

# CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

**Report to:** Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date of meeting:** 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023

**Title:** Grass Cutting

**Purpose of the report:** To provide information on the Council's Grass Cutting programme

**Reason Scrutiny have requested the information:**

For Information

## **Background**

This paper details how the Grass Cutting is managed, the rationale behind that management and the costs involved.

The main verge mow was reduced to one cut a season in 2014-15. This was dictated by cuts made to the service following a review of Council Services in that year. Recognising this the decision was made to cut in areas rather than according to road hierarchy, although there is some cross over. See Appendix 1

## **Current Situation**

The current regime is to undertake the 'safety / visibility' cuts first (junctions and sight lines) and then the early growth areas. Due to climatic conditions the growth is earlier in the south and we therefore work from south to north.

With 70% of our network made up of Class C and Unclassified roads getting to all the narrow lanes is a challenge. Obviously, resources are limited, and we can't cut all the verges at the same time, and so some will be cut earlier than others, and some later, either way there is the possibility that the timing of those cuts may attract complaints.

Our contractor has been cutting the grass for many years and attempts are made not to divert the contractor from the programmed regime as there are additional costs involved in this.

However, the programme will be altered if deemed necessary for highway safety reasons. An officer will investigate all requests for grass cutting received and assess whether there is sufficient reason to divert resources.

The main cut itself usually takes 6 weeks to complete.

A pre-season and end of season briefing meeting is also held with our contractors.

The county is split in to 10 'beats' in total, 9 county beats with the trunk road separated completely into beat 10 which is managed on behalf of NMWTRA.

See Appendix 1

The different types of cuts are as follows with approximate start and end dates. These vary from one season to the next depending on weather and resultant growth.

The Authority is constantly having to review its service level standards to reflect the decreasing budget allocation to the various highway maintenance activities.

Future priorities are likely to lead to an approach focused more on risk and road safety and less on the aesthetic appearance of grassed areas that it maintains.

### **Main Highways cut:**

The work is carried out for the Council by a contractor. This is all verge work and is carried out using a tractor mounted flail unit. This type of unit has a cutting head that can be angled or elevated to suit the ground as it changes along the road verge i.e., flat to vertical and anything in-between.

This is a safety cut rather than an amenity cut, and the finish is quite rough and is a 'cut and drop' operation. The mower head is a metre wide and cannot get to every piece of grass, especially if there is very small verge at the base of bank.

On larger verges the tractor has to run over the verge and if the ground conditions are soft, the tractor may mark or even rut the ground.

The aim is to complete cuts within a 6-week period.

The contractor includes in his rates for grass cutting the following:

1. Fuel and all consumables, including flail replacement
2. Licences, subsistence, maintenance, and any other overhead expenditure incurred in the provision of plant and operators, and provision of personal protective equipment (PPE).
3. Traffic management, including all signing, lighting, guarding, and traffic control.
4. All costs incurred in travelling to, from, between and on sites within the areas for which the tender is submitted together with all travelling before and after each period of work.
5. Hand cutting of grass around street furniture.
6. Removal of any significant quantities of cuttings deposited on either footway or carriageway.

Types of cuts required, Specification and Start dates (2023-24):

- Visibility and Sightlines: w/c 15 May, starting in the south.
- Main Cut South Beats 5-9: w/c 12 June 2023; Main Cut North Beats 1-4: w/c 03 July 2023.

- The C roads have two swathes cuts this year and U roads one. This alternates biannually between C roads and U/C routes.
- Amenity cuts, banks/inclines within urban areas, carried out as part of main cut because of the machinery used.
- Ystwyth and Llanerchaeron Cycle Ways: w/c 17 July 2023.
- Rheidol Cycle Ways and the link to Penparcau are cut by the Grounds Maintenance Team and are scheduled for w/c 17 July 2023.

The amenity cut specification has been changed for 2023-24 in order to try and generate more urban wildflower areas. The aim is to improve all of the wildflower reserves, and to have a list of all the areas which will include the roadside reserves.

The number of sites in rural areas is expected to stay the same, with an increase in the number of urban sites. Moving forward there will be site specific habitat management. This change is driven by the need to reduce our impact upon the environment and to do things differently.

Over the next couple of years, this change in the mowing will improve the diverse range of flora and fauna within our urban green estate.

### **Amenity Grass cutting:**

This cut is done in-house by the Grounds Maintenance team with smaller ride-on machines which are either flails or rotary with the ability to collect.

Collecting has environmental and safety benefits on amenity grass. It removes litter and arisings, meaning less debris is left to block gutters and pose a fire risk during hot periods during the summer months.

Being smaller machines, they can reach places a large tractor cannot.

408 separate amenity grass sites are managed, including 27 new developing wildflower sites and 17 Historical roadside reserves which are under review.

63 sites are managed on behalf of NMWTRA.

