

Cllr Peter Jones
Convener, Natural Environment Scrutiny
Performance Panel

BY EMAIL

Please ask for: Councillor Mark Thomas
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Our Ref: MT/HS
Your Ref:
Date: 30 October 2020

Dear Cllr Jones

Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel – 1 September

Thank you for your letter dated 5 October 2020. Please find the response to the questions you raised below.

The Panel would encourage you to reflect on current practice, and consider developing new policy in relation to parks / grass cutting, weed and verge management, informed by necessary research, consultation and community engagement, including practice elsewhere that would help to deliver Council aims and objectives in relation to the nature conservation and biodiversity. A small joint working group of members, including a member of the Panel, and officers may be a good way forward, which engages relevant organisations such as Plantlife.

We would also ask you to consider how the gains over the last six months during the pandemic – the increased level of human engagement with the natural environment evidenced - could be maintained and enhanced.

In terms of current practices, we have already significantly reduced use of herbicide by not spraying grass around trees, lamp columns, safety barriers etc unless for a safety reason. This will result in long grass/weeds up against these features which would periodically be strimmed. It should also be noted that whilst the some may express safety concerns over the use of Glyphosate, it is a licenced product and our staff are trained in its safe use.

Existing grass cutting can be split into a number of categories:

- a. Vision splays and other safety areas cut around 9 times a year
- b. Urban verges and other amenity areas cut around 9 times a year for amenity/aesthetic reasons
- c. Rural verge areas cut once or twice a year, on a rolling programme throughout the season, with the cut grass left down

- d. Amenity areas of long grass, some with walkways cut through, are flailed once a year. This can provide improved habitat, but limited biodiversity due to the grass left down enriching soil.
- e. Uncut areas left to grow wild. These can also provide improved habitat, but again, limited biodiversity due to dominance of certain plants

If the Council wished to create areas of meadow land rich in natural wildflowers, these areas need to be maintained in a specific way. This would include a cut mid-July to end August after flowers have seeded, collection of the grass cuttings so that they don't form a thatch and enrich the soils, and a second cut before Christmas (or possibly early March) before the next year's growth. Due to the required timings of grass cuts, these areas cannot be on a rolling programme through the full season, so are therefore restricted to the areas which could be cut within the specified cutting windows. There would also need to be funding to purchase cutting & collecting equipment, and to cover the disposal costs for the arisings.

We could engage with Plantlife over the detailed approach for our climate and appropriate sites, and trials areas could be done initially, although Cabinet would need to approve the approach based on balancing the biodiversity benefits, amenity needs, and maintenance costs in relation to the Council's grassed areas.

I'd be happy for the Parks Operations Team to participate in a small Member/Officer/Plantlife Working Group on these issues, which will allow us to gain from Plantlife's experience, and allow Members to gain a better understanding of the operational issues.

For the increased use of the outdoors by our residents, during the pandemic, to be maintained and enhanced, we need to ensure that we have the optimum balance for our open spaces areas between amenity value and biodiversity.

Yours sincerely



Y Cyngorydd / Councillor Mark Thomas
Aelod Y Cabinet Dros Wasanaethau'r Amgylchedd
Cabinet Member for Environment Services



Y Cyngorydd/Councillor David Hopkins
Aelod Y Cabinet Dros Cyflawni a Gweithrediadau
Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations