

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE**RESULTS OF THE 'REDUCED GRASS CUTTING FREQUENCIES FOR RURAL
ROADS' TRIAL****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Members with the results of the 'reduced grass cutting frequency for rural roads' trial which took place in 2018.
2. To seek approval from Members to extend the duration of the trial for a further year.

Information**Background**

3. The 'reduced grass cutting frequency for rural roads' trial was approved by the Communities and Place Committee on the 9th of April 2018. The report presented at that time also gave an undertaking to produce a further report to provide Members with details about the trial's results.
4. The trial was limited in scope and involved changing the grass cutting frequency of rural verges on roads with a speed limit of 50 mph or more - *at a maximum of six locations* - from twice to once per year. The duration of the trial was limited to one year. The cutting frequencies for any visibility splays or verges adjacent footways within the trial sites has remained unchanged.
5. The trial was supported and endorsed by the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. Prior to commencement the potential trial sites were reviewed by Via EM Ltd.'s District Managers who confirmed they had no safety concerns about any of the locations. As part of the trial Via EM Ltd. co-ordinated with Bassetlaw District Council about their litter picking arrangements to ensure this work was carried out in advance of the grass being cut.

Trial Site Locations

6. The locations of the trial sites were as follows:

Newton Parish -	East Bridgford Road
	Main Street
	Newton Lane
Misson Parish -	Top Road

Results of the Trial

7. The impact of reduced grass cutting frequencies upon the safety of the trial sites was assessed throughout the course of 2018 however, no safety concerns were identified.
8. In total the trial generated approximately £150 of savings. The reason the savings were not greater is that two visits were still required at each location in order to cut the vision splays for safety reasons therefore, the only savings that could be realised were the time saved by not undertaking a single width cut during one of those visits.
9. If the reduced grass cutting frequencies were to be introduced elsewhere in the county the time saved would depend upon the nature of each road, the ease of access, and also the number of vision splays & footways along each length of road.
10. Via EM Ltd. undertook an ecological survey to try and establish whether the trial had resulted in any environmental improvements however, the exceptionally hot and dry weather experienced during the summer of 2018 inhibited the colonisation of the verges at the trial sites by any new species and stunted the growth of the vegetation which already existed. It should be noted that the summer of 2018 was not representative of the weather conditions normally experienced in Nottinghamshire.
11. Via EM Ltd.'s Liaison Team has reported that no complaints were received from either the Parish Councils or the public about the trial sites. One enquiry was received which related to the date on which a trial site was programmed to be cut, this was answered to the customers satisfaction and no further actions were required.
12. The unusually hot and dry conditions experienced in 2018 made it impossible to comment upon the ecological merits of reducing the frequency of rural grass cutting therefore it is proposed to extend the duration of the trial for a further year.
13. A further report will be brought at the end of the 2019 growing season which will present the results of the extended trial.

Other Options Considered

14. Grass cutting at trial sites could be returned to its original frequency however, this would prevent an adequate assessment being made of ecological benefits of the reduced grass cutting regime.
15. The reduced grass cutting frequencies undertaken at the trial sites could be extended elsewhere however, this report does not recommend that approach because the weather conditions experienced during 2018 were not representative of the weather conditions generally experienced in Nottinghamshire making it impossible to adequately assess the public's reaction to the trials, their ecological impact or their effect upon the safety of the network.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

16. The unusually hot and dry weather conditions experienced during the summer of 2018 has prevented an adequate assessment of the impacts of the reduced grass cutting frequency for rural roads being made.
17. It is anticipated that the proposed extension of one year will allow the trial to take place in weather conditions which are more commonly experienced in Nottinghamshire.
18. It is good practise to review the County Council's approach to highway maintenance, particularly if there are ecological or cost saving benefits.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

20. The extended trials may result in some minor saving being achieved however, the main benefits of the trials are expected to be ecological in nature.

Implications for Service Users

21. Service Users travelling along the roads included in the trial will encounter verges with longer and more diverse foliage.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

22. The proposed less intensive management regime will allow broadleaved plants the opportunity to flower and, crucially, set seed. There will be an increased amount of pollen and nectar source for insects.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) It is recommended that the Committee grants approval for the 'reduced grass cutting frequency for rural roads' trial to be extended for a further year to establish whether any ecological benefits can be achieved.

Adrian Smith
Corporate Director, Place

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Martin Carnaffin, Contract Manager, Tel: 0115 9774229

Constitutional Comments [LW 23/01/2019]

23. Communities and Place Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report.

Financial Comments [SES 23/01/2019]

24. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- Bingham West – Councillor Neil Clarke
- Misterton – Councillor Tracey Taylor