

## Management of Thanet Way vegetation and verges

This article aims to raise residents' awareness of the maintenance of the Thanet Way verges and vegetation, and action of the Parish Council to improve it.

There is a stretch of 1600 metres of verges on both sides of the road from Chestfield roundabout, just down from McDonalds, to Foxgrove Road. The soil is mostly heavy London Clay giving rise to characteristic neutral grassland.

These sites have been designated as Roadside Nature Reserves (RNR) by Kent Wildlife Trust and thus are covered by a Management Plan. The following is extracted from the management plan to explain the designation:

"These sites are an RNR because they contain a mosaic of well-established, unimproved, mostly neutral grassland verges with banks, scrub and hedgerows which together form a very valuable habitat. Neutral grassland is now extremely rare in Kent and the verges along this section of the Thanet Way contain remnants of the species which were once common in meadows in the surrounding area.

Of greatest interest are uncommon plants, such as dyer's greenweed, sea clover and pale flax, all classified as scarce in Kent. Burnet rose is also present, which is classified as scarce in Kent and not previously recorded from the north east of the county.

The diversity of flowers supports in turn a good number and range of insects. Several species of butterflies have been seen during surveys of the site. Other insects include burnet moths, grasshoppers and the uncommon Roesel's bush cricket.

The scrub and hedgerows around the verges also provide excellent bird habitat, and the least disturbed areas of neutral grassland provide good habitat for small mammals such as short-tailed field voles and common shrews."

Meadow grass can be cut anywhere from 1-4 times a year depending on the management objectives. But the conservation grass/RNR is currently only receiving one cut per year in September. The areas are heavily used on the McDonalds side from McDonalds towards Whitstable as there is a wide tarmac footpath on the other side of the road verge. There is a public perception of neglect especially at the end of the summer growth when the vegetation becomes the size of small trees.

Parish Council representatives met Kent Highways Service (KHS) and Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) on 18 May 2010. KWT and KHS agreed to increase the number of cuts from one (September annually) to two cuts per year. The additional cut will be to both sides of the road and both sides are to be full-width cuts. Timing is crucial to protect the rare species, insects and wildlife. The first cut is to be no later than the first week of May and the second cut preferably late September but no earlier than late August. For this year (2010) we have missed the first April cut, of course, but hopefully residents will see an improvement in the look next year.

The area in front of McDonalds is not a designated RNR (it starts further down), hence why that area can be cut differently than the RNR. McDonalds do litter picks of the whole area from the Chestfield roundabout to Foxgrove. Later on in the summer the thistles are so large along the verges that their staff are unable to litter pick effectively. KWT suggest that when the verges get two cuts per year this will weaken the thistles. They agreed however that if in two years time the problem has not lessened KWT will do a spot spray (not a blanket spray).

To try and raise residents' awareness of the designation of the verges and therefore why they are maintained in this manner, fairly prominent KWT Roadside Nature Reserve signage along the verges from June 2010 should help. This text will also be added to the website along with the PDF of the KWT RNR sign for context.

For more information please contact the Road Verge Project Officer at Kent Wildlife Trust, Tyland Barn, Sandling, Maidstone Kent ME14 3BD  
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