On the Verge of Success - yet further to go

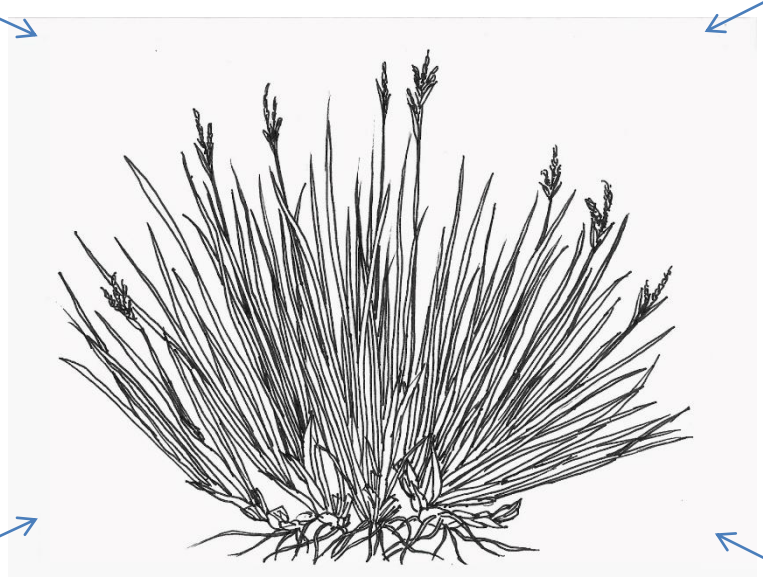
Creation & Management of Herb-rich Grasslands within Road Infrastructure

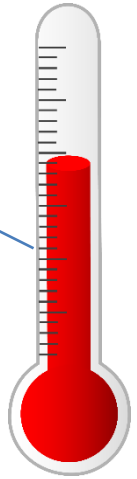
Dr Phil Sterling

Butterfly Conservation
50th Anniversary

Posted 12th July 2018:
"North East Lincolnshire Council's grounds maintenance team is into its third mowing round of the summer and cutting their way through almost 3,000,000 sq.m. grass"

What drives the grassland ecosystem?





Infertile soils allow lots of plants to coexist

Little management is needed

Grass growth controlled by design not maintenance

Weymouth Relief Road, Dorset (2009 – 2011)

- Low fertility verges designed into scheme
- Scatter of topsoil on some verges, <15mm, or no topsoil
- Wildflower seed hand sown

Road verges can provide ecological corridors alongside transport corridors

Verges can become rich in wildlife very quickly

Verge management alternatives built into design – grazing units

Small-scale cut and collect


Disposal on site
Grillo
FD 2300


Topped once in 2017
Tall coarse grasses in June 2018
3 x cut & collect in 2017
Short fine grasses in June 2018

Retrofitting low fertility


Dorset County Council


Dorset County Council
Conservation verge trials
www.dorsetforyou.com/verges

Cost savings on Weymouth Relief Road

- **Cost saving through not spreading topsoil on 7ha £270,000**
- **Verge management cost is <£500/yr**

(Standard cutting of Herb-rich Grassland c. £2,700/yr)

- **Injurious and notifiable weed control - £0 after Yr1**
- **DCC budget for verge management reduced 15% from £927k (2014/15) to £785k (2017/18) through authority-wide adoption of ecological approach**

Take-home messages

- **Low fertility = high diversity; less to maintain = cheaper**
- **Grass growth can & should be controlled by design**
- **Herb-rich grasslands can be created on almost any land at any scale if infertile soils used**
- **Retrofitting lowered fertility & open swards through cut-and-collect is practicable and increases biodiversity**
- **Public engagement is important, and grass verges full of wildflowers are popular**

Butterfly Conservation
50th Anniversary