

ROAD & PATH GRASS VERGES POLICY

Please note, in most cases Betts do not own or manage any roadside verges. If you need to verify whether we own/manage a specific verge, please contact our Customer Services through the Help Desk at www.bettsestates.com/help.

It is the case that many roadside and path verges are prescribed in housing and other development schemes as “amenity grass”, to be sown or turfed with species-poor mixes of mainly coarse and tough grasses, and then to be mown regularly to a height of a few centimetres. For practical management and to pander to the popular opinion many have that nature must be controlled and “tidy”, this is understandable. However, it is ecologically unsound and certainly does not help the urgent need to halt the loss of botanically diverse grassland that has been such a sad result of management practices over the last half century. At Betts, we manage verges to deliver biodiversity gain. This has the added advantage of making them much more interesting and far more attractive once any prejudice of regimented and shorn green carpets is overcome.



About 700 flowering plant species, not far off half our native flora, have been recorded on roadside verges and of course they support a wealth of insects and other invertebrates, as well as small mammals and birds. They are also important for ecological connectivity, forming a network of “wildlife corridors”. Road and path treatments, though, can give them a hard time, for example, herbicide applications, salting, oily/contaminated drain water, too frequent and too low-cut/scalping mowing, neglect that encourages scrub invasion, etc.

Betts policy for road and path verges on our sites is therefore summarised as follows:

- Except in very particular circumstances such as stump treatment where digging out or grinding would be damaging to the sward, the use of herbicides is proscribed;
- We do not use salt on roads or paths that we own/control;
- We encourage landscapers to prescribe native, species-rich mixes for verges – where these are not established, we work to increase species-richness through additional seeding, plug-planting and suitable biodiversity-enhancing management;
- We allow the plants to flower, set seed and the seed to fall, generally following the cutting regime recommended by Plantlife as follows:

Management option		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
One cut									full cut				
Two cuts	Summer and autumn cutting								partial cut		full cut		
	Late winter and autumn cutting		full cut							full cut			
	Dry verges (short vegetation)	regular cuts								regular cuts			
	Species-rich verges with mown edge		1m strip							full cut			

- We reduce above-ground biomass – this decreases soil fertility, promotes species-richness and deters bulky and smothering coarse species;
- We remove (for composting or environmentally sound disposal) all hay and cuttings;
- We keep adjacent hedgerows from spreading out into the grass verge;

- We leave patches of bare ground, especially where these occur naturally, as they are important for a range of invertebrates and as “dust bath” sites for birds and basking sites for reptiles;
- We monitor verge status and take action to prevent or stop undesirable trends.



For a detailed synopsis on roadside verge management by Plantlife, see http://bit.ly/plantlife_verges.

Please also see our [Grassland Policy](#).

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