

National Highways and Plantlife announce biodiversity boost in Hereford

National Highways and Plantlife have joined forces to launch a new £372,600 Meadow Makers project that will improve habitats in Hereford, benefitting people, nature and wildlife.

The projects will help restore the biodiversity of up to 3.7Ha of existing grasslands across Warren Farm near the Malvern Hills.

The site had been fertilised and reseeded in previous years with grasses palatable to dairy-cattle but will now be using tried-and-tested methods to reduce the land's fertility and grass-dominance, including introducing the grass reducing, Yellow Rattle.

When the timing is right, seed harvested from nearby 'donor' species-rich meadows, and grazing with old livestock breeds will transform this meadow into a flower-rich buzzing community of Knapweed, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Oxeye Daisy, Lady's Bedstraw, Cowslip, Bulbous/Meadow Buttercups and finer grasses.

This will, in turn, support many insects including bees and butterflies, groundnesting birds, small mammals and bird-of-prey.

The move comes as part of National Highways' Nature Week, in which the government-owned organisation launched its Environmental Sustainability strategy; a plan to deliver a more sustainable road network that protects and enhances the environment over the next three decades.

By partnering with Plantlife, the ambition is for species rich wildflower and waxcap grasslands to be restored and protected at scale.

With England and Wales having lost 97 per cent of wildflower meadows since the 1930s, the aim is to drive up grassland restoration, helping to create an abundance and diversity of plants and fungi.

Andy Jinks, Regional Director for National Highways, said: "We're committed to significantly improving biodiversity near our road network, and the partnership with Plantlife will be a vital step in delivering a more sustainable road network that protects and enhances the environment.

"At National Highways, our work goes beyond operating, maintaining and improving roads; we're investing in the environment and communities surrounding our network, helping to unlock the creation and enhancement of habitats, and this is an example of the difference we can make with designated funding.

"We were delighted to partner with Plantlife to realise this project – a glowing example of how this funding can improve biodiversity near our roads."

Isobel Hall, Plantlife's meadow makers programme manager, added "This exciting partnership, working with people across sectors, is helping Plantlife realise its aims of restoring a substantial hectareage of grassland across the UK by the end of the decade. Grasslands like those in Warren Farm are valuable but rare natural assets, that when restored to glory, provide not only a spectacle for the eyes but essential food for wildlife as well as helping solve the climate and biodiversity crises we are facing."

James Hawkins, landowner of Warren Farm, added: "With the uncertainty surrounding traditional mixed farming this funding announcement gives us an opportunity to work with and utilise the skills of Plantlife and the support of National Highways to create a traditional meadow, improving biodiversity across the area at the same time as guaranteeing us an income for a set period.

"A great example of partnership working: Better the for environment, better for the climate and better for the business."

With competing pressures on the UK's land, it is now clear that organisations like National Highways and Plantlife need to make the most of the country's grasslands, which cover at least 40% of the UK.

Pressures from intensive agricultural practices, development and other land use changes mean only small, fragmented areas of species-rich grassland remain.

However, Ancient wildflower meadows and other permanent species-rich grasslands are exceptionally important habitats for wild plants and fungi, supporting pollinators, birds and a wide variety of other wildlife, and need to be protected.

There is also clear evidence that increased diversity of plants in grasslands – particularly communities of deep-rooting plant species – can increase carbon sequestration in the soil.

Plant diversity increases soil carbon in many ways; for example, plants can use their deep and varied roots to access water and nutrients, promoting their growth and enabling the plants to draw down more carbon into the soil.

This means that managing grasslands for biodiversity can also help to tackle climate change.

The funding news arrives during the peak of Plantlife's No Mow May campaign – a movement that has seen thousands of people up and down the country rethinking how to look after their own lawns and green spaces for nature, not only during May but over the course of the summer.

People are encouraged to leave the mower in the shed during May and adopt different mowing regimes to encourage wildflowers to flourish and attract pollinators and other animals in.

With over 20 million gardens in the UK, even the smallest grassy patches add up to a significant proportion of our land which, if managed properly, can deliver enormous gains for nature, communities and the climate.

Since 2015, National Highways has invested around £25 million towards the creation, enhancement and restoration of habitats on or near the motorway and major road network.

Last year, it invested £7m into a combined group of Network for Nature projects with The Wildlife Trusts, which was one of the biggest contributors towards biodiversity improvements in the company's history.

National Highways aim to achieve no net loss of biodiversity by 2025, lead industry peers and the supply chain, and encourage and support communities to connect with wildlife and wild places where they live and work.

National Highways' Environmental Sustainability strategy sets out the company's vision to not only mitigate the impact of England's busiest roads but ensure they can be used as a force for good for generations to come.

It makes a series of major commitments to map out a green future for the 4,500mile network with a focus on three key areas – the protection and enhancement of nature, carbon reduction and support for community wellbeing.

This includes using land to reconnect habitats, reversing the decline in biodiversity, helping wildlife thrive and building environmental resilience to a changing climate through initiatives such as natural flood management.

Currently in its fourth year, [National Highways' Designated Funds programme](#), which was allocated £936m for Roads Period 2 (2020-2025), is divided into four funding streams aimed at making the biggest difference and delivering lasting benefits: environment and wellbeing, users and communities, safety and congestion and innovation and modernisation.

For more info on No Mow May, visit <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/>

Ends

NOTES TO EDITORS

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