plant species. Like ditches and hedgerows, they provide a historical context to the land and the environs, adding to an understanding of place and encouraging emotional and psychological health and wellbeing.

Many of the verges in the Parish are older than the tarmac roads they lay beside and, in many areas, contain a huge amount of local botanical diversity. Dickleburgh, for example, hosts a variety of orchids and rare Sulphur clover. They also provide historical context and understanding of human passage through the landscape. Verges that existed before 1843 are considered Heritage Verges and are protected through Heritage Policies. Verges created after 1843 will be protected through the environmental policies.

We wish to improve the quality and status of all verges. To that end, the Dickleburgh and Rushall Neighbourhood Plan identifies 3 levels of verge, it affords them protection rights and requires a management regime designed to increase biodiversity and improve the richness and status of the verges in the Parish. The Parish Council, in partnership with other agencies when appropriate, will establish an ongoing project to identify, manage and protect verges. Verges will be identified as being a verge of conservation interest (bronze status), a Heritage Verge or verge of significant conservation interest (silver status) or, Wildlife Verge (gold status). All verges will be managed according to their status to raise them to a higher status, or in the case of gold status verges to maintain that status. Where the verge is not publicly owned, we would trust that the owner of the verge will see the merits of the policy and support it by adopting the management policy and applying it to their verge.

The NP refers to a grading system for the verges, specifically Gold and Silver. Although the NP policies seek to protect the verges the intent behind the Gold/Silver designations is to set in place a long-term aim to promote the improvement of quality in the verges throughout the Parish. Clearly, it is sensible to see barren roadside verges, currently of little quality, being improved and securing a Silver rating. Similarly, the environment and residents will gain if those Silver verges with an established mix of plant species can be nurtured and improved and subsequently 'promoted' to a Gold rating.

The proposal is as follows:

Three classifications of verge with an aspiration to increase the quality and quantity of the biodiversity distribution on the verges to raise all verges to the highest status verges.

Gold The Gold designation is awarded to those verges which contain rare species of wild flowers which are listed by *Plantlife* in their guide¹ as Near Threatened, Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered.

Both Oxlip and Sulphur Clover, which are important within the Parish and appear on certain verges are listed as vulnerable within the *Plantlife* plant listings. It is also suggested that verges holding orchids are given similar status.

Silver Silver verges would therefore be those verges which are neither Gold or Bronze. The vast majority of verges in the Parish would fall into this category and will feature a wide range of wildflower types. Obviously, some of these will arguably be more important than others for various reasons and it is envisaged these might be targets for inclusion under the Gold category if the definition is developed over time. Essentially this is hopefully a simple, clear starting point. A silver status verge should be able to support any animal species protected under European or National legislation or supports a rare animal species or rich community of animals in the context of the county's fauna. It should contain 7 different species of flora and at least 1 of the following:

Birds – foot trefoil, Yarrow, Red clover, Dandelion, Ragwort, Lady's bedstraw, Hedge bedstraw, White clover, Meadowsweet, Oxeye daisy.

All heritage verges will have a silver status as a starting point.

Bronze Bronze designation would be given to those, mainly pure grass verges, cut regularly for road safety purposes and generally lacking in mixed wildflowers. Typical examples would be the bulk of Harleston Road, out of Dickleburgh Road heading to Rushall as it emerges from Rectory Road. Bronze should support a good example of a plant community that represents a habitat characteristic of the local area. If the verge contains a ditch and hedging, it will automatically be graded as silver and fall under the silver maintenance regime, until such time as it can be verified if it is of Gold standard. Some of these verges will hold nettles and the like and it is recognised these are particularly beneficial for butterflies. but there is very little prospect of such locations being left alone for long enough to ever improve in terms of plant variety.

Care

Gold Wildlife Verge Requires the verge shrubs and hedging to be maintained on a 3 year cycle to enable and encourage birds and enable wildlife routes through the Parish. Grass cutting and maintenance of the verge should be conducted in line with NWT recommendations. Where recommendations do not exist the following regime should be followed.

¹ Plantlife: Road Verges, Last Refuge Document
https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/4514/9261/2387/Road_verges_report_19_April_FINAL.pdf

Grass 1st cut during late August / early September. 2nd cut if needed during December.

Ditches should be inspected annually. If they need clearing by digging out, the spoil should be deposited on the surrounding verge.

Hedges should be cut every 3 years and should have variegated heights

Silver (Heritage) Verge. To encourage and support a diversity of flora. Heritage verges should be managed following the set criteria below:

Grass 1st cut during August. 2nd cut, if needed, during December.

Ditches should be inspected bi-annually. If they need clearing by digging out, the spoil should be deposited on the surrounding verge.

