

# Arnside Parish Council

## Wildflower Verges Project

### 1. Introduction

Arnside Parish Council set up a working group in autumn 2021 to investigate the feasibility of increasing the botanical diversity of the roadside verges in the Parish and hence improve the habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.

The Group was made up of Parish Councillors, a local resident and a staff member of the Arnside and Silverdale AONB. It was supported by other residents and members of the AONB, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and other expert bodies.

### 2. Project Review, 2021 - Present

The initial pilot work was on three verges and work commenced in the autumn of 2021. The methodology was advised by the Arnside and Silverdale AONB and from published sources, eg Plantlife. The basic principle was to reduce soil fertility by removal of vegetation cuttings, thus limiting growth of rank grasses and other tall plants, thus allowing slower-growing, less vigorous flowering species to thrive. This was enhanced by introducing semi-parasitic species such as Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and Eyebright (*Euphrasia* spp). Other flowering species were introduced as plug-plants but most of the plants which grew in the pilot verges were already present. A management regime of cutting once or twice per year, depending on circumstance, was introduced.

Although the results of this process are long-term, some effects are already apparent. In all three verges, the ranker grasses and other tall, unsightly vegetation have been significantly reduced. The early outcomes are sufficiently encouraging to suggest the management processes are working.

We also decided to plant a beech hedge in the roadside area next to the recycling bins in Black Dyke Road simply to hide the unsightly bins and improve amenity on one of the approach roads to the village. This project was entirely funded by the generosity of one of the working group members and planting and maintenance done by the group and other volunteers, so at no public cost. In the eventuality, other species than Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) were added to the hedge, in particular Hawthorn (*Crateagus monogyna*) and Dog-rose (*Rosa canina*). The hedge has thrived and will provide a hedgerow habitat for birds and other animals as it matures.

The roadside verges project was significantly extended in the winter of 2022-3 by adding 350m of verge on Sandside Road, thanks to a grant from the AONB. This long section, untreated for several years and very unkempt, was cleared, cut, scarified and seeded with a wildflower and grass seed mix in early 2023. (The seed was paid for by a grant from the Planting for Pollinators [P for P] project of Cumbria CC and Cumbria Wildlife Trust [CWT]). Again, early results are encouraging and it will shortly be cut again and more seed and plug plants put in to speed up the improvement process.

Thanks to another grant from P for P project, the Black Dyke Road verge will be cut later in the autumn and be planted with spring bulbs - snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*),

native Daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) and Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).

### **3. Extension of the Project**

The Group is now looking at means of extending the project beyond the roadside verges. Group members have been encouraged throughout by the welcome response to the project amongst local residents - any criticism has been of the methodology rather than of the principle. We feel this is an opportune moment. There has been much publicity recently about the benefits to pollinators of leaving areas of gardens uncut - 'no-mow-May', for example - and much advice about how to go about it in the popular press.

We are holding a Community Plug-planting Day on 30<sup>th</sup> September to put in the spring bulbs on Black Dyke Road, to involve local people in the process directly. We also are planning a Gardening for Wildlife programme, starting with a launch event in January, to which expert speakers have been invited and which we intend to be led by residents with Council support. We have also involved the children from Arnside Primary School, who have already done some planting at the Council's site at The Beachwood and we intend this to continue. The School's activities have been supported by a small grant from P for P.

An information board outlining this work has been erected at Beachwood, courtesy of a grant from the Barnes Trust and another has been designed to go up on the verge on Sandside Road at the main entrance to the village.

### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it has been a privilege to be involved with an enthusiastic and knowledgeable group of individuals from different backgrounds who all share the same passion for improving our local environment. We all want the same goal: to see more wild flowers in our village, to have more insects buzzing around the flowers and more birds feeding on the insects - and so on, up the food chain. We feel we have achieved some success so far; not only in the improvement to the roadside verges but in the knowledge we have gained, the friendships we have made and the organisations with whom we have linked. Together with the sense of community we've developed, I'd call that a good start.

I hope this article gives a picture of what we've done and how we want to go forward. If others want to draw on our experience, please do get in touch - we'd be happy to help.

Steve Porter  
Lead Councillor  
Wild Verges Working Group  
Arnside Parish Council  
04sep23