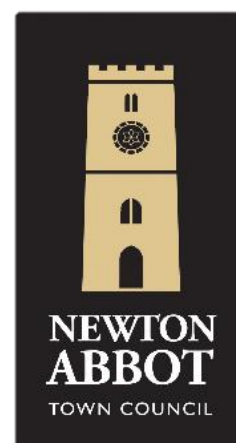




Newton Abbot Grass Verges Community Survey Report



BY THOMAS COLLARD, GREEN SPACES OFFICER

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

In May, Newton Abbot Town Council launched a community survey to understand how local people feel about the way we manage our grass verges across the town. 117 responses were received, and we are very grateful to everyone that took the time to share their views.

This report summarises what we heard from you, some answers to your questions, and outlines the plans for our approach going forward. A special thank you to those who left detailed comments; many have helped us think more deeply about how best to balance nature, safety, and appearance.

WHAT YOU TOLD US

1. Appearance Matters

86% of you said that grass verges are important or very important to how Newton Abbot looks.

2. Wildlife is Everywhere

71% of people reported seeing wildlife in verges daily or weekly.

3. Strong Support for Change

70% of respondents support reducing or changing mowing schedules to benefit wildlife.

4. Your Top Concerns

Many people raised valid issues, especially around:

- Safety and visibility at junctions (40%)
- Litter and dog mess (26%)

5. Understanding the Bigger Picture

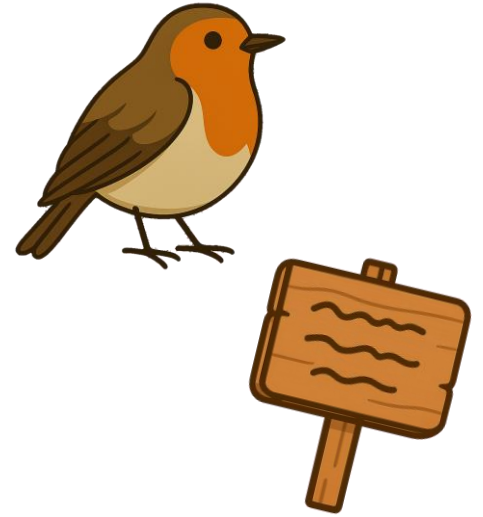
86% of people had heard of "**biodiversity net gain**," though 37% would like to understand it better.

In the context of grass verges, biodiversity net gain means making changes to how we manage these spaces so that they end up supporting more plants and animals than before. Ultimately, leaving nature better off.

6. You Want to See the Benefits

You told us you'd feel more positive about change if:

- Wildlife presence increases
- Clear and informative signage is used
- Community is involved
- Before-and-after comparisons are available
- Regular updates from the council are provided



7. You're Keen to Stay Involved

Most people want to hear more as the project progresses.

Your responses were overwhelmingly positive

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

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?

There will be no changes to the way visibility splays are managed. These areas will continue to be cut regularly to ensure road safety is never compromised.

Q2. Isn't this just a way for the council to save money?

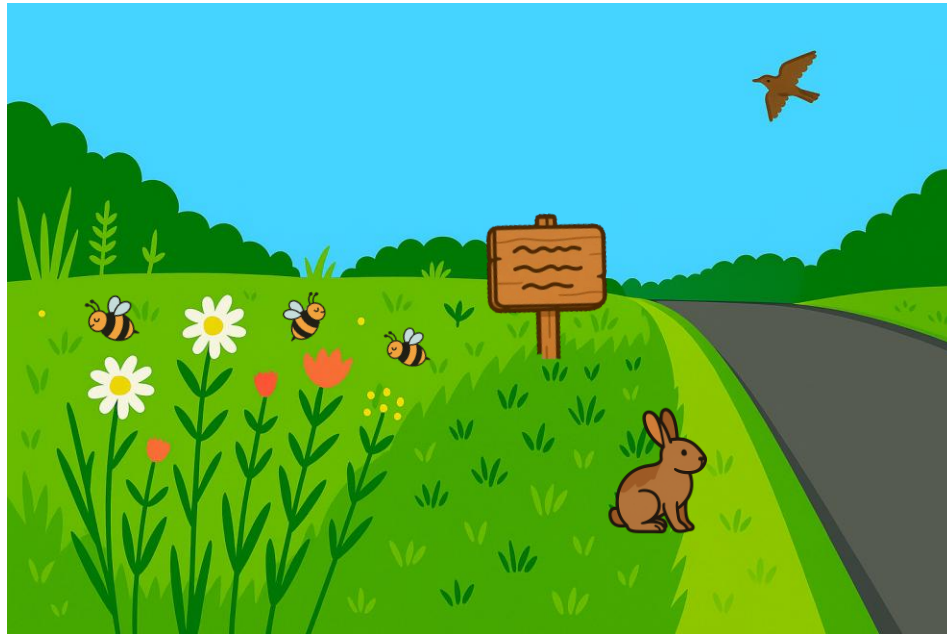
While financial savings are always welcome, the primary goal of this project is not to cut costs. In fact, in the early stages, the new verge management approach may require more resources. Our focus is on enhancing the biodiversity of our grass verges, creating healthier habitats for wildlife and more attractive green spaces for the community.

