

Committee	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date	13 January, 2022
Title	Grass Cutting and Road Verge Maintenance
Cabinet Member	Councillor Catrin Wager
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Purpose	Review of the County road verge maintenance

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The main purpose of road verges is to ensure clear visibility for traffic as well as provide safe pedestrian spaces in areas where there are no footways. Consequently, verges must be managed to safeguard all road users.
- 1.2 Verges are also important habitats for biodiversity - for the benefit of species such as bees and other pollinators; for flowers and other wildlife that are rapidly disappearing in the countryside, and as vital wildlife corridors that connect habitats. We aim to review our current working arrangements and address the above realistically and economically.

2. Background and Current Situation

- 2.1 Gwynedd Council, as the Highway Authority, has a legal responsibility to keep our highways accessible and safe for all users.
- 2.2 The Council also has a duty to maintain and repair the highway (within reason) and to keep the road surface free from anything which may cause obstruction or danger. Under Part 1 - Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, the Council has a legal duty to 'maintain and enhance biodiversity' where that is part of its functions and, in so doing, seek to 'promote resilience of ecosystems'. This responsibility is underpinned by the duties placed on public bodies by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to maintain long-term sustainability.
- 2.3 Responsive roadside management enables us to contribute effectively to the Welsh Government's 'Pollinator Action Plan' by providing better and more connected wildflower-rich habitats for urban and rural areas.
- 2.4 The new national code of practice for highways - 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice', sets out recommendations and good practice for cutting highway verges and advises that local authorities should develop their own local standards.
- 2.5 Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 requires all Highway Authorities to ensure that road users have a safe route along the highway. In terms of vegetation, this has been interpreted to mean that overhanging branches and grass should be cut so that forward visibility is not unnecessarily impaired.
- 2.6 In order to fulfil these duties, we need to prepare and adopt a roadside grass cutting policy that considers the needs of road users as well as the needs of wildlife.

3.0 Next Steps - How often should verges be cut?

Proposed regime for discussion.

- 3.1 Roadside verges need to be cut for the safety of users (including pedestrians) as well as the species they support. Road user safety is extremely important; consequently, visibility splays and footways need to be maintained at key locations.
- 3.2 On verges in other locations, plants should be allowed to flower and seed before cutting and animal habitats needs to be maintained. To achieve these goals, careful attention needs to be paid to the timing of mowing as well as the cutting height.
- 3.3 Throughout the County, grass will be cut twice a year, based on time, verges that are on the main road network and the minor road network. Main roads are defined as roads that are classified as A or B roads. Minor roads are those which are not classified as A or B roads.
- 3.4 Main roads will generally be cut after 01 July with works estimated to be completed by the end of July.
- 3.5 Minor roads will be cut after 01 August with work estimated to be completed by the end of September. Grass cut by tractors and mowers should be not less than 100mm in height after cutting. Other equipment (strimmers etc.) may be used at some sites where a tractor and mower cannot be used. In these circumstances, it may not be possible to cut the grass to a height of 100mm and the grass may be cut shorter. Whatever equipment is used, the height of the grass after cutting should not expose or disturb the surface soil.
- 3.6 On all roads, including A and B roads, the length of the cut section shall be no more than 1 meter wide from the kerb and of a height of not less than 100mm. In some specific locations, the cut may need to be greater than 1 m at the discretion of the relevant area office for health and safety reasons. This may mean that some roads will be cut ahead of the dates in clauses 3.4. and 3.5 above. Frequent cuts may be necessary to maintain visibility splays in some locations. Again, this will be at the discretion of the relevant area office for health and safety purposes.
- 3.7 Every effort will be made to delay cutting along the minor road network for as long as possible in order for flowers to seed and to avoid unnecessary disturbance to wildlife. The entire length of the kerbside may be cut at the discretion of the relevant area office to prevent overgrowth of scrub and to ensure forward visibility for health and safety purposes.
- 3.8 We will be returning in the Autumn with a full cut on all roads. Such a cutting regime promotes wildlife and enhances the environment for growth.
- 3.8 We will work towards a policy of collecting cut grass (where possible) when resources allow and this will be done when organising the second cut in October.