



Review of Verges and open spaces (excluding land owned by Farms, National Trust and Caravan sites) within the Parish of Arnside

The review and findings of a Work Group set up by Arnside Parish Council to determine the extent of land which could be re-wilded and the efficacy and ability in doing so.

September 2020

Contents

Introduction	2
Summary of Findings	3
Recommendations.....	3
Scope of Work	4
Constraints	4
Quantification of the land area involved	5
APC land Assets	5
Road Verges	9
Residents Mowing of Verges.....	12
Risk	13
Increased Risk arising from reduced visibility where verges are left uncut.....	13
Sloping junctions which present specific visibility hazards:.....	13
Blind Bends which present specific visibility hazards:.....	13
Low road signage presenting hazards if verge is re-wilded;	13
Additional risk associated with Re-wilded areas.....	13
Costs	14
Re-wilding Benefits.....	15
Local Improvements	15
On-site review of locally created wildflower verges	18

Introduction

An Arnside resident has approached Arnside Parish Council (APC) with a proposal to discontinue the cutting of the grass verges particularly along Blackdyke Road and Sandside Road in support of re-wilding and planting of wildflowers to encourage nature to flourish.

APC convened a Work group to investigate the extent of mowed area compared to that left wild within the parish, to estimate costs involved in re-wilding, to establish responsibilities and review perceived benefits of either continued mowing or re-wilding. The Work Group included the land owned by APC in order to a) clarify and quantify what APC own, b) demonstrate or otherwise that, by and large, it is properly managed to perform it's specific function and c) that, where possible, consideration could be given to further re-wilding or planting of wildflowers.

The overriding factors are:

CCC own the road verges and, as such, the ultimate decision for change rests with them.

APC have undertaken to maintain verges within the village on an historical basis (it is not known if CCC contribute towards the cost of such).

Any decision taken by APC will therefore impact on CCC or vice versa.

The Work group is to report to a committee to be established in order to decide on the merits of changing APC present strategy with regards to mowing. The committee would need to consider the following options:-

Cease all mowing/strimming (need to consider if public consultation required prior to APC carrying out such action as it is not officially APC's duty to mow verges)

Reduce area mown/strimmed

Advise CCC of any change in strategy and thus their obligation for costs arising from such a change. (CCC will be obliged to conduct a survey of residents prior to enacting any changes).

Retain the status quo

All the above considerations are subjective given that re-wilding will undoubtedly improve habitat for wildlife and flora, but on the other hand, create conflict with a proportion of the Arnside residents who enjoy the aesthetic view of neat and tidy verges established over many years. The appearance of the village has drawn in many new residents over the years and any change may well result in public discontent. Such views cannot be taken lightly even though they cannot be measured in quantifiable ways (without a survey). The question to be answered is – is it appropriate for that location and is it wanted by the majority of Arnside residents? However, it is likely that once a decision to re-wild is made then any future reversal of such a decision could result in extreme social media comments.

The Work Group has reviewed many published articles on the subject (referenced within the report) but must point out that such publications are written by environmentalists, wildlife enthusiasts and funded bodies.

Summary of Findings

There would be an increase in costs associated with maintaining the verges after re-wilding and it is recommended that if re-wilding was to take place then the cost to both enact it and to subsequently maintain the areas should fall upon the rightful duty owners – Cumbria County Council.

Savings to APC from transfer of responsibility for maintaining the verges could be in the region of £1000. However, it should be borne in mind that a gain to APC will result in an increase cost to CCC.

If responsibility is transferred then APC would have no say in the maintenance of such verges and therefore require residents to take up any issues with CCC directly.

Areas of land mown have been calculated and ownership and responsibilities determined. Land owned by APC is judged to be amenity land or in small blocks embedded within residential areas.

If verge maintenance was returned to CCC then they would apply the strategy they have established on re-wilding. Such a strategy includes the requirement for a metre-wide strip closest to the kerb to be regularly mown. In the case of some verges (e.g Blackdyke Road this would leave a re-wilded strip of a maximum width of 1 metre in places). An area sufficient to ensure adequate visibility for vehicles exiting the side road (bungalows backing on to railway) would also be required to be mown.

Re-wilding undoubtedly produces and sustains greater biodiversity particularly during the growing season. Whilst in bloom the flowers are pleasing to the eye, but when the season is over the grassland can look uncared-for and abandoned.

Recommendations

(Re-wilding of verges will have to be done by CCC and any recommendations should be passed to CCC for consideration, survey of residents, estimation of hazards etc.)

The Work Group considers the limited area available for re-wilding on Blackdyke Road (given the 1 metre wide mown strip requirement) to probably be of insufficient size to justify a cost/benefit balance.

