

Introduction from Cllr Paul Rone & BBLP's Andy Williams

The challenge of a reduced budget means that the Council and BBLP have prioritised all matters of safety. Therefore Herefordshire's road network will see a huge investment of nearly £35m, for much needed repairs, including potholes, resurfacing and drainage.

Road repairs, traffic control, flood risk, street lighting and winter maintenance all have been categorised as having the greatest demand on the budget, and Herefordshire Council has already warned that because of budget cuts, grass cutting has to be reduced from seven cuts a year to three in the county's parks and public areas, while in some rural areas the grass will be left untouched.

However it has been confirmed that any safety cuts required for grass verges or trees affecting motorists' visibility is considered a priority task.

Safety cuts take place around road junctions where visibility for motorists and pedestrians is paramount. These areas of land are known as visibility splays and form part of public highways, providing a safe view of oncoming traffic for all road users, whether motorists, cyclists or pedestrians. It is essential that we keep these areas tidy to provide sight lines for everyone using our roads.

For more information please see attached Q&A. Grass cutting schedules, a grass cutting guide, are available on:

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/grass-cutting

In this newsletter

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- Grass cutting Q & A

Highways Maintenance Programme

Work has started on the £40 million maintenance programme on essential road repairs over the next two years. That figure includes an investment of £20 million.

It is also anticipated that we will be claiming 3.5 million on the Belwin scheme.

Road safety is a key priority and the money is focused on unclassified and C roads.

Please see attached spreadsheet for next week's investment scheme works.

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Self Help Guidance for Parish Councils

As identified in our approach to managing open spaces we want to encourage Parishes and their communities to take pride in the appearance and safety of their neighbourhood. There are a number of ways they can do this:

- a. You can set up a Lengthsman Scheme recruiting a suitable person to deliver various minor maintenance activities, such as clearing drains and ditches which can also cover grass cutting activities. For more information please email your locality steward or herefordshireparishes@bblivingplaces.com
- b. Public spaces - consider setting up a community group, liaising with a Housing Association or Britain in Bloom groups.
- c. Employ someone to do the work but remember that you are responsible for ensuring their competence and that the right insurances are in place.
- d. Planting – if you're thinking of planting up highway land or grass verges, you will need a cultivation licence. There are a number of restrictions including height of plants and you would have to continue maintaining the area for the duration of the licence. For more information, please email your locality steward or herefordshireparishes@bblivingplaces.com
- e. Pesticides - if you must use these, you must take full responsibility for their safe use.
- f. If you're interested in taking on the management of a public space, then please contact Herefordshire Council who can provide further information, guidance and advice.

Contact Us

Parish Councils

Parish clerks please use: herefordshireparishes@bblivingplaces.com

We always endeavour to reply to all messages as promptly as possible (often within 3-5 days), *but there may be occasions when due to a high level of requests, it may take up to ten working days for us to get back to you.*

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Lengthsman Scheme

The role that Herefordshire Council will play in the management of Green Spaces has had to change. It makes sense for us to focus our activities on cutting the grass that if left to grow will cause a definite hazard. It is increasingly obvious that others are better placed to maintain many other places throughout the County. One of the ways that we do provide the support that enables routine maintenance work to be delivered locally is the Parish Lengthsman scheme. We actively encourage all Town and Parish Councils to consider joining the Parish Councils already in this scheme as a means of enabling them to work alongside us in maintaining the character of the places that we enjoy on a daily basis.

Details of this scheme are available on our website:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-highways/maintenance/lengthsman-scheme?q=lengthman&type=suggestedpage>

For more information email us:

herefordshireparishes@bblivingplaces.com

Locality Working – The Role of Locality Stewards

The role of the Locality Stewards is to engage with the Herefordshire community, working alongside elected members (Parish and Ward Councillors). To understand and prioritise the needs of the community and combined with knowledge of the condition of the public realm, inform the service to maximise customer satisfaction and ensure public funds are spent in the best possible way. Stewards provide an important link between the Council, the service and the community, communicating planned works and inspecting the state of the public realm.

What should you expect from your locality steward?

