

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

1. To seek approval to undertake a trial - at a maximum of six locations - to establish whether the reduction of grass cutting frequencies on rural roads, without footways and with a speed limit of 50 mph or more to one cut per year delivers any ecological or economic benefits. The duration of the proposed trial is one growing season. It is proposed that a subsequent report will be presented to committee on the outcomes of the trial.

Information

2. The current verge cutting frequency for rural roads without footways is generally a single swath cut (i.e. the length of a single cutting blade which can be up to 1.2 metres) undertaken twice per year however, in every third year the final cut takes in the full width of the verge.
3. The cutting frequencies for any visibility splays or verges adjacent footways within the trial sites will remain unchanged and no changes are proposed to the full width cut which occurs every third year.
4. The locations of the trial sites are being determined currently. The shortlist was prepared collaboratively with Nick Crouch (Nottinghamshire County Council's Nature Conservation Leader) and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. The proposed trial sites have been reviewed by Via EM Ltd's District Managers who have confirmed they have no safety concerns about any of the locations. Approximately half of the sites have been proposed by Parish Councils.
5. Members whose Divisions will include one of the trial sites will be contacted once these locations have been determined.
6. Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust supports the proposed trial and have provided their endorsement. The Trust has also granted permission for the County Council and Via EM Ltd to use their logo and any of their materials when liaising with other parties about this proposal.
7. Further liaison with the District and Parish Councils will take place about this matter once the locations of trial sites have been determined.
8. Via EM Ltd will co-ordinate with the District Councils about litter picking arrangements prior to commencing works at the trial sites, operatives will also be instructed to remove any large items of rubbish prior to cutting. It is anticipated that the improved programming arrangements recently introduced by Via EM Ltd will greatly assist joint working arrangements with the District Councils.

9. A further report will be brought at the end of the growing season which will present an analysis of the trial.
10. It is proposed to use the following criteria to assess whether the trial sites have been successful will be as follows:
- An assessment of any safety concerns which arose during the trials.
 - The identification of any savings that have been achieved.
 - The identification of any ecological benefits that have been achieved.
 - A review of the public's reactions to the trials.
 - A review of any concerns raised by Parish and District Councils.
 - A review of any feedback received by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust.
 - Any other relevant matters which arise over the course of the trials.
11. The trial sites will be monitored through the growing season to ensure that the reduced grass cutting frequency does not compromise safety. If safety concerns are identified the trial sites will immediately revert back to their original cutting frequencies.

Other Options Considered

12. The only other option considered is to leave the grass cutting frequencies for rural roads without footways unchanged however, if the proposed trials are not undertaken it will be impossible to establish whether any savings or ecological enhancements are achievable

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

13. 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

14. 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

15. There are no direct financial implications from the trial. The trial will identify if there are future cost savings.

Implications for Service Users

16. 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

17. 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/S

It is recommended that:

- 1) The Committee grants approval for the proposed trial of reduced grasscutting frequencies on selected rural roads with speed limits of 50 mph or more - at up to a maximum of six locations – to establish whether any ecological or economic 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 [SLB 23/03/2018]

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

Financial Comments [RWK 22/03/2018]

19. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 15 of the 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

- All