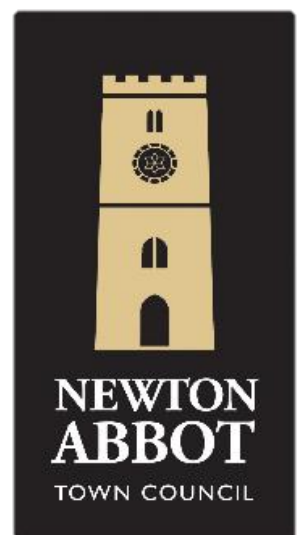




Newton Abbot Grass Verges Community Survey Report and Project Update

BY THOMAS COLLARD, GREEN SPACES OFFICER



BACKGROUND

In **May 2025**, Newton Abbot Town Council launched a community survey to understand how local people feel about the way we manage our grass verges. This was prompted by a desire to adopt a more wildlife-friendly approach to their management, helping to meet the goals of our **Biodiversity and Green Spaces Policies**, whilst keeping the thoughts of the community in mind.

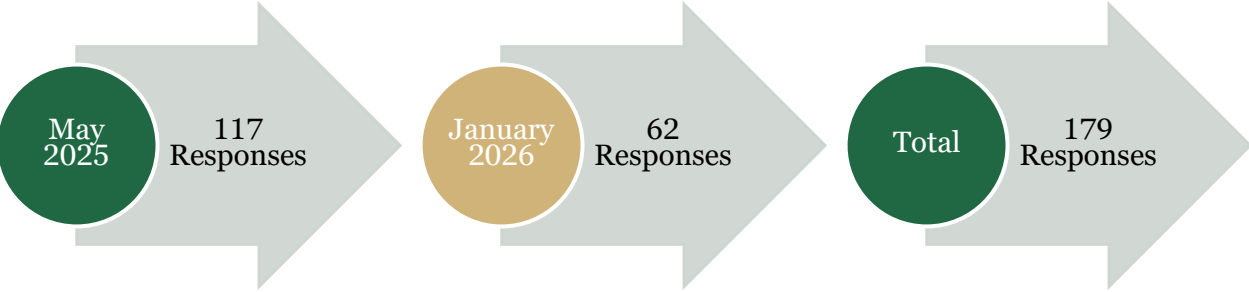
Following the initial survey in 2025 and using your feedback, Council Officers have been working with **local experts** to develop a wildlife-friendly verge management trial by identifying appropriate verges.



Council Officers identified potential verges using online mapping software and visited each site to assess its feasibility for the trial with a local ecologist.

This verge is located in Applegarth Avenue.

A plan with eight proposed verge locations and an updated survey was released in **January 2026** to collect further comments. An additional 62 responses were received, bringing the total number of responses to 179 across both surveys.



This report summarises the **community responses** to both surveys, our **updated plan** for the trial, and **some answers (FAQ)** to common questions or concerns highlighted throughout our community engagement.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

1. Appearance Matters

88% of respondents said that grass verges are important or very important to how Newton Abbot looks (2025 = 86%, 2026 = 90%).

2. Strong Support for Change

75% of respondents support reducing or changing mowing schedules to benefit wildlife (2025 = 70%, 2026 = 84%).

3. Top Concerns

In both surveys, the **top concerns** are the potential for:

1. Safety and Visibility issues
2. Litter and dog mess

4. Understanding the Bigger Picture

89% of people had heard of "**biodiversity net gain**," though 31% would like to understand it better.

Biodiversity net gain means making changes to how we manage grass verges so that they end up supporting more plants and animals than before. Ultimately, leaving nature better off.

5. Seeing the Benefits

In order of popularity, you told us you would feel more positive about change if:

1. Wildlife presence increases
2. Clear and informative signage is used
3. Community is involved
4. Before-and-after comparisons are available
5. Regular updates from the council are provided

6. Staying Involved

81% of respondents expressed a willingness to **learn more** about the project.

There will be clear signage at each verge location with a link to further information on our website.

ADDITIONAL JANUARY 2026 SURVEY

The following information is taken from the January 2026 survey where verge site specific questions were asked.

7. Verge Familiarity

89% of respondents are familiar with the selected verges and pass them on a regular basis.

8. Verge Commentary

We asked for verge specific comments to help tailor our approach. The feedback has allowed us to consider the locations of the wildlife-friendly areas at each verge site so not to disrupt current usage or disregard **community feedback**.

Applegarth Avenue

Respondents identified that the Applegarth Avenue site is used for play, by dog walkers and has occasional parking issues.

The wildlife-friendly areas will be placed on the perimeter of the verge so that the community are able to enjoy the space whilst also avoiding desire paths.

We will install grass verge and no-parking signage.



