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Special Verge Selection and Scoring Guidelines

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This guideline has been written in conjunction with Devon County Council Ecologists and Exmouth Wildlife Group.

The County Council policy on the management of roadside verges in Devon states that: "*Grass cutting on road verges by Devon County Council will only be carried out when deemed necessary for the following reasons: to maintain visibility areas/splays for highway users and/or to provide forward visibility to signs*"

With regards to Special Verges, County Council Highways policy states "*There are many special verges identified within Devon where flora and fauna of local or national interest exist. The existing policy of protection for visual, scientific or ecological purposes will be continued for the whole of the County*".

To assist in the selection of these sites, the following scoring system for site selection is suggested, based on their value for wildlife (plants and invertebrates) and / or whether they are part of a site designated for its wildlife and / or geological value. These relate, where relevant, to the existing guidelines for the selection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, County Wildlife Sites and County Geological Sites (i.e. RIGS sites).

Guidance

1. The final verge score is the combined total of individual species scores. Sites which score **greater than 5** are recommended to be designated as a Special Verge.

2. Any species which appears on the lists below receive a score. However, this score can only derive from **one list which represents the highest value**, i.e. a species which appears on more than one list cannot generate multiple scores. For example, Deptford pink appears on **four** lists (protected species on Schedule 8 of W&C Act, Nationally Scarce, NERC Act Priority Species and axiophyte). However, this species can only score a maximum of 5 which meets the required threshold for Special Verge status.

Species			
Plants (vascular & non-vascular)	**Score**	**Categories**	**Examples**
	5	*Species listed as:* ▪ **Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable** ('notable') in the current UK or England red data books for vascular plants (Cheffings & Farrell 2005, Stroh et al. 2014) *and/or:* ▪ **Protected species** listed on **Schedule 8** of the Wildlife & Countryside Act *and/or:* ▪ **Priority species** for conservation listed in **Section 41** of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 *and/or:* ▪ **Nationally Rare or Nationally Scarce species** listed as occurring in <100 10-km squares (hectads) in Britain *and/or:* ▪ **Very rare Devon species**, listed in <10 tetrads in the *New Flora of Devon* (Smith et al.,) *and/or:* ▪ **Devon Special Species (shortlist):** https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/joint-initiatives/special-species/	Bastard balm (*Melittis melissophyllum*) Deptford pink (*Dianthus armeria*) Devon whitebeam (*Sorbus devoniensis*) Vigurs' eyebright (*Euphrasia vigursii*) Bulbous meadow-grass (*Poa bulbosa*) Multi-fruited cryphaea moss (*Dendrocryphaea lamyana*) Bithynian vetch (*Vicia bithynica*)
	3	*Species listed as:* ▪ **Near Threatened** in the current UK or England red data books for vascular plants (Cheffings & Farrell 2005, Stroh et al. 2014) *and/or:* ▪ **Rare Devon species**, listed in 10-30 tetrads in the *New Flora of Devon* (Smith et al.,) *and/or:* ▪ **Devon Priority Species (long list):** https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/joint-initiatives/special-species/	Greater butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*) Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) Adder's-tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) Common Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*)
	2	*Species listed as:* ▪ Recognised **axiophyte** (Walker, 2018). Also see Appendix. *and/or:* ▪ Recognised **Ancient Grassland or Ancient Woodland Indicator Species** (see Appendix) *and/or:*	Betony (*Stachys officinalis*) Sawwort (*Serratula tinctoria*) Bistort (*Polygonum bistorta*)

		▪ **Occasional** Devon species, listed in 31 - 100 tetrads in the *New Flora of Devon* (Smith et al.,)	Great Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) Cowslip (*Primula veris*)
Invertebrates	**5**	*Species listed as:* ▪ **Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable** ('notable') in the current UK or England red data books for invertebrates. *and/or:* ▪ **Protected species** listed on **Schedule 5** of the Wildlife & Countryside Act *and/or:* ▪ **Priority species** for conservation listed in **Section 41** of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 *and/or:* ▪ **Nationally Rare or Nationally Scarce species** listed as occurring in <100 10-km squares (hectads) in Britain *and/or:* ▪ **Devon Special Species (shortlist):** https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/joint-initiatives/special-species/	Brown hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*) Marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) Southern damselfly (*Coenagrion mercuriale*) Heath potter wasp (*Eumenes coarctatus*) Violet oil beetle (*Meloe violaceus*)
	3	*Species listed as:* ▪ **Near Threatened** in the current UK or England red data books for invertebrates *and/or:* ▪ **Devon Priority Species (long list):** https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/joint-initiatives/special-species/	
	2	▪ Recognised **Ancient Grassland or Ancient Woodland Indicator Species** *and/or:* ▪ **Occasional** Devon species, listed in 31 - 100 tetrads	

