

# Arnside Parish Council

## Wildflower Verges Working Group

### Project Review June 2023

#### 1. Introduction

The purposes of this paper are:

- ❖ to review the progress of the Wildflower Verges Working Group (WVWG) of Arnside Parish Council (APC) from its inaugural activities in autumn 2021 to present;
- ❖ To suggest the next steps that the WVWG might take to pursue the goals of the initial project;
- ❖ To suggest how the project might be taken further, beyond the narrow confines of roadside verges;
- ❖ To examine how the residents of Arnside can be more involved in the project;
- ❖ To consider collaboration with other local authorities;
- ❖ To look at sources of funding, including sponsorship;
- ❖ To consider means of publicity.

#### 2. Group Membership

The member ship of the Group was:

**Paul Barnes**, resident.

**Helen Chaffey**, Parish Councillor.

**Mike Mann**, Parish Councillor.

**Steve Porter**, Parish Councillor.

**Dougie Watson**, Countryside Officer, Arnside and Silverdale AONB.

Others have given valuable support, notably **Dr Tony Sturdee**, resident, and **Caroline Howard**, AONB Funding & Communications Officer.

Since he became Chair of the Parish Council, Mike has left the group.

#### 3. Project Review, 2021 - Present

The initial pilot work on three verges, one at Sandside Road and two near the level crossing on Black Dyke Road, were given approval by APC in the late summer of 2021 and work commenced in that autumn. Methodology was that advised by the Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (A&S AONB) and from several published sources (eg Plantlife). The basic principle is 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 is 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 has been significantly reduced; and although this is qualitative data and not controlled (ie. there are other variables, such as weather) the initial outcomes are sufficiently encouraging to suggest the management processes are working.

In a slightly sideways move, we 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 the 350m section from the Sandside Road pilot to the Parish boundary at the point where the B5828 passes over the Leighton Beck. 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 and Pollinators project of Cumbria CC and Cumbria Wildlife Trust, CWT). It will be subject to a similar management regime to that shown to be effective in the pilot phase and should, in time, not only provide a greatly enhanced resource for pollinators but also a much better amenity for visitors as they enter the village along its main approach road.

In summary, the pilot has been a qualified success. More work needs to be done on all the verges for the next few years but, in time, they should be self-managing.

#### **4. Wildflower Verges - Next Steps**

There are few roadside verges now left in the village which are suitable for wildflower havens. Most are too narrow and have to be cut for line-of-sight road safety reasons (a minimum of 1m from the road edge has to be kept clear under Health and Safety [H&S] legislation and is the responsibility of the local authority, now Westmorland and Furness [W&F]). This applies to the long verge along Black Dyke Road between the junctions with Station Road and Briery Bank). One of the WVWG plans to meet the appropriate Officer of W&F to establish exactly which verges require safety cutting. Any other remaining verges can then be brought into the programme. It is also necessary to establish exactly who has ownership of the verges in the Parish and we are talking to the Director of Thriving Places in the new W&F authority to make this clear.

The roadside verges will, it is hoped, eventually require little or no management, as the semi-parasitic species become established and the soil fertility continues to decrease. However, for the next year or so at least, they will need annual cuts, possibly more than one per year. At present, we intend to cut the long Sandside Road verge (incorporating the Sandside pilot verge) as a hay meadow, ie. at the end of July or early August. Reseeding with annual species will then take place and these will be trampled into the bare soil patches opened up by the cutting. It may be necessary to have a second cut of this verge later in the year, depending on growth conditions. This regime will be repeated on the section of Black Dyke Road verge on the village side of the level crossing.

The verge on the far side of the level crossing, opposite the recycling bins on Black Dyke Road, will be cut later in the autumn and will require a single cut. It is then intended to plant spring bulbs in this verge - snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*), native Daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) and Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*). In the process of planting the native Daffodils, the ornamental ones there now will be lifted and replanted elsewhere.

## 5. Extension of the Project

Given the case in (3) above, the Group is now looking at means of extending the project beyond the roadside verges. WVWG members have been encouraged throughout by the welcome response to the project - 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 conscious that this can be a sensitive issue and that it needs careful handling but we have the approval of Council and feel it is time to plan for how to take this forward.

As a first step, we have agreed that the project be given a new name to signify a broader remit - we have decided upon the **Arnside Nature Network** as an appropriate title and we intend to use this on our publications henceforth.

Any extension of the Campaign should include the **Beachwood**. The work done there to replace the failed conifers with apple trees has been only partially successful; the new trees have suffered from adverse weather during the late winter and spring of 2023 (and inadequate watering - *mea culpa*) and two, perhaps three, may need replacing. The new trees have also been grazed by deer and some severely so; we will need to consider ways of protecting them.

The areas where the pines were removed and which were subsequently seeded and plug-planted by the children from the Ecogroup at Arnside School have also had mixed results. There are funds which have been donated to the school from the Planting for Pollinators grant (which paid for the seed for the Sandside Road verge extension) and the School may use this money to carry on this restoration work.

The wildflower bank at Beachwood has been maintained by A&S AONB for many years and this is planned to continue. Incidentally, since the conifers failed, there seem to be more flowers in the bank! However, the current management regime of a single autumn cut needs to be reviewed because of the changed circumstance of the fallen trees and this is **recommended**.

