

## Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 16/17: Rural Highways Grass Cutting		Paul Hendry - Countryside Manager	19 January 2016 Version 2 (Exec)
<b>Proposal:</b>	To reduce the rural highways grass cutting.		
<b>Total budget 15/16:</b>	£70,000	<b>Recommended officer saving 16/17:</b>	£10,000 (14%)
<b>Initial proposed saving 16/17:</b>	£10,000 (14%)	<b>Final recommendation to Executive 16/17:</b>	To proceed with this savings proposal, without any modifications.
<b>Nos of responses:</b>	22 in total, 12 from residents, seven from Town / Parish councils, two from the Green Party, one from WBC.		
<b>Key issues raised:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential hazard for highways users as a result of overgrown hedgerows/vegetation</li> <li>• Overgrown vegetation on bends and sightlines is dangerous to road users.</li> <li>• Reduce the cut but make sure emergency and statutory works would be carried out, especially with regard to sight lines at road junctions in order to maintain road safety.</li> <li>• There is far too much cutting of verges in the district, to the detriment of wildlife. In many if not most cases, this is nothing to do with road safety, which of course we agree should be paramount, but more about keeping things "neat and tidy". If the council is really concerned about road safety, it should be reducing speed limits and working to make sure they are properly enforced, maintaining rather than cutting school crossing patrols, improving rather than cutting public transport, making cycling more attractive, and many similar measures.</li> <li>• The cost of just one serious accident could be significantly more than the modest savings proposed.</li> <li>• This will impact negatively on walkers and horse riders if it is not carefully managed, because they will be put at risk of injury through collision with traffic if they use the road but at risk of injury through unseen pits and bumps in the verge if they walk or ride off the road.</li> <li>• Where a busy road forms a link between popular public rights of way, there should be more cuts. However elsewhere - the vast majority of the network, there should be a positive environmental impact. Less grass cutting means more wild flowers can set seed and wildlife generally will thrive.</li> <li>• There might be a negative economic impact on owners of livestock in the longer term because ragwort will thrive in uncut road verges.</li> <li>• Cut verges less so the flowers have a chance to grow. Clearly if there are places where it is dangerous because of poor visibility then those locations need to be cut.</li> <li>• Use local knowledge to set a priority system on when the work is undertaken.</li> <li>• Priority for cuttings should be based on road safety rather than cosmetic appearance.</li> <li>• Concern that in rural area's this will have a particularly bad an impact on walkers &amp; horse riders.</li> <li>• It may affect water drainage off the highway.</li> <li>• This will result in tatty towns and villages and unsafe cycle and walking routes, which is not environmentally friendly</li> </ul>		

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A reduction in maintenance may make bus waiting facilities unsafe, and could impact on availability of safe walking routes to schools, which would lead to a greater cost to the Council in putting on dedicated vehicles.</li> <li>• Parish councillors (Lambourn) feel that the parishioners overall did not appreciate the consequences of overgrown road verges and the possibility of reduced litter picking. While there is little objection to the broad principle of the reduced cutting of verges, exceptions should be made where visibility might be significantly impaired on bends and corners for safety reasons.</li> <li>• In general, reducing verge cutting should not be a problem. In particular, obstructed sight lines at junctions and foliage obscuring road signs due to inadequate cutting are a serious road safety problem. Maintenance of these areas must be kept at present levels, or even enhanced.</li> <li>• The priority for these route assessments should be changed so there is a greater emphasis on safety rather than cosmetic appearance. Visibility splays, visibility of signage and safety of those who find themselves on verge areas should be the overriding priority. Where remedial cutting is required this should be done severely to make a real difference rather than minor trimming.</li> </ul>		
<b>Equality issues:</b>	None were drawn out from the responses.		
<b>Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:</b>	<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Council response</b>	
	Reschedule the cutting frequency and don't cut the residential roads as frequently.	The difficulty here is that grass growth varies from year to year and in some years, the vergers need a very late cut otherwise the verges are difficult to maintain in the Spring. The Council does suspend cutting at times and can focus on those areas of highest priority.	
	Consult the Ramblers Association and British Horse Society (via the Local Access Forum) to get help in identifying the parts of the network most used by recreational walkers and horse riders. Also involve parish councils. The grass cutting regime needs to be 'smarter' but can otherwise be cut without serious impact.	We are wary about leaving the safety of the network to user groups, however the suggestion is useful. We do know where the higher priority safety concerns are and these could receive an additional cut. Clearly if any stakeholder has a view on this then we would listen.	

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	Use local knowledge by setting up a system via parish council to set priorities.	As above.	
	Raise our council tax by 1p a resident and keep the work up - I am happy to pay for services when they are done dutifully and diligently.	This is a decision for elected Members.	
	The priority for these route assessments should be changed so there is a greater emphasis on safety rather than cosmetic appearance. Visibility splays, visibility of signage and safety of those who find themselves on verge areas should be the overriding priority. Where remedial cutting is required this should be done severely to make a real difference rather than minor trimming.	This suggestion is addressed above. We have a concern that the saving would be lost in carrying out reactive maintenance however.	
<b>Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:</b>	<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Council response</b>	
	Get parents to pay for the school bus and take responsibility for their children's transport and spend good money on villages and towns we can be proud of.	This saving is being considered amongst other savings.	
<b>Suggestions for how others may help contribute:</b>	Some stakeholders and parish councils have offered assistance with identifying priority locations.		
<b>Officer conclusion as a result of the responses:</b>	The exercise has not highlighted any impacts that are not already anticipated. A reduction from three to two cuts annually is manageable; however there is a risk that there will be increased calls for reactive maintenance and the potential for road traffic accidents.		

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<b>Officer recommendation as a result of responses:</b>	Feedback has not uncovered any further issues which would prevent the council from proceeding with this proposal. It's therefore recommended to implement this proposal with no changes.		

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