Fungi	**5**	*Species listed as:* ▪ **Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable** ('notable') in the current UK or England red data books *and/or:* ▪ **Protected species** listed on **Schedule 8** of the Wildlife & Countryside Act *and/or:* ▪ **Priority species** for conservation listed in **Section 41** of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 *and/or:* ▪ **Nationally Rare or Nationally Scarce species** listed as occurring in <100 10-km squares (hectads) in Britain *and/or:* ▪ **Devon Special Species (shortlist):** https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/joint-initiatives/special-species/	Pink (Ballerina) waxcap (*Hygrocybe calyptriformis*) Date waxcap (*H. spadicea*) Olive earthtongue (*Microglossum olivaceum*)
	5	▪ At least 5 species of **waxcap** (*Hygrocybe*)	
	3	*Species listed as:* ▪ **Near Threatened** in the current UK or England red data books *and/or:* ▪ **Devon Priority Species (long list):** https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/joint-initiatives/special-species/	
Site designations			
Wildlife	**5**	▪ Verge forms an integral part of the wildlife interest, *within or directly adjacent to*, a **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**, as agreed with Natural England *and/or:* ▪ Verge forms an integral part of the wildlife interest *within* a **County Wildlife Site**, as agreed with the County Wildlife Site Panel.	

Geology	**5**	▪ Verge forms an integral part of the geological interest within a **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**, as agreed with Natural England *and/or:* ▪ Verge forms an integral part of the geological interest within a **County Geological Site**.	
	3	▪ Other geological exposures or features recommended by the Devon RIGS Group as being of conservation significance and worthy of special protection / management.	

References

Allen, M (2018). *Ancient Grasslands in England – a summary*. Inside Ecology [https://insideecology.com/2018/04/23/ancient-grasslands-in-england-a-summary/]

Cheffings, C.M. & Farrell, L. (Eds), Dines, T.D., Jones, R.A., Leach, S.J., McKean, D.R., Pearman, D.A., Preston, C.D., Rumsey, F.J., Taylor, I. 2005. *The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain*. Species Status 7: 1-116. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

Smith, R., Hodgson, R. & Ison, J. (2016). *A New Flora of Devon*. Devonshire Association, Exeter, UK.

Stroh, P.A., Leach, S.J., August, T.A., Walker, K.J., Pearman, D.A., Rumsey, F.J., Harrower, C.A., Fay, M.F., Martin, J.P., Pankhurst, T., Preston, C.D. & Taylor, I. 2014. *A Vascular Plant Red List for England*. Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, Bristol.

Walker, K.J. (2018). Vascular plant 'axiophyte' scores for Great Britain, derived from the assessments of the vice-county recorders of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (May 2016). NERC Environmental Information Data Centre. https://doi.org/10.5285/af2ac4af-12c6-4152-8ed7-e886ed19622b

Appendix

1. **Allen's listing of *Ancient Grassland Indicators* (vascular plants) includes the following species:**

Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*
Spring Sedge *Carex caryophyllea*
Pignut *Conopodium majus*
Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria*
Bitter Vetch *Lathyrus linifolius*
Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*
Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*
Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*
Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*Pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*

Betony *Stachys officinalis*
Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*

2. Ancient Woodland Indicators (vascular plants)

A list of ancient woodland indicator plant species was pioneered by Francis Rose in 1999 and published in the British Wildlife quarterly journal. The list is split into regions and only those which are considered as AWIs in the South West should be counted in calculating the verge scoring.
https://pad.basingstoke.gov.uk/documents/4753/01/02/76/01027625.PDF

3. Axiophytes

https://bsbi.org/axiophytes

Reaffirmed 18th May 2026
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