- Stewards will regularly meet with Ward and Parish Councillors/Clerks, conducting Ward walks, understanding local priorities and capturing defects.
- Where deemed appropriate, Stewards will engage with other interested parties and key stakeholders to improve provision of the service.
- Stewards will respond to emergency calls, aiming to respond within 2 hours.
- Stewards will undertake frequent safety inspection of the Public Realm.
- Stewards will conduct inspections in response to customer enquiries.
- Stewards will work closely with the operations team to prioritise service provision to meet community needs, address emergencies and respond to enquiries.
- Stewards will provide information about the service, communicate planned works and follow up on enquiries to ensure a resolution.

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Although Locality Stewards will interact with members of the public during the course of their work, it is not their role to routinely take requests for service directly via customer calls or via other media. The public should continue to be directed to the Council's website for online defect reporting or the customer service telephone line. The Stewards will not be able to perform their role effectively if their Contact details are passed straight to the public.

Recruiting an Effective Team:

The Locality Team are managed by the Locality Manager; Alasdair MacDonald. The team will consist of 13 stewards at full capacity. As this is a new role, a programme of recruitment has been initiated. Recruitment of the team is following a rigorous approach to ensure that a high quality service can be provided. To date:

- 4 Locality Stewards have been recruited (these are currently covering 2 localities each)
- 7 offers have been made to candidates, with 2 new Stewards confirmed as starting in June.

We aim to have all roles filled by the end of August. During this process of recruitment, we are relying heavily on the Stewards in post to cover a wide area. As such, we will not always be able to respond as quickly or engage as widely as we would like. Your patience during the recruitment is very much appreciated.

How to get in contact with your steward:

Herefordshire is split up into nine Localities, which will be serviced by the 13 Locality Stewards, as follows:

Bromyard – 1 Steward	Golden Valley – 1 Steward	Hereford – 3 Stewards
Kington – 1 Steward	Ledbury – 1 Steward	Leominster – 2 Stewards
Mortimer – 1 Steward	Ross-On-Wye – 2 Stewards	Weobley – 1 Steward

The contact details for the current Stewards are:

- Bromyard & Mortimer – Rachel Dixon – Rachel.dixon@bblivingplaces.com, 07816 062994
- Leominster & Weobley – Phil Pankhurst – Philip.pankhurst@bblivingplaces.com, 07816 064103
- Kington & Golden Valley – Vince Playdon – Vince.playdon@bblivingplaces.com, 07816 064116
- Hereford City – Mike Gill – Mike.gill@bblivingplaces.com, 07816 064054
- Ledbury & Ross-on-Wye – Locality Steward Starting 16th June

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Grass Cutting – Q & A

1. Why are you not cutting the grass as often?

Herefordshire Council has had to make savings of £33M but at the same time ensuring it maintains its priority services for the people of Herefordshire. Some tough decisions have had to be made about where the cuts fall.

Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) are contracted to deliver Public Realm Services. These are important services such as roads, street lighting, cleansing and maintenance of public spaces. Safety is the highest priority and more than £34M will be invested in much needed improvement in the condition of the county's highway network this year, the largest single investment for decades. This investment is Capital funding and other services have had to be tailored to meet the available Revenue budget, so all grass cutting will be reduced, typically from around seven cuts to three cuts a year. We want to encourage communities to help us by keeping their neighbourhoods tidy.

2. Why is the quality of the first grass cut sometimes poor?

The first grass cut can sometimes leave a slightly messy result as the grass will have been longer than usual so it may be difficult to achieve a good finish the first time.

3. I am paying more council tax – this doesn't seem fair when you cut back on services?

Since September 2013 BBLP have been working in partnership with Herefordshire Council to deliver a variety of public services including road repairs, winter maintenance, street cleansing and the care of public spaces and they have to spend the money wisely.

Herefordshire Council and BBLP have made safety their priority for all the work they carry out. Herefordshire's road network will see an additional investment of £20M over this year and next. This investment is in addition to approximately £6.5M that we have received to date from the Government to address the damage caused by severe weather over the winter. This is Capital expenditure and funds come predominantly from Central Government Grants. Your Council Tax is used to support our Revenue budgets. Revenue budgets are also supported by a grant from Government and it is the Revenue budgets that must be used to pay for grass cutting, street cleaning and many other Council services. Our savings must be made from our Revenue budgets and unfortunately other areas of work, such as grounds maintenance, have had to be reduced.