An information board has been erected at Beachwood, courtesy of a grant from the Barnes Trust.

## 6. Involving the Residents of Arnside

It has already been made clear that the local residents are supportive of what the WVWG has done so far and that there seems to be general goodwill towards further moves towards helping improve biodiversity. Any significant future developments will necessarily involve residents working on their own land - gardens and farmland especially - though there is some Council land that could be brought into the scheme, for example part of the playing field.

Which raises the question: how do we involve the residents? An important aspect, we feel, is to respect what they are already doing, which we suspect may be considerable. There are many environmentally-minded people in this village and this is a priceless resource to be drawn upon. We see our role as coordinators and facilitators first and enablers second. Any awareness-raising, for example, should focus on residents' own experiences and expertise with additional guidance where necessary from the AONB, CWT and from WSWG's limited knowledge. There are organisations within the community already working on biodiversity and it's important that they should be given the opportunity to take leading roles. That is in addition to the many individual gardeners who are leaving a patch of uncut lawn, or putting in a small water-feature, or some other little but vital effort to improve the lot of wild plants and animals.

We would suggest first making contact with as many known local individuals and groups as we can find to canvas opinion and support; then publicising and holding a meeting to kick off a programme of awareness-raising differentiated to meet the needs of those with different starting levels of experience and knowledge. It would be good to have a keynote speaker - some one such as Lee Schofield of Naddle Farm RSPB, for example - but we envisage the inputs from there being from local people. The programme would need to be supported by publications and links to on-line sources - eg. PlantLife - with perhaps a newsletter published by the Parish Council as a point of contact.

We would **recommend** that this programme should commence during the autumn of 2023, when gardeners are beginning to plan for the new growing season.

## **7. Collaboration with Other Local Authorities**

It has always been our goal to work collaboratively with our neighbours, particularly Beetham PC and Milnthorpe TC, and Dallam Estates. Through various members of our Council we have links with all these bodies and it seems there are sympathetic ears to be found there. We **recommend** setting up meetings - informal, preferably - with these bodies to explore how we may work in collaboration. Again, we would take the view that there is expertise out there upon which we may draw - that others may well be further down the road than we - but we might act as coordinators and facilitators, thus encouraging the development of biodiversity ideas and programmes. Again, we have been encouraged in this by the supportive comments from members of the Planting for Pollinators project, who see Arnside, the first local authority to be involved in the Project in the south of Cumbria, as a potential lead council in the area.

## **8. Sources of Funding**

We are very conscious that the work we are doing is taking money from the public purse and we have sought from the outset to look for sources of income outwith the APC budget. So far, we have been fairly successful and have secured grants from the Barnes Trust, the A&S AONB and Cumbria CC/ CWT, as well as a donation from a group member. We are fortunate in having a member of the group who is very good at sniffing out pots of money and even better at acquiring funds from them! We are now in the happy position, having been accepted onto the Planting for Pollinators project, of having access to another significant amount of funding; and the new W&F authority Climate Change and Biodiversity department has grants for which we can bid. Guidance on the bidding process is there within the membership of the group and we

are confident that funding streams independent of the APC budget and capable of supporting the campaign's objectives in full will continue into the foreseeable future.

## 9. Means of Publicity

This has been touched on in (5) above; in summary:

- ❖ Public meeting/s;
- ❖ Newsletter/s (paper and/ or on-line);
- ❖ On-line forums (Face Book etc);
- ❖ Dedicated page on the APC website;
- ❖ Perhaps a dedicated website.

## 10. Conclusion and Action Plan

In conclusion, it has been a privilege for me to be involved with an enthusiastic and knowledgeable group of individuals from different backgrounds who share the same passion for the environment as I. 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 trophic levels. 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 which I for one certainly feel has developed I'd call that a good start.

I hope this paper sets the scene for a secure future for what we now want to call the **Arnside Nature Network**. We think this title stresses that nature is the core of the project and that this is a collaborative effort - very much our mission for the future.

## Action Plan

<b>Section</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Who by</b>	<b>By when</b>
<b>3</b>	1. Establish ownership of verges	SP + W&F	Awaiting response from W&F officers
	2. Determine safety of verges	SP + W&F	
	3. (i) Cutting SR verge; (ii) Seeding/ planting SR verge	AB AONB	W/e 15/09; 19/09
	4. Cutting BDR verges	AB	W/e 29/09;
	5. Community planting day	AONB	30/09
<b>4</b>	1. Arnside School visit	SP, School	Sept 23
	2. Review AONB management	SP, DW	End 23
	3. Consider deer-proof treeguards	SP, DW	Oct 23
<b>5</b>	1. Public Meeting	ALL	Jan 17th 24
	2. Set up newsletter	PB	Autumn 23
	3. Set up on-line systems	?	Autumn 23
	4. Set up Working Group	ALL	Post-Jan 17th
<b>6</b>	Set up meeting with local bodies	SP, HC	Autumn 23
<b>7</b>	Bid for funds from W&F Biodiversity	SP, HC	Autumn 23

SP  
11 Sep 23