

**Lancashire Local – Lancaster District**  
Meeting to be held on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2008

**Part I - Item No. 13**

Electoral Divisions affected:  
All

**Highway Grounds Maintenance Service Overview**

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**Executive Summary**

The report provides members with an overview of the highway grounds maintenance service and identifies the role of Lancashire Local in respect of highway maintenance.

**Decision Required**

That the report be noted.

**Background**

The County Council is the highway authority for the administrative area of Lancashire, and has a range of statutory duties and powers arising from the Highways Act 1980 and other legislation.

The prime duty is to maintain the adopted local highway network. This duty includes the maintenance of highway verges, hedges and trees. Horticultural maintenance is undertaken to assist in the improvement of the environment by implementing a management strategy which fulfils safety requirements but is compatible with wildlife conservation.

The policy and standards governing this maintenance work are summarised below.

**Grass cutting:**

The practice for grass cutting on rural roads, defined as roads with speed limits in excess of 40 mph is as follows:

- i. Where the verge is wider than 3 metres it is to be managed in three zones:

- Zone A      The zone adjacent to the carriageway is the safety swathe and a 1 metre width should be cut twice a year. A third cut may be required, dependent on rate of growth, on A and B roads.
- Zone C      A 1 metre zone at the rear of the verge is to be left uncut and undisturbed apart from a nominal amount of winter thinning and coppicing.
- Zone B      The intervening zone is the mid verge of variable width, and is to receive a single annual cut in August/September (concurrent with the 2nd safety swathe cut).
- ii.      Where the verge is less than 3 metres, there should be a safety swathe (Zone A). The remainder of the verge being Zone C. There is no mid verge.
- iii.      Where there is a verge between the carriageway and footway it should be managed as follows:
- a)      The width is 2 metres or less – the safety swathe should be extended to the full width of the intervening verge. A 600mm wide safety swathe should be cut at the rear of the footway.
- b)      The width is over 2 metres – the safety swathe adjacent to the carriageway should be 1 metre. A 600mm safety swathe should be cut at both sides of the footway. The remaining intervening verge is mid verge (Zone B). The remaining verge beyond the safety swathe at the rear of the footway is Zone C.
- iv.      Sight lines at junctions and on the inside of bends should be cut as described for the safety swathe.
- (Note: All cuttings to be left in-situ.)
- v.      Where the verge includes rare or unusual species or has a rich diversity of plants then a particular management prescription may be required. These specific management regimes override the above standards.

Rural verge maintenance includes around 40 km of A class swath cutting, 18.8 km of A class dual carriageway swath cutting, 253.1km of swath cutting on other roads, 6,000sq.m of sight lines on A class roads and 6,000sq.m of sight line cutting on other roads.

The practice for grass cuttings on Urban Roads, defined as roads with speed limits 40 mph or less is set out below:

In urban areas there is a clear need for highway grass to be kept shorter than about 150mm for safety reasons as distinct from any local amenity consideration.

Furthermore long grass can conceal debris which can become a safety problem if left unattended. Five cuts a year is normally required to achieve these standards,

and in Lancaster this has been the norm for all areas maintained by the County Council. All cuts are 'cut and lift'.

In the urban core of Lancaster district (Lancaster, Morecambe, Heysham and the Overton peninsula) the City Council carries out grounds maintenance on behalf of the County Council under the residual agreement.

Outside the urban core, some Parish Councils currently maintain some of the verges within their Parishes on behalf of the County Council under local agreements. The general requirement is that the verges are maintained to the minimum standard to comply with the County practice. Currently a contribution from the County Council is given to participating Parishes equal to the cost that would be incurred if the County Council's contractor undertook the work in accordance with County practice, that is, the cost of cutting and lifting five times a year.

The schedule below shows the areas currently maintained as urban verges and also highlights those areas undertaken by Parish Councils.

The area of urban verges maintained by Lancaster City Council direct is 94,500sq.m

The areas of urban verges maintained by Parish Councils are:

<b>Parish</b>	<b>Sq.m</b>
Caton with Littledale	3531
Cockerham	1300
Slyne with Hest	4565
Warton	2736
Wennington	883
Yealand Redmayne	1108
Halton	3144
Hornby	2586
Nether Kellet	2207
Quernmore	1200

### **Weed Treatment:**

Herbicides may only be used in the following circumstances:

- a) Following the cutting of the following noxious weeds: Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed.
- b) To eliminate weeds and control growth where this is causing damage to the fabric of the highway or causing a safety hazard.

Ragwort is generally controlled by hand pulling. Weed treatment to highway channels and hardened areas of verge and footway is by spraying with total weed killer. This is usually limited to two treatments, but, in recent years, Lancashire Local – Lancaster District has provided an additional budget to meet the cost of a third weed treatment.

### **Hedge, trees and planted shrub areas:**

In the rare circumstances where it is the responsibility of the Highway Authority, trimming of seasonal growth should be carried out as necessary for safety purposes only. In Lancaster this is generally either once or twice a year and relates to only a few locations.

The UK Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management recommends that all highway trees should ideally have an arboricultural inspection at least every 5 years. The County Council does not presently undertake scheduled arboricultural inspections of highway trees, but a review of its policies for tree inspections is included in the Highway Maintenance Strategy and Improvement Plan. Highway trees are pruned as required following safety inspections or complaints. Trees may be removed where required due to disease, instability or unsuitability of location following safety inspection or complaint.

Shrubberies which are the responsibility of the Highway Authority are maintained until established and thereafter pruned for visibility only, or where necessary.

### **Residual Agreements:**

The County Council's financial arrangements with other districts is as follows:

Grass cutting, weed treatment and tree/hedge maintenance are 3 of up to 17 services affecting the highway that are the subject of voluntary Residual Agreements between the County Council and the 12 district councils in Lancashire. The following table shows the current district involvement in these grounds maintenance services:

District	Grass Cutting	Weed Treatment	Tree/Hedge Maintenance
Lancaster	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wyre	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fylde	No	No	No
Preston	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Ribble	Yes	Yes	No
Chorley	Yes	Yes	Yes
West Lancashire	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hyndburn	Yes	Yes	Yes
Burnley	Yes	No	Yes
Pendle	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ribble Valley	No	No	No
Rossendale	No	No	No
Total	9	8	8

The current residual agreements expire in July 2009 and are currently under review.

