

## Case Study

# Wildflower Verges Rodmell

### Background

My name is Jan Knowlson and I am the SDNPA Ranger based in the Eastern Downs Office at Stanmer Park, Brighton. My patch stretches from Lewes to Newhaven. After attending a Parish Council meeting, I was approached by John Harvey, a member of Rodmell (near Lewes) Parish Council to ask for help with wildflower planting. I visited the village with him and looked around at potential areas. We decided that the verges into and out of the village were ideal for the plan. It would not only improve the area aesthetically, but would potentially increase biodiversity – floral species will be increased by the planting and hopefully these will in turn be visited by many pollinating species, such as bumblebees, butterflies and hoverflies. There were no surveys prior to the project unfortunately, so we don't have any historic data of how rich the verges were as far as pollinators are concerned. However, floral species present prior to the project were minimal. Species such as Burdock, Spear thistle, Cow Parsley and nettle Charlock were most common. The idea was to increase the floral species and eradicate the more dominant species in favour of a varied and diverse range.



### The project

It was first necessary to gain permission from the local authority (East Sussex County Council). Their highways team manage all the verges so would need to approve the scheme and then support it with their maintenance schedule. ESCC agreed to avoid cutting the verges for the first year in order for the seeding to settle in and have a chance to grow and set seed for the following year. Once established it would then be cut early Spring and late Autumn. They agreed to this and so I went ahead with the project.

The next step was to spray off the existing vegetation in order to create suitable conditions for seeding and establishment of the plants. I sprayed the verges with a herbicide twice over the summer of 2013. After the first spray, I then cut and removed the dead vegetation, before the regrowth occurred and then a second spray. I followed the second spray with raking off any dead vegetation to create as much bare ground as possible. Once no regrowth was occurring, I seeded the area in February 2014 with a mix of native cornfield annuals – to provide initial colour and also native perennials. Any of the dominant species that returned were spot treated with herbicide or de-headed before setting seed.

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## John Harvey – Rodmell parish Council and local resident said;

“Just a quick note to say thank you for last spring’s wildflower seed sowing on the verges of the C7 through Rodmell. It produced a good display of cornfield annuals, with a few perennials interspersed, throughout the summer. In a few areas there are still flowers even now, particularly on the western side of the road under the 30 MPH sign at the Lewes end of the village.”

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## The Outcome

The seed took well and the cornfield annuals provided fantastic colour from June right through to September. The first year was mostly the annuals, so year 2 (2015) will be interesting and hopefully even more diverse as the perennials start to come through. The feedback was extremely positive from the parish. The photo below was taken at the start of the flowering season in June, it became more and more colourful through the summer. The seed was funded by my area patch budget, with a contribution from Rodmell Parish Council. This worked very well and was not a huge cost to me, the reward of the flowers were very worth the effort and will hopefully reward again by benefitting our pollinators. Aesthetically it made such a difference as you drive into the village, bright, colourful flowers, inviting you in. Having the support of Rodmell Parish and working in partnership was key to this endeavor and they were able to spread the word to residents about what was happening. The knowledge of the seed supplier Colin Reader was also invaluable and he provided me with good advice on preparation and species that would grow well. I am currently supporting our volunteers in learning about bumblebees and they will be able to help me with the surveys next year.



## The future

The verges will be surveyed by myself and volunteers in the Spring/Summer of 2015 for pollinator species and the surveys will take place every year for a minimum of 5 years to see if invertebrate diversity increases. The verges will be maintained with an early Spring cut and a late Autumn cut, every year as agreed by ESCC. The hope for the future is that other parishes in the area will see the results of these first verges and also want a planting scheme in their area. I would like to have a section of wildflower verge in each parish along the C7 over the coming years. With species declines in our native butterflies and bumblebees it is hoped that by providing these “corridors” of habitat, they will be able to recover and start to increase again. I will contact other parishes once I have some good photos of the second year and potentially some survey results. I will offer funding and labour support in order to encourage take up. Plans are also well under way for a wildflower meadow at the Itford YHA, this is a joint project with the South Downs Way team from SDNPA. This area will also be followed up with annual surveys, to monitor species diversity.