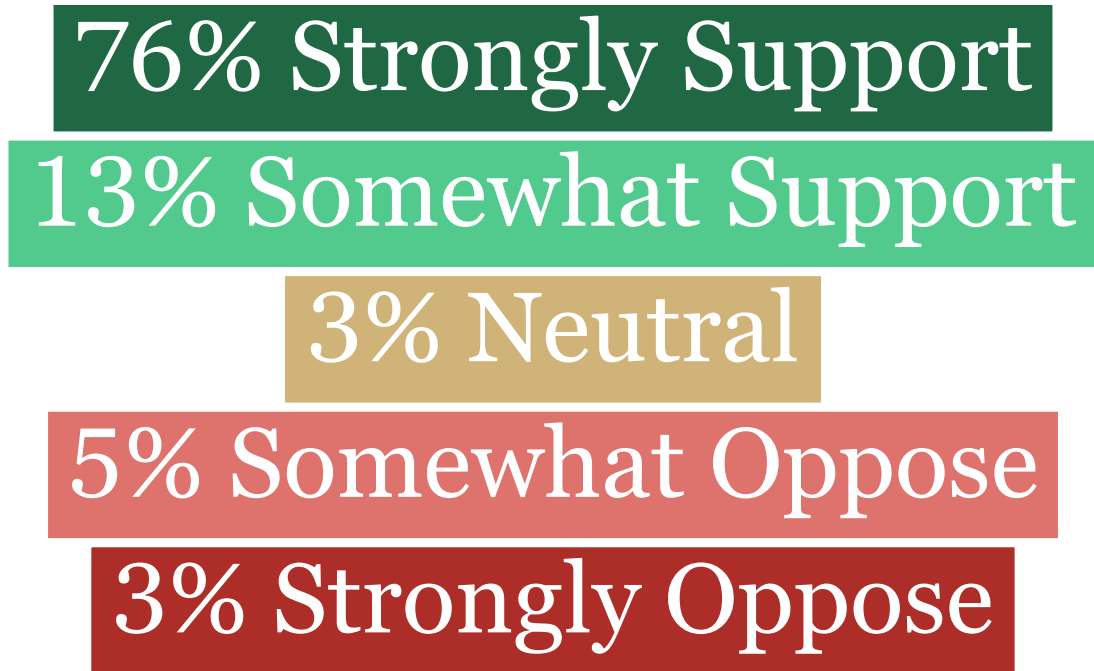
Queensway

Following comments concerning visibility during the summer, the location of the verge on Queensway has been relocated to the verge opposite the Buckland Break junction to Queensway.

Please note that the wildlife friendly areas are not near the bus stop or steps located on the verge.

9. Overwhelming Support for Wildlife-Friendly Verges

Overall, **89%** of respondents were **supportive** of the eight proposed verges being included in the trial. See a more comprehensive breakdown below.



RESULTS SUMMARY

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the surveys and share their views. Your feedback shows that grass **verges are an important** part of how Newton Abbot looks, with strong support for wildlife-friendly management where it is well explained, safe, and responsive to local concerns such as visibility, litter, and dog mess.

There is clear interest in understanding the wider benefits, including biodiversity net gain, and in staying involved through signage, updates, and visible results. The site-specific comments provided have been particularly valuable in shaping how the trial will be delivered, and the **high level of support** for the proposed verges gives the Council confidence to move forward in a way that reflects community priorities.

THANK YOU!

THE TRIAL PLAN (FEB 2026)

Following the community feedback outlined in this report, we are now moving towards the implementation of the trial which will run until **early 2028**. We will be preparing the wildlife-friendly areas at seven of the eight proposed sites throughout **2026**. One of the proposed verges has been removed from the trial due to its proximity to a long-term road closure. An overview of the **seven verges** selected for the trial and approximate sizes of each wildlife-friendly area is available below.



Verge 1, Ashburton Road



Verge 2, Applegarth Avenue



Verge 3, Exeter Road



Verge 4, Exeter Road



Verges 5 and 6, Heath Park



Verge 7, Queensway

TRIAL PLAN CONTINUED

Preparations will include **cutting** of the verges in **early 2026**, followed by **rotavating** the soil, and **marking out** (with wooden stakes) the wildlife-friendly areas. **Signage** to identify the wildlife-friendly areas has been produced and will be present at all verge locations. The signage will provide links to the Town Council website where further information will be available.

Example of the Wildlife Friendly Verge signage that will be present at each site.



A species-rich mix of **wildflower seeds** has been sourced from local producer, Goren Farms, and will be sown in **spring/summer 2026**. In the first year of the trial, some cornfield annuals will also be present, acting as a short-term nurse crop that supports and protects the slower-growing native perennial wildflowers that make up most of the seed mix. At some verges, two wildlife-friendly areas will be established; however, whilst both will be rotavated, only one of these will be sown with the wildflower seed. This will allow us to compare how the different areas develop and assess the success of the approach versus natural regeneration.

Throughout the trial, we will continue to work closely with our grass verges contractor and facilities team to keep the verges well maintained, including regular cuts and litter picking. If you have any comments to make on the trial as it progresses, please contact:

thomas.collard@newtonabbot-tc.gov.uk

FAQ

To help address some of the recurring themes in your responses, here are answers to some of the most common questions.

Q1. Will visibility at junctions still be maintained?

Yes. Visibility splays will continue to be cut regularly to ensure road safety is never compromised.

Q2. Is this just a way for the council to save money?

No. The aim is to improve biodiversity, and early stages may even require more resources.

Q3. Why do the verges look messy sometimes?

Weather can delay scheduled cuts, but we work closely with contractors to keep on top of the verges. Wildlife-friendly areas will have a neat, regularly maintained border to help them look cared for while still supporting biodiversity.

Q4. Will wildflowers be planted, or will long grass just be left to grow?

It depends on each verge. Some already contain wildflowers and just need adjusted mowing; others may require sowing native wildflower seed. Management will be tailored to each site.

Q5. Will the changes be rolled out across the whole of Newton Abbot?

For now, no. Changes will focus on sites with good potential for biodiversity gains and effective monitoring. The trial will help inform any future expansion, but it is very unlikely all verges will become 'wildlife-friendly'.

Q6. How will you know if the new verge management is working?

We'll monitor wildflowers, pollinators, and other wildlife, alongside community feedback and site appearance. Success will be measured through improvements in biodiversity and public satisfaction.

Q7. Why not just let nature take over completely?

Fully unmanaged spaces can become dominated by aggressive species. Adjusted mowing and sowing wildflowers help strike a balance between supporting biodiversity and keeping verges tidy, safe, and accessible.

Keep your eyes peeled for further updates on our social media and check out the verges as we begin to develop them throughout 2026!