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Wildlife-Friendly Verge Project Update 2026/27

Reviewing our first growing season, ecological findings, challenges and plans for the year ahead

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NEWTON ABBOT TOWN COUNCIL

BACKGROUND

Since **early 2025**, Newton Abbot Town Council has been exploring how **wildlife-friendly management practices** could be applied to grass verges throughout the town. This is with the aim of aligning Council practices with the goals of our **Biodiversity and Green Spaces policies**.

179 Responses to community Consultation (May 2025 and Jan 2026)

+

75% Combined support for a change to management practices

+

89% Support for proposed trial locations

Following two rounds of **community consultation** and after gaining **expert advice** to guide our **approach** and **trial locations**, the first locally sourced wildflower seeds were **sown in April 2026**.

Community Influence

At Applegarth Avenue and on Queensway, the proposed verge sites were amended following community feedback.



Queensway



Applegarth Avenue

Detailed results on the community consultation can be found here: 2026-newton-abbot-grass-verges-community-survey-report-and-project-updated.pdf

THE TRIAL IN ACTION

During spring 2026, designated areas within the seven trial verges were marked out and prepared for wildflower establishment. This involved cultivating the existing ground to create suitable conditions for new vegetation to develop.



Wildflower Seeds

A species-rich seed mix from Devon-based Goren Farms was used, containing predominantly native perennial wildflowers alongside cornfield annuals to provide early flowering interest.

Left: one of two Applegarth Avenue verge areas being prepared.

At three of the seven locations, two plots were marked out. One was cut, rotavated and seeds sown and the other cut and left to regenerate naturally. This allows us to compare the effectiveness of both approaches to inform our longer-term management approaches.

Signage and Management

Signage, linking to our website, was introduced, while the surrounding verges continued to be maintained with safety, visibility and public access in mind.



MONITORING OUR PROGRESS

The three **independent ecological surveys** undertaken in March, June and August 2026 have provided encouraging early findings, with evidence of **increased flowering resources**, vegetation establishment and **pollinator activity** across several trial verges.

Changes Throughout the Growing Season

The March baseline survey found predominantly short, regularly maintained grassland with limited flowering plants and no pollinators recorded. However, **these findings were expected** given the early timing of the survey, before the main flowering and pollinator activity seasons.

By June, a greater **variety of flowering plants** had been recorded, including yarrow, oxeye daisy, clover and borage, alongside observations of bees, butterflies and hoverflies.

The August survey identified further vegetation establishment at several locations, although **prolonged dry conditions** continued to **restrict growth**.

Encouraging Signs of Success

Some of the **strongest results** were recorded at **Exeter Road**, where diverse flowering plants had established, vegetation was spreading into previously bare areas, and borage had successfully regenerated from seed.



Exeter Road, June 2026

One of the more successful trial areas, supporting a variety of flowering plants, including common yarrow, black medick, dandelion and clover, providing valuable potential food sources for pollinating insects.

Pollinators were observed using the verges, including bees visiting clover flowers and **red-tailed bumblebees** foraging on common knapweed at Heath Park.

Sown vs Naturally Regenerating Areas

The trial compared areas that were rotavated and sown with wildflower seed against undisturbed areas left to regenerate naturally.

Early results were mixed. Some sown areas supported a greater variety of flowering plants, while undisturbed areas generally retained more established vegetation. However, dry conditions significantly affected germination and growth in several sown plots.

Further monitoring will help assess which approach delivers the greatest long-term ecological benefits.

A Promising Start

Although several plots showed encouraging development, others experienced poor establishment and substantial bare ground, largely attributed to the **prolonged dry weather**.

Heath Park, August 2026

One of the less successful trial areas, where prolonged dry conditions significantly affected wildflower germination and establishment.



Anecdotally, however, following the arrival of rainfall in September, Council Officers observed **considerable vegetation growth** across several trial verges, suggesting that limited moisture had been a significant factor affecting establishment during the summer.

Overall, the findings are promising, but further monitoring in 2027/28 will be needed to determine whether these early improvements lead to lasting biodiversity benefits.

2026 AUTUMN IMPROVEMENTS AND 2027 PLANS

Between September and October 2026, the Council cut, turned over and resowed (with **native wildflowers**) the plots that had originally received the Goren Farms wildflower seed

Importantly, the plots reserved for natural regeneration were not resown, allowing the Council to maintain the distinction between the two management approaches.

As we move into the second year of the trial, here are our plans:



Investigate and introduce a practical watering method capable of supporting establishment during prolonged dry periods, subject to feasibility.



Monitor how the unsown plots develop alongside those receiving additional seed.



Maintain safe visibility, access and general standards of appearance while encouraging wildlife-friendly management.



Surveys are planned throughout 2027/28 to assess changes in vegetation and pollinator use.



Launch a third community survey to gather residents' views on the trial's first growing season, including its appearance, perceived benefits and areas for improvement, helping to shape our approach for 2027.

LOOKING AHEAD

The first year of our wildlife-friendly verge trial has provided encouraging results alongside valuable lessons. We look forward to building on this progress in 2027/29 and continuing to learn what works best for Newton Abbot's green spaces.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the project so far. Your feedback and continued interest are greatly appreciated.

THE VERGES



1. Ashburton Road



2. Applegarth Avenue



3. Exeter Road



4. Exeter Road



5 (L) and 6 (R). Heath Park



7. Queensway