The Work Group recommend that the verge mowing on Sandside Road is restricted to the length of verge between the Railway Bridge and the Arnside Village sign. Resulting in a significant area of land being made available for re-wilding. Such an area (1440 m²) represents approximately 50% of the presently mown verge in the whole parish.

APC owned land which may be suitable for re-wilding is deemed to be restricted to banking areas in Beechwood and the Cemetery (which would need to be reclaimed as future pressure on the finite burial space is applied). If this recommendation were to be adopted then volunteers would be needed to carry out the work and maintenance, and a budget line set up within the APC finance report.

APC should encourage interested groups to lobby local land owners (Dallam Estates, National Trust, Woodland Trust, Network Rail etc) to expand their area of wildflower planting (far greater areas being available than that of existing verges).

Scope of Work

Quantify the total amount of cultivated land (by mowing, strimming and flower beds) within the boundaries of Arnside Parish and thereby deduce the percentage left uncultivated.

Identify which areas are owned by APC and which are the responsibility of Cumbria County Council.

Identify any areas which would result in additional hazards to motorists, cyclists and pedestrians if areas were left uncut.

Identify cost implications to the APC budget if less mowing were carried out.

Consider the issue of residents mowing the areas in front of their properties.

Review arguments for and against re-wilding of verges and open spaces.

Provide a report to APC to facilitate decision making by a specific committee or the whole council.

Constraints

All road verges are the responsibility of CCC and therefore any recommendations would require their review, an implementation of their public consultation process and funding of re-wilding plus future maintenance.

APC simply ceasing all verge maintenance without habitat management may not achieve a significant increase in bio diversification and wildlife numbers. The majority of Arnside residents may want to maintain the status quo (as many enjoy what they consider a “tidy” village).

To date only one resident has requested re-wilding (0.04% of Arnside population) and therefore it is difficult to know the local strength of feeling on this issue.

Arnside is a rural community surrounded by hundreds of acres of uncultivated land. Such land being arable farmland or National Trust land. This area of land has not been taken into account by the work group even though it is of an overwhelming quantity when compared to mown areas at present.

The area of foreshore has not been taken into consideration, given that it is generally uncultivated and subject to tidal conditions.

The working group do not possess any specific expertise on wildlife/plant biology or environmental sustainability.

Quantification of the land area involved.

There are two issues to be considered;

1. The land which APC hold title to and can thus legally make changes to.
2. The land which Cumbria County Council hold title to which would require them to make any decisions concerning such land after a full and comprehensive involvement with all stakeholders (APC, residents, traffic safety experts)

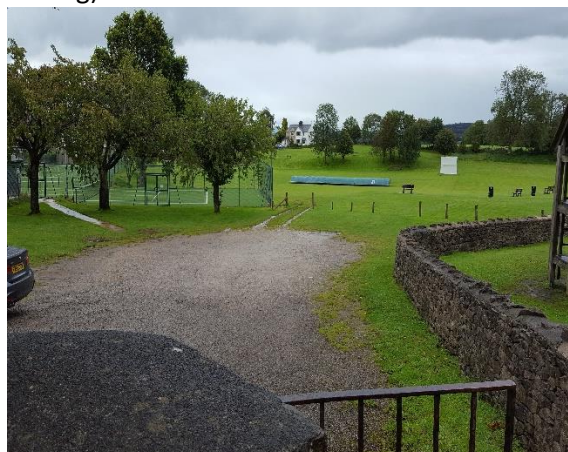
APC land Assets

Title	Approximate Area m2	Approximate Area cut m2	Percentage uncultivated
Memorial Field	27200	25840	5
Beechwood	7200	2450	66
Cemetery	10880	8160	25
Lawrence Dr (2 plots)	750	750	0
Jubilee Gardens (foreshore)	1000	1000	0
Seaward side of sea wall	400	400	0
Allotments	2400	2100	13
Area opposite railway bridge	320	320	0
Total Area	50150	41020	18

Overall percentage of uncultivated land owned by APC is in the region of 18%. Council owned land is either required for a specific function – i.e. burials or sports or is classed as amenity land. 18% is a reasonable area given the necessary allocations for sport, leisure and burial.

Memorial Field

The largest area of cut land is the Memorial Field where the mowing of grass is required for cricket, football and general recreation. (Note tennis and bowling club areas, plus club buildings included in mown area). The cutting of grass in general recreation areas is considered necessary to ensure the safety of the public (including adequate provision of visual inspections to minimise litter and fouling).



Beechwood Nature Reserve

Beechwood is designated a nature reserve and as such mown only in the area where there is a pathway and benches for residents and visitors to enjoy the setting. Beechwood was donated to APC by the Matson ground Estate Company.