Hedges should be cut every 3 years and should have variegated heights.

The verge to be managed to the same requirements as the commons within the parish.

Bronze. Requires the grass to be cut once a year from July – September. Hedges to be cut on a 3 year cycle. Green hay from gold or silver sites can be spread upon these verges as required to encourage increased diversity of growth.

In an ideal situation, some councils mark these special areas with an arrangement of coloured posts, with an information plaque. Each verge has its own specific management regime developed to benefit the special wildlife/flora of that verge. Verges are monitored regularly to ensure that their wildlife/flora value is being maintained or enhanced. The Dickleburgh and Rushall Neighbourhood Plan supports this management policy.

Policy

- 1 Gold and Silver grade verges will not be allowed to build upon, reduced, degraded, or covered unless it can be demonstrated that there is no viable alternative to doing so. Compensation should be delivered in the form of additional verges created and managed in order to achieve Gold status.
- 2 If a Gold or Silver grade verge is damaged, it will be made good using soil of the same description and seeded with plants equal to those lost.
- 3 If a Gold or Silver grade verge is built upon compensation will be provided that will double the amount of verge that has been lost to the development. The new verge will be seeded with plants from the verges flora list.
- 4 The Parish Council, in partnership with other agencies when appropriate, will establish ongoing projects to identify, manage and protect verges identified as being a Heritage Verge, Wildlife Verge or a verge of significant conservation interest.

Verges and their designation

General Background

The Dickleburgh & Rushall Neighbourhood Plan (NP) talks extensively about the importance of verges within the Parish in terms of heritage, biodiversity, rurality and beautification.

It is also backed up by extensive notes and reference to research in the various Biodiversity Section Appendices and participation in various online webinars run by relevant bodies such as *Plantlife*².

The NP sets out specific policies designed to protect certain old and/or important verges within the Parish. The intention within these policies is to protect these vital habitats and in the extreme and hopefully rare cases where this cannot be achieved there are specifics about appropriate 'green' compensations.

Verge Designations

We would like to see Norfolk Wildlife Trust work with us to declare certain verges as Roadside Nature Reserves to preserve and hopefully improve the chosen locations. Unfortunately, they do not have the capacity at present to consider or accommodate any new candidate sites.

The NP makes reference to a form of grading system for the verges, specifically Gold and Silver. Although the NP policies seek to protect the verges the intent behind the Gold/Silver designations is to set in place a long term aim to promote improvement of quality in the verges throughout the Parish. Clearly it is sensible to see barren roadside verges, currently of little quality, being improved and securing a Silver rating. Similarly the environment and residents will gain if those Silver verges with an established mix of plant species can be nurtured and improved and subsequently 'promoted' to a Gold rating.

The Process of establishing ratings

Research has not been able to establish any sort of Gold/Silver/Bronze rating in place anywhere else in the country. Such ratings do not seem to form part of *Plantlife's* important work.

² Plantlife: The Wild Plant Conservation Charity <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk>

One County Council does have a similar series of ratings but this is based on specific scientific criteria relating to soil types etc and is not based on quality or diversity of planting or habit.

We therefore need to establish a rating of our own.

After various discussions with local enthusiasts and ecologists it became clear that we have two main issues:

1. Any designation/rating should be very simple.
2. It would be absolutely pointless in having a rating method that leads to an enormous number of verges being granted Gold status from the very outset. It is clear that the bulk of the work in terms of maintenance will fall on the shoulders of local volunteers and volunteer groups so they need a realistic chance to engage with a manageable number of sites initially.

The proposal is as follows:

Gold designation is given to those verges which contain rare species of wild flowers which are listed by *Plantlife* in their guide³ as Near Threatened, Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered.

As it happens the Oxslip and Sulphur Clover which are important within the Parish and appear on certain verges are listed as vulnerable within the *Plantlife* plant listings. It is also suggested that verges holding orchids are given similar status.

Bronze designation would be given to those verges which are mainly pure grass verges, cut regularly for road safety purposes and generally lacking in mixed wild flowers. Typical examples would be the bulk of Harleston Road heading to Harleston as it emerges from Rectory Road.

Some of these verges will hold nettles and the like and it is recognised these are beneficial for butterflies etc but there is very little prospect of such locations being left alone for long enough to ever improve in terms of plant variety.

Silver verges would therefore be those verges which are neither Gold or Bronze. The vast majority of verges in the Parish would fall into this category and will feature a wide range of wild flower types. Obviously some of these will arguably be more important than others for various reasons and it is envisaged these might be targets for inclusion under the Gold category if the definition is developed over time. Essentially this is hopefully a simple, clear starting point.