Q3. Why do the verges look messy sometimes?

Weather can occasionally delay scheduled verge cuts, which means that grass may grow longer than intended. However, we maintain close communication with our grass verge contractor to stay informed of any adjustments to the schedule. For the new wildlife-friendly trial areas, we'll ensure each site includes a neat, regularly maintained border free from litter. This approach helps to keep the space looking tidy and cared for, while still allowing the area to support biodiversity.

Q4. Are wildflowers going to be planted or just long grass left to grow?

The new approach will depend on the current condition of each verge. Some areas are already rich in wildflowers and simply need their growth encouraged through changes in the mowing schedule. Others may require the sowing of native wildflower seeds to establish more diverse and beneficial habitats. We will tailor the management to suit each location, aiming to support and increase local biodiversity.



Q5. What about pests, litter, or rats?

We understand these concerns and are addressing them as part of the new management approach. Litter is a key issue whether verges are cut short or left to grow. For trial sites, we will ensure a tidy, maintained border is kept around each wildlife-friendly area, which helps deter littering and signals that the area is cared for. Regular litter picks will also be part of the plan. As for pests like rats, there is no evidence that less frequent cutting causes an increase; unmanaged food waste and urban factors are typically more influential. We will monitor conditions and adapt as needed to keep verges safe and pleasant for people and wildlife alike.

Q6. Can I get involved or become a 'Verge Champion'?

We're currently exploring ways for residents to help promote and protect wildlife-friendly verges. This may include opportunities such as monitoring local verges, sharing sightings, or helping to maintain signage and litter-free zones. We'll be sharing more details about how to get involved very soon!

Q7. Will the changes be rolled out across the whole of Newton Abbot?

No. We will be focusing our efforts where it makes the most sense; sites that offer the best potential for biodiversity gains, community engagement, and effective monitoring. This trial will help us understand what works well and where wider changes could be considered in the future.

Q8. How will you know if the new verge management is working?

We'll be monitoring the trial verges closely. Each site will be surveyed before and after the change in management to assess changes in biodiversity. This includes the presence of wildflowers, pollinators, and other wildlife. Community feedback, visual improvements, and maintenance standards will also help us measure success. Our goal is to see an increase in biodiversity and greater community satisfaction with the look and purpose of these spaces.

Q9. Will this change how often the verges are cut overall?

This depends on the specific site. Wildlife-friendly verges may be cut less frequently to allow plants to flower and set seed, but key areas such as visibility splays and verges not included in the project will remain on their usual cutting schedule.

Q10. Why not just let nature take over completely?

Completely unmanaged spaces can become dominated by aggressive species like brambles or nettles. By adjusting mowing schedules and sometimes sowing native wildflowers, we aim to strike a balance, supporting biodiversity while keeping verges attractive, accessible, and safe.

Verges won't be left to grow wild

Q11. What about children's safety and play areas near verges?

Safety is a priority. While Newton Abbot Town Council does not currently manage any children's play areas or wider green spaces affected by this scheme, we remain committed to ensuring that any verges near areas of public use are maintained for visibility and safe access.

Q12. How will you decide which verges to include in the trial?

With the assistance of a local ecologist, we'll be choosing a mix of verges that represent different neighbourhoods and types of green space. Considerations include size, current wildlife value, visibility, community interest, and ease of monitoring.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR VERGE MANAGEMENT IN NEWTON ABBOT?

Following the results of this survey, we are excited to move forward with a trial of new verge management approaches across a small number of sites in Newton Abbot. These sites will be carefully chosen to reflect a range of local conditions and verge types. At each location, we will:

- Conduct biodiversity surveys before and after the changes to track their impact
- Install clear and attractive signage explaining the new approach and its benefits
- Distribute information leaflets to nearby residents to explain what's happening and why
- Maintain tidy, litter-free borders to ensure the sites continue to look cared for

This trial phase will help us refine our approach and determine how best to scale wildlife-friendly verge management more widely across the town.

We hope these pilot sites will become valued local features, celebrated for both their natural beauty and their contribution to biodiversity.

AGAIN, THANK YOU!

Thank you again for playing a vital role in shaping the future of Newton Abbot's green spaces. We look forward to sharing updates with you as the project progresses! If you have any further thoughts, feedback, or questions, please feel free to contact our Green Spaces Officer, Thomas Collard:

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