

Date: 24 March 2009  
Your Reference:  
Our Reference: EIR 2009-010

Email: [request-8854-xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:request-8854-xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)

Dear Ms Davis

**ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REGULATIONS 2004 – REQUEST FOR INFORMATION Ref: EIR 2009-010**

The Council has completed its search for information relating to ecological protection schemes which we received on 9 March 2009

The Council holds information within the definition of your request. The following and attached information has been supplied by Environment Directorate.

The background and rationale for Cumbria County Council verge maintenance is summarised on our website, where a leaflet can also be found. The website link is

<http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/roads-transport/highways-pavements/highway-maintenance/grasscuttingandroadsideverges.asp>

All Cumbria's verges are managed to some extent with the verge flora in mind. All verges are given a verge cutting time to suit the verge with the aim of achieving the necessary highways maintenance without cutting the verge at the prime flowering period. The current cutting times are given in the attached schedule.

There are also c 640 Special Roadside Verges covering c 690 km length. I attach plans showing their location in Cumbria.

Each Special Verge also has the cuttings removed. Three are SSSIs – parts of Lamony Verges & Fields, Millfield Verges and Raisbeck Meadows. Some are County Wildlife Sites and therefore given some protection through the planning system. Many are included in the Natural England Grassland Inventory and shown on the Magic website.

In addition here at the County Council we seek to protect these Special Verges from development/ damage in any advice that we give. The District Councils also have the GIS boundaries supplied as part of a data package from the Cumbria Biological Data

Network, based at Tullie House Museum. Note under the terms of their licence agreement they are not permitted to pass this information on.

We have c 640 Special Verges, the majority well mapped and others somewhat uncertain, hence the red symbols on the plan. Each side of the road is a separate verge. Usually both sides of the road are identified but sometimes this is not the case. Each verge has a separate code number. We do not have grid references for the verges.

We hold botanical information on each verge in an access database. Verges were chosen by a site visit during 1993-5 with a certain amount of data collected, varying from site to site. Verges were usually chosen for their botanical diversity, though sometimes chosen for a single species, such as giant bellflower or melancholy thistle. Verges are a range of habitats – neutral grasslands, calcareous grasslands, more marshy grasslands, woodlands, some with heath. Most can be categorised as predominantly neutral (420 of the 640).

Our GIS is not capable of linking the access database information to the site boundary automatically. To provide initial information on each verge is possible, but to link this to each verge on the plan would take a considerable amount of time.

For further information please contact the County Ecologist, Environment Unit, Environment Directorate, County Offices, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 4RQ.

## Schedule from Highways Maintenance Manual

### Nature Conservation and Biodiversity

#### General

- 4.1. In preparing, carrying out or authorising works, all reasonable care and measures must be taken to ensure that there is no interference with protected species of animal, plant or bird. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and subsequent regulations prescribe various criminal offences relating to disturbance or damage to protected species and also introduce a licence system for works which, could affect certain species. Detailed advice to be followed for County Council works is given in EWI 09/005. Additionally, the County Council is under a duty to have regard to biodiversity in all our functions under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act). Cumbria Highways complies with these requirements as the verge maintenance policy is based on ecological and biodiversity principles.

#### Verge Maintenance

- 4.2. All verges have been categorised according to the plant mix contained within the verge section. Sections are considered to run from junction to junction to avoid splitting them up into too many small areas. A cutting time has been allocated to each verge type. Refer to table below for details.

Management type	Verge type	First cut: Safety swathe	Second cut: Safety swathe / full width cut of verge
0/0S	Privately managed	No cut	No cut
1 / 1S	Coarse grassland - summer flowering	15 May - 15 June	15 August - 31 October
2 / 2S	Short grassland - Spring / summer flowering	15 July - 15 August	1 Sept - 31 Oct
2A / 2AS	Summer flowering grassland - Special	15 Aug - 31 Aug	1 Sept - 31 Oct

3 / 3S	Coarse hedge bank - spring flowering	1 July - 31 July	15 August - 31 October
4 / 4S	Grassland with heath or woodland to rear or short grassland privately cut in Autumn	15 August - 15 September	No cut
5	Poached / disturbed grassland	No cut	15 August - 31 October
6 / 6S	Dwarf shrub heath	No cut	No Cut – remove self sown trees as necessary
7 / 7S	Narrow steep banks backed by wall or hedge.	Cut by hand 15 August - 15 Sept.	No cut
8 / 8S	Coarse grassland privately cut in Autumn	15 May - 15 June	No cut
9/9S		15 Sept - 30 Sept	15 Sept - 30 Sept
10/10S		1 Oct - 30 Oct	1 Oct - 31 Oct
11/11S		15 May - 31 May	1 Oct - 31 Oct

**“S” denotes Special Verges.**

On Special Verges the cuttings are to be collected and removed from site to prevent enrichment of the soil.

**Frequency of full width cut:**

For non-special verges, full width cut every four years in rotation.

For special verges full width cut every two years in rotation.

We have also attached copies of the maps indicating the areas mentioned.

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including any non-commercial research you are doing and for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder.

If you have a complaint about the way we have responded to your request or wish to appeal against our decision please write to:

Customer Services  
Cumbria County Council  
FREEPOST NWW6059A  
The Courts  
Carlisle  
CA3 8NA  
Tel: 0800 121 8800  
E-mail: [xxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxx.xxx.xx](mailto:xxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxx.xxx.xx)

If you are not satisfied with the Council’s internal review of your complaint you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner:

FOI/EIR Complaints Resolution  
Information Commissioners Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF <http://www.ico.gov.uk>

Yours sincerely

Nicola Howell  
Information Manager