One Final Note

³ Plantlife:Road Verges, Last Refuge Document
https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/4514/9261/2387/Road_verges_report_19_April_FINAL.pdf

None of this will be possible without the collaboration of various wildlife groups and it is hoped NWT will contribute to this and we will also need County Council and Highways permissions. Also, given that most damage to wildlife on the verges is largely due to badly timed and inappropriate cutting from farmers and landowners we will need either their cooperation or strict edits from the County Council to break this annual cycle of destruction.

The document issued by Cambridge County Council⁴ does touch on many of the issues we need to consider in building a long term programme and is included here as a potentially useful point of reference.

Heritage verges are not required to be classified as gold, silver or a Nature reserve but there should be an active policy of driving the standard up so that all heritage verges achieve the status of gold or nature reserve. This can be managed through careful, thoughtful cutting policies being part of the mix of measures to increase biodiversity and health of verges so they evoke even more a sense of place and memory. The Parish Council, in partnership with other agencies when appropriate, will establish ongoing projects to identify, manage and protect verges identified as being a Heritage Verge, Wildlife Verge or a verge of significant conservation interest.

“One noticeable trend is that, with the move to earlier and earlier cutting in spring, we’re erasing summer from our verges. Only plants that flower early have a chance to set seed before the mowers arrive. As a result, some spring flowers are thriving and spreading, but summer flowering plants – many of which typify our beautiful meadows – are disappearing. This isn’t just bad news for flowers, it is bad news for the bees, beetles, butterflies and birds that rely on plants for food.”⁵

All developers are strongly encouraged to look to increase the quantity and quality of verges in the parish and including the establishment of new verges in relation to any development.

We have already established above what constitutes a Heritage Hedgerow for the purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan. Any verge which sits alongside one of these Heritage Hedgerow shall be deemed to be a Heritage Verge for the purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan .

⁴ Highways Verge Maintenance attached.

https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/CCC_live/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=96UhY8mvcCmYuQ6fHuLe9e9muHdj3njV6coZwDa0iFu%2bShv3aUq75g%3d%3d&rUzwRPf%2bZ3zd4E7lkn8Lyw%3d%3d=pwRE6AGJFLDNlh225F5QMaQWctPHwdhUfcZ%2fLUQzgA2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3d%3d&mCTIbCubSffXsDGW9IXnlg%3d%3d=hFflUdN3100%3d&kCx1Ans9%2fpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3d%3d=hFflUdN3100%3d&uJovDxwdjMPoYv%2bAJvYtyA%3d%3d=ctNJff55vVA%3d&FgPIIEJYlotS%2bYGobi5oIA%3d%3d=NhdURQburHA%3d&d9Qjj0ag1Pd993jsyOJqFvmyB7X0CSQK=ctNJff55vVA%3d&WGewmoAfeNR9xqBuxOr1Q8Za60lavYmz=ctNJff55vVA%3d&WGewmoAfeNQ16B2MHuCPMRKZMwaG1PaO=ctNJff55vVA%3d

⁵ Plantlife: The Good Verge Guide

Environmental Policy 6

All Heritage Verges are protected under this Neighbourhood Plan. All efforts must be made to avoid compromising the health of a heritage verge. Where a development takes place that compromises the integrity of the verge, mitigation and compensation must be put into place prior to that compromise.

Compensation will consist of the creation of a new verge with the same opportunities to wild life the original verge afforded. Any replacement of a heritage verge must significantly and demonstrably outweigh the loss. In this instance it will be through raising the status of the new verge to a higher level than the Heritage verge that has been destroyed or damaged. A gold standard heritage verge would therefore be replaced by a verge with the status of nature reserve. Failure to ensure this, will result in the application being denied.

The Neighbourhood Plan identifies 3 levels of verge and affords them protection rights. The Parish Council in partnership with other agencies when appropriate will establish an ongoing project to identify, manage and protect verges identified as being a Heritage Verge (silver), Wild life Verge (gold) or a verge of significant conservation interest (bronze). All verges will be managed to enable them to become richer in biodiversity and enable them to rise in status.

Gold Wildlife verge, Nature Reserve verge as identified by NWT or NCC.

Silver Heritage verge identified by DR PC adopted criteria. A heritage verge is a verge that is identified on maps prior to 1900,
or It supports any animal species protected under European or National legislation or supports a rare animal species or rich community of animals in the context of the county's fauna. It should contain 7 different species of flora and at least 1 of the following:
Birds – foot trefoil, Yarrow, Red clover, Dandelion, Ragwort, Lady's bedstraw, Hedge bedstraw, White clover, Meadowsweet, Oxeye daisy.