Cemetery

The cemetery is maintained to a high standard and part of this is the mowing of grass in the designated burial areas. The southern slope and quarry area are uncultivated and will remain so until such time in the future that the land may be required for the interment of ashes. A special area has already been allocated within the burial ground which is mown only once a year to support the growth of rare orchids and many native flowers (butterflies are in abundance in this area). Mowing in additional areas is delayed until June to allow flowers to bloom, seed and spread.

The question as to whether the burial areas should be mown is a contentious one as many relatives of the deceased enjoy the access provided and the visual confirmation that their deceased relatives resting place is being looked after.



Lawrence Drive

The plot on the corner of Lawrence Drive and Redhills road is on a raised sloping section of ground and as such the mowing of grass enhances visibility for drivers on access and egress from Lawrence Drive. The second plot on Lawrence Drive is small but immediately adjacent (no wall separation) to residential gardens/buildings as well as being on the corner of a steeply sloping cul de sac. Long grass in this area may incur visual impairment of drivers exiting the cul de sac and result in species spread into private property. Both plots are in the midst of residences and as such do not conform with “wildlife corridor provision”. Note that both plots were donated to APC as part of the developers landscaping scheme.

Redhills Road/Lawrence Drive



Lawrence Drive/cul-de-sac



Jubilee Gardens

Jubilee gardens on the foreshore was purchased in 1935 in order to specifically establish an ornamental garden area.



Seaward side of Seawall.

Although mowed, this area is submerged during spring tides. It provides a picnic area within reach of the foreshore unofficial parking area and litter bins.



Allotments

This area is designated for residents-only to grow their own produce and a portion of land to the front is left to grow unattended.



Garden opposite Railway Bridge

The area has long been cultivated as diversified flower and bush layout which provides an entrance statement to visitors that leaves them in no doubt that they are entering Arnside.



Road Verges

The following areas are not owned by Arnside parish Council:

Title	Approximate Area m2	Approximate Area cut m2	Percentage uncultivated
Blackdyke Road	1270	550	57
Cold Well lane	600	200	66
Silverdale Road	1810	130	93
Hollins lane	600	0	100
Redhills Road	100	0	100
New Barnes Road	300	0	100
Sandside Road	2200	1700	23
Total	6880	2580	63

63% of uncultivated verge compares favourably with the County Council "Special" verge area of 6% of their road verges.

Blackdyke Road



Sandside Road



Memorial Field Road Verge.

Note; Some time ago, residents were unsatisfied with the uncared-for condition of this verge and took it upon themselves to strip and replant the area.



Waste Recycling Area (Cold Well Lane)



Hollins Lane



Residents Mowing of Verges

There are several areas in the parish where residents have taken it upon themselves to mow and tend to the verge area immediately outside their boundary. To prohibit this, in what are small areas, would not result in a significant gain in biodiversity and would antagonise the residents.

Risk

Increased Risk arising from reduced visibility where verges are left uncut.

Increased risk is limited as hazards are only apparent where there are sloping road junctions, blind bends or where signage is hidden.

CCC management of verges requires the first metre nearest the kerb to be cut for safety reasons.

Sloping junctions which present specific visibility hazards:

Lawrence Drive cul-de-sac

Waste recycling lay-by

Memorial Field entrance

Access road to bungalows on Blackdyke Road

Road to houses opposite Briary Bank.

Corner of Hollins Lane and Briary Bank.

Blind Bends which present specific visibility hazards:

Lawrence Drive and Redhills Road.

Low road signage presenting hazards if verge is re-wilded;

Blackdyke Road Note – signs can be elevated.

Additional risk associated with Re-wilded areas

The long grass can conceal (and in some cases encourage) deposited litter (cans, bottles, plastic) which can present a hazard to personnel when conducting the biannual maintenance and to dogs and walkers. **This is particularly relevant at the waste recycling site.**

Working Group member witnessed condition of verges in Endmoor after cutting. Cutting was done with tractor driven hedge cutter and numerous items of rubbish exposed (bottles, cans, plastic wrappers and containers).

Recent reports of a council being sued as the long grass concealed the presence of an adder which killed a dog must be taken seriously as adders are known in the area.

Costs

(COMMERCIALLY SENSITIVE – SHOULD NOT BE CIRCULATED OUTSIDE COUNCIL)

Example of costs associated with present mowing regime.

Sandside Road £xxx per annum.

Estimated costs associated with maintaining the same verge after re-wilding.

£xxx per annum. (This is based on the requirement for two men to carry out the maintenance only once per annum, strimming the area, raking up the cut grass, loading onto a tipper truck, removal and disposal)

If the decision was taken to re-wild this area then the set up (Capital) costs are estimated as follows:-

Weedkill existing grass, rotavate soil and (a) sow wildflower grass verge seed or (b) lay wildflower turf.