4. Can I cut the grass by my house?

Yes of course, but for your own safety, we suggest you only do this in residential areas where traffic volumes and speeds are low. For your own safety, we recommend that you carry out a thorough inspection before you start, removing any glass, litter and branches; ensure your equipment is in good working order and wear appropriate protective clothing. We are aware that there may be concerns around liability should an

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incident occur as a result of your actions. Whilst this is possible the likelihood is minimal but we would not want to discourage individuals from taking it upon themselves to cut the grass on public open spaces and highway verges (please see 'Advice on Litigation Arising from Self Help' at the end of this article).

5. What is happening with my local play areas regarding cutting?

Cutting the grass in formal play areas will be maintained but more informal play sites or kick about areas are being reduced from seven to three cuts per year. You can find out where and when the work is being carried out by visiting www.herefordshire.gov.uk/grass-cutting

Any formal sports pitches (rather than general kick about areas) will have the normal cutting service to allow for scheduled matches to be played as usual.

Other open spaces around sports pitches and play areas will be left but walkways will be maintained to enable the spaces to be used.

6. Dog fouling in the long grass is getting worse – what can I do?

Allowing your dog to foul in a public place and not to remove the mess is illegal and can lead to fines of up to £1,000. We are encouraging dog owners to take their responsibilities seriously and clear up after their pets. Our message is to “bag it and bin it”.

7. What can I do to improve my local open space/play area?

In the first instance, please contact your Parish Council or local Councillor who will know about any existing groups who are helping to make a difference in your area. For example, there may be a Lengthsman's Scheme in place (an individual employed by a Parish to do minor maintenance works in the Parish), and they might take on some extra work if requested by the Parish.

Our Locality Stewards will also be working with local Parishes to encourage the community to help maintain their area.

If there's not already a community group, consider setting one up.

8. Can we use your mowing equipment?

Unfortunately this is not possible as all of our equipment is fully utilised.

9. I have a sit on mower – can I use that on play areas?

Yes providing you follow all safety instructions for your particular machine. For your own safety, we recommend that you carry out a thorough inspection before you start, removing any glass, litter and branches; ensure your equipment is in good working order and wear appropriate protective clothing.

10. What should we do with the grass cuttings?

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Our advice is to 'cut and drop' rather than 'cut and collect' so cut without the collection box on your mower if possible. If you do need to 'cut and collect' please stockpile cuttings neatly in an appropriate area, away from walkways.

11. How often will you be cutting verges?

Please visit www.herefordshire.gov.uk/grass-cutting where you can find out where and when the verge cutting in your neighbourhood will take place.

12. What are safety cuts?

Safety cuts take place around road junctions and other key locations where visibility for motorists and pedestrians is paramount. These areas of land are known as visibility splays and provide a safe view of oncoming traffic for all road users, whether motorists, cyclists or pedestrians. It is important that we keep these sight lines clear for everyone using our roads.

Safety cuts also take place in other locations where we assess that long grass will cause an immediate or imminent hazard to the public. Please visit www.herefordshire.gov.uk/grass-cutting where you can find out where and when the grass cutting in your neighbourhood will take place.

Advice on Litigation Arising from Self Help

The best advice in regard to the potential for litigation against individuals who take it upon themselves to cut the verges alongside their property is as follows:

The position of an ordinary person who clears cuts the grass from outside their own or someone else's property is that they would only be liable for an accident if:

- their efforts actually made the verge less safe than it was with the grass uncut;
- they should have foreseen the likelihood of someone being injured as a result;
- someone actually gets injured;
- the injury is the result of their efforts; and
- the person injured decides to sue them.

In most cases people will be improving the situation, in which case no liability could arise.

While there is a theoretical possibility of liability arising if a person cut the grass in an area and in the process, or as a result they caused an accident, we do not think that this should discourage individuals from taking it upon themselves to cut the grass on public open spaces and highway verges, particularly in residential streets where traffic volumes and speeds are comparatively low.

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