There are 24 sites that are maintained to a higher spec/frequency, and these include schools, cemeteries and park areas such as the Castle grounds and Victoria Gardens

See Appendix 1

### **Standard actions – 4 cuts per season.**

Grassed areas will be walked prior to each cut to remove large items of rubbish and any build-up of detritus, and to locate fixed items such as manhole covers etc. that could damage the machine during cutting.

All areas are treated as a cut and lift site, this means all arisings will be collected and removed to an agreed disposal site. The height of cut will be set between 50-75mm.

### *Cut 1*

This cut will commence at the start of April and will take until the middle of May to complete. This cut will be classed as a safety cut and will comprise of 1m wide cut against a kerb line or footpath running against the grass area.

A grassed area that is between 2 and 3m wide is likely to receive a full area cut as not to leave a small piece of uncut grass. Each area will be assessed individually on its size and shape.

### *Cut 2*

As cut 1 but will commence mid-May until the end of June.

### *Cut 3*

As cut 1 but will commence July the until end of September.

### *Cut 4*

Will commence mid-August until late September.

This cut will be a full cut and collect of the area.

## **Urban Wildflower Areas:**

### **Standard actions – 3 cuts per season**

Grassed areas will be walked prior to each cut to remove large items and build ups of detritus from the sward and to identify manhole covers etc. All areas are treated as a cut and lift site, this means all arisings will be collected and removed to an agreed disposal site. The height of cut will be set between 75-100mm.

### *Cut 1*

This cut will commence at the start of April and will take until the middle of May to complete. This cut will be classed as a safety cut and will comprise of 1m wide cut against a kerb line or footpath running against the grass area.

A grassed area that is between 2 and 3m wide is likely to receive a full area cut as not to leave a small piece of uncut grass. Each area will be assessed individually on its size and shape.

### *Cut 2*

As cut 1 but will commence mid-May until the end of June.

### *Cut 3*

As cut 1 but will commence July the until end of September.

NMWTRA's specification is the same CCC's in terms of cut numbers but there is a difference in start dates for the cuts with the season starting in March

## **Roadside Reserves:**

Grassed areas will be walked prior to each cut to remove large items and build ups of detritus from the sward and to identify manhole covers etc. All areas are treated as a cut and lift site, this means all arisings will be collected removed to an agreed disposal site. The height of cut will be set between 75-100mm.

### Roadside Verge Nature Reserves

Site 1: U1001 - Eglwys Fach

A hay meadow-type verge with specific botanical interest.

Site 2: C1040 - Llanilar

Very mixed site which has been well characterised, and many botanical records are held making this a valuable site for continuity.

Site 3: C1076 - Ysbyty Ystwyth

The only existing upland type of verge in the RVNR programme and includes specific botanical interest and generally heathy communities.

Site 4: A485 - Tregaron

Limited botanical interest at the beginning of the programme, incorporated in order to determine the beneficial effects of the scheme on a species-poor verge.

Site 5: C1071 - Betws BledrwsROAD

Woodland-type verge with lots of bluebells.

Site 6: Private Road - Aberarth common

Moderate botanical value at start of scheme, should improve with sympathetic management.

Site 7: U1555 - Ciliau Aeron

Species-rich site of a woodland type.

Site 8: U5180 - Oakford

Good damp flush habitat and which has been relatively undisturbed.

Site 9: A486 - Post Bach - Synod Inn

Species rich and a good example of a meadow type reserve with good spring violets.

Site 10: C1180 - Cwmttydu

Woodland type of verge with good spring–early summer flora.

Site 11: Llyn y Fran - Llandysul

Aesthetically attractive and species rich.

Site 12: C1150 – Capel Dewi, Llandysul

Aesthetically attractive and species rich.

Site 13: C1034 – Rhyd-y-Gwin, Llanfarian

Presence of Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis purpurella*)

Site 14: A485 - Llanilar  
Dominance of Wild Garlic in the verge.

*Cut 1*

Commence late September until late October.

These sites are currently under a review to assess their environmental value, once completed it is hoped that many of the site can be brought into the same management regime as the Urban wildflower areas.

**Service costs: -**

Highways Verge & Amenity Cut - £ 285,000

Grounds Maintenance - £176,000

**Wellbeing of Future Generations:**

**Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why.**

No. This report is for information only

**Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:**

**Long term:** Report is for information only

**Collaboration:** Report is for information only

**Involvement:** Report is for information only

**Prevention:** Report is for information only

**Integration:** Report is for information only

**Recommendation(s):**

N/A, paper is for information only.

**Reasons for decision:**

N/A, paper is for information only.






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Manager

**Date of Report:** 18/12/2023

**Acronyms:**

## Appendix 1

2014-15 budget reduction	 Cabinet report on grounds maintenanc		
2023 verge cutting plans & guidance	 Grass Cutting Areas North. Split 25-01-22	 Grass Cutting Areas South Split 25-01-22	 verge-hedge cutting guidance.doc
2023 amenity cut locations	 2023-24 Highway Data.docx.xlsx		