(a) £xxx / m²

(b) £xxx / m²

Savings achievable by leaving the following areas unmown (completely untouched):

Sandside Road £xxx

Blackdyke Road £xxx

Recycling Area £xxx

Silverdale Road £xxx

Total £xxx

Cost to trim, rake and remove cuttings once per annum if these areas were re-wilded:

Sandside Road £xxx

Blackdyke Road £xxx

Recycling Area £xxx

Silverdale Road £xxx

Total £xxx

Clearly the additional costs are a significant figure for the APC budget to sustain. It would thus be reasonable to hand the management of these verges back to CCC.

At present 13 cuts per annum are made over a 26 week period at fortnightly intervals. A variety of machinery is used appropriate to the type of growth, location and manoeuvrability required.

There is in excess of £xx k of machinery invested in carrying out the contract. A reduction in the areas mown would not necessarily result in a saving to the contract due to the need to pay down capital cost and the fixed operating costs such as travel time and fuel for travel.

Re-wilding Benefits

An increase in bio-diversity for flora and fauna. The published articles by the Plantlife charity provide adequate information on this.

<https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/roadvergecampaign/management-guidelines>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife/managing-land-wildlife/managing-road-verges-wildlife>

Local Improvements

Several initiatives have been commenced in the area and the Work Group have reviewed the available documents published to date. Admittedly, such initiatives are on a far grander scale than the verge areas in Arnside and have thus made a significant contribution to improvements to biodiversity.

Published data on the Morecambe Bay Nature Improvement Area projects which ran from 2013 – 2015 (final report not found) details improvement undertaken and the financial assistance provided (£800k). AONB were the lead management organisation and published the following overview:-

The Morecambe Bay area – internationally important for its wildlife – became one of only 12 Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) in England in 2012, attracting £800,000 of funding from Natural England to improve and connect up the area's special wetland, limestone grassland and woodland habitats, as well as inspiring community action and supporting sustainable farming, woodfuel and wildlife tourism.

Over 1700 hectares of priority habitat have been restored to benefit species such as Lapwing, Curlew, High Brown Fritillary butterflies, woodland birds, orchids and wildflowers. Four new jobs have been created, along with one apprenticeship and one internship as a direct result of the programme and a new nature tourism business network involving over 35 businesses has been established.

Morecambe bay Local Nature Partnership (11 organisations) published the following overview:-

Nature Improvement Area

The Morecambe Bay Limestones & Wetlands Nature Improvement Area is creating a step change for nature around Morecambe Bay by improving and connecting up the area's special wetland, limestone grassland and woodland habitats, as well as inspiring community action and supporting sustainable farming, woodfuel and wildlife tourism.

- The 3-year £800,000 NIA programme was delivered by Morecambe Bay Local Nature Partnership, with [Arnside & Silverdale AONB Partnership](#) acting as the lead organisation.
- [Nature Improvement Areas](#) are areas where partners are working together to restore, enhance and connect wildlife habitats. Nature Improvement Areas are supported by Defra, DCLG, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and Natural England.
- We became one of the first NIAs in England after achieving success in a national competition announced in the [Natural Environment Whitepaper 2011](#).
- We've been busy working with farmers, landowners, communities, businesses and volunteers around the bay. You can see where we've been working on our [map](#) and read our [Progress Report 2013](#) and [Progress Report 2014](#).

The Progress Report 2014 can be accessed at:-

<http://www.morecambebaynature.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/NB%20NIA%20Progress%20Report%202014.pdf>

The Plantlife Case Study document on the A590 Morecambe Bay NIA Green Transport Corridor Project reports on a scheme which involves habitat management and enhancement works to 12 km of verge over a 4 year period (2016 – 20). Delivery costs to date have been £615k with an estimated annual maintenance cost of £10k

https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/uploads/documents/RVcasestudy_A590MorecambeBay.pdf

Nationally, the Work Group reviewed schemes undertaken by Peterborough Environmental City Trust.

Making a B-Line for Pollinators.

This document discusses how Peterborough has used the maps produced by Buglife to identify areas where there are gaps in the B-Lines and create 'pit-stops' for bees and other pollinators as they move across the landscape. Note – the B-Line corridor in the north west does not include Arnside. But that does not mean it cannot be extended to do so.

<https://www.pect.org.uk/projects/b-lines/>

Creating pollinator-friendly spaces.

Discusses aim to provide a practical experience that gives local residents and businesses the opportunity to get involved with habitat creation.

<https://www.pect.org.uk/projects/pollinating-peterborough/>

On-site review of locally created wildflower verges

The Work Group visited sites in Kendal and Endmoor.

Kendal

Photographs of wild-flower verges on Kendal housing estate are included as reference for committee decision making.

The verges shown were properly prepared and seeded and maintained by CCC.

Anecdotal evidence is that the majority of residents are not supportive of the scheme.



Endmoor

The Endmoor site had only recently been cut and displayed signs of significant rubbish and waste deposited in the long grass.