



London Borough of Enfield

Report Title	Verge maintenance
Report to	Environment Forum
Date of Meeting	18 th September 2023
Cabinet Member	Councillor Anyanwu
Executive Director / Director	Simon Pollock, Exec Director, and Cheryl Heedon, interim director of Parks, Leisure, and Culture
Report Author	Marcus Harvey
Ward(s) affected	All
Classification	<i>Part 1 Public</i>

Purpose of Report

1. Provide an update on the verge maintenance and associated tasks completed by the Parks and Open Spaces service. The report provides detail on the 'as-is' of the service and future environmental options for verge maintenance.

Main Considerations for the Panel

2. Grass cutting periods are increasing in duration, with winters and autumn being warmer, grass growth occurs at an increased frequency. The issue presented by an extended period of growth at either the opening or closure of the grass cutting schedule, is that while the grass is growing the ground fails to provide a suitable surface for machinery and the undertaking of the grass cutting process.

The summer months of 2023 have been significantly impacted by rain, yet at times continually warm providing an ideal growing environment for all aspects of maintenance. Like the extended periods of grass growth, this presents challenges for the operational team.

The increased grass growth creates a scenario where the grass is maintained and the arisings (clipping's) caused by the activity are left, this can lead to poor aesthetics and can also lead to change in nutrient content potentially impacting on future growth rates and appearance.

Background and Options

3. Verge maintenance for the borough returned to an in-house provision in 2021 from external provision. This decision provide growth to the Parks and Open Spaces service and provided local employment.

The maintenance operates on postcode and route optimisation, aligning with the other Park Operations services performing front-line tasks. Pymmes Park depot serving the eastern corridor and Trent Park serving the western corridor. In 2022, Trent Park depot was subject to three separate burglaries, resulting in the western corridor service operating from Pymmes for the duration of the 2022 grass cutting season. This displacement created extended travel times, which had a direct impact on work schedules. This has since been resolved and in May 2023, and we returned to operate from both depot locations.

There are several tasks linked to verge maintenance which include general litter collection, grass cutting, and edging. Equally, verges can contain shrubs and hedges, which are specified for two maintenance visits per year. Shrub / hedge maintenance is limited by the nesting season via legislation within the Countryside act, March – September. During this period unless there are Health and Safety issues, such as impeded sight lines, we are unable to cut back.

Rural roads are included in the maintenance programme for the highways (verge), due to the nature of speed limits, they require traffic management controls, ensuring public and staff safety. This maintenance predominantly

includes both hedge and ditch maintenance, again completed outside of nesting season. These works are performed collaboratively with colleagues in street scene, allowing for both a deep litter clearance and gully maintenance.

The overall area for highway verges within the borough is circa 465 linear kilometres. Industry practice is not to collect grass cuttings from location of activity, this requires alternative machinery, and generates waste.

Options are being considered regarding the introduction of areas of our highway maintenance verges into the broader rewilding / biodiversity network. Lambeth Council has successfully undertaken this approach known as 'Bee roads' introducing pollinators and improved biodiversity. Initial thoughts navigate around the arterial roads into the borough & roads which lead into the broader rewilding projects.

Aligning schedules with colleagues in street scene, to allow for any arisings due to increased growth rates are included in the path / road sweeping activities, where possible to assist in appearance.

The service is currently undertaking a feasibility study with Natural England in relation to land management and income generation from external funding to support best practice. The stewardship operates based on parcels of land, their characteristics, and the best method of maintenance. A section of the feasibility study is to review highway hedge maintenance, and look at alternative methods such as layering hedges, to allow for a developed hedgerow with a reduced maintenance schedule.

Relevance to Council Plans and Strategies

4. The above maintenance aligns to the clean and green commitment identified within the Council Plan.

The maintenance aligns with the commitment identified within the Council's Blue and Green infrastructure strategy, providing accessible and good standard green assets and open space

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Background Papers

(Note: Please list here all the documents which have been relied on in the preparation of this report, but which are not appended to it)

Departmental reference number, if relevant: