

Wiltshire Council mowing policy

Briefing Note No. 21-11

Services: Highways, Street Scene
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Grass cutting and wildflower growth are always a popular topic at this time of the year, and for good reason. With the recent wet weather and then the warm spell, we have had perfect conditions for prolific plant growth, and this can affect our amenity areas and the safety of our highways.

As always, we need to balance the need to ensure that our highways are managed safely with the need to protect our wild spaces and to encourage wildlife, particularly insects.

With this in mind, we periodically review the recommendations for grounds maintenance, taking into account feedback from local communities, to establish how it can be improved to encourage more flora and fauna into amenity areas while keeping highways safe – particularly at junctions, roundabout and bends. Currently the amenity maintenance is based on keeping grass cut regularly, while in rural areas, cutting is based on safety – the cutting schedules for these areas are listed below.

Rural highway verge mowing

This year we have modified our approach to mowing our rural roads, in recognition that these verges can provide a significant environmental benefit. Historically we carried out one single cut of the entire rural network through May and June. This year we started cutting visibility splays on junctions and some bends, along with some of the particularly narrow lanes in the middle of May. The remaining verges will be left uncut until September. Leaving these areas much later to cut will enable wildflowers to set seed and spread more widely in the verge.

In addition to this we have also been holding a pilot on the A350, where we have been ‘cutting and collecting grass’. We have identified areas that are able to utilise a rear mounted collector flail. This then impoverishes the soil and creates conditions that encourage the growth of wildflowers. Normally grass cuttings remain in situ, creating a nutrient-rich environment that wildflowers do not prosper in.

Progress on our current mowing program has been good; we have been utilising ten tractor flails across the county and we are anticipating that we should have completed the cut by 21 June. Following this, any issues reported to us will be investigated and revisited if necessary.



Highway verge cutting to enable wildflowers to thrive

Urban grass cutting

We mow the grass in urban areas regularly, but the frequency of mowing depends on the area and conditions. Cutting is deferred in very wet or frosty weather, and when it is very dry for a prolonged period, we may also suspend cutting so we can direct resources into other allocated works.

We are currently running some wildflower trials to enable wildlife to thrive in these areas. As with highways verge mowing, we 'cut and collect' in these areas to create better conditions for wildflowers to thrive. Current wildflower trials are only undertaken in large open spaces with good access for the tractor, relatively flat geography with appropriate locations for onsite composting.



Heathlands wildflower meadow in Warminster

The grass cutting schedule is as follows:

Urban mowing (Generally within 30mph zones)			
Area	Expected mowing season	Expected frequency of cut	Type of mow
General grass areas	Second week March - end of October	Monthly	Cuttings to be as flown
Environmental cut	One cut during March, July and September	N/A	Cuttings to be as flown
Wildflower/ conservation areas	A cut will take place the last fortnight of March and commence again in the last two weeks of September.	N/A	Cuttings to be collected and removed from site
Rural mowing (Generally outside of 30mph zones)			
Visibility splays and narrow lanes	May/June	Scheduled annual cut and then reactive to issues as they arise	Tractor flail – cuttings flown
Non-visibility verges	September/October	Scheduled annual cut	Tractor flail – cuttings flown
Pilot wildflower areas	September/October	Scheduled annual cut	Tractor flail – cuttings collected and disposed of in situ
Protected verges	September/October	Scheduled annual cut. Generally September but may differ, depending on plants that have been identified as being of ecological value	Tractor flail – cuttings collected and disposed of in situ

Areas of grass where bulbs have been naturalised are not cut for a minimum of eight weeks after flowering.