

Report to	Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	11th February 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Lead Member for Housing and Communities / Lead Member for Highways, Environmental Impact, Waste and Sustainable Travel / Head of Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services
Report author	Head of Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services
Title	Highways Grass Verge, Hedge Maintenance and Pesticide Application Policies

1. What is the report about?

1.1. This report is about the council's policy with respect to verge/ hedge maintenance and pesticide application.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. This report was requested by members of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13th February 2020. As part of that discussion, officers highlighted the Council's policy on verge cutting, which had been amended in order to deliver biodiversity benefits. Members requested a further discussion/review be undertaken ahead of the new financial year.

2.2. Furthermore, a separate request was made around the same time to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group for a discussion at Scrutiny regarding the use of pesticides in public areas.

2.3. This report is the response to the requests highlighted in 2.1 and 2.2, above. This report, and associated appendices, are therefore presented in order to enable Members to discuss the current policy and approach being taken.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That the Committee examine the current policy and make comments and recommendations as deemed appropriate.

4. Report details

Denbighshire County Council policy on maintenance of highway verges

4.1. Appendix I sets out the Council's policy on the maintenance of highway verges.

The policy can also be found on the Council's website at:

<https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/parking-roads-and-travel/grass-cutting.aspx>

The main principle underpinning the policy is that verges must be managed to ensure the safety of all road users. However, verges are also increasingly recognised as important habitats for maintaining biodiversity - to the benefit of species such as bees and other pollinating insects, as living spaces for wild flowers and other wildlife that is being lost from the wider countryside, and as vital wildlife corridors connecting habitats together. The council's policy therefore aims to address these desired outcomes in a realistic and economic way.

4.2. Further information and guidance in regard to the maintenance of highway verges is provided in the Plantlife document, as attached within Appendix III or downloadable at <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/ourwork/publications/roadverge-management-guide> Welsh Government, Highways England and Transport Scotland have all supported and adopted this approach.

Denbighshire County Council briefing note on weed spraying, including the use of pesticides

4.3. Appendix II sets out the Council's position on the use of pesticide for the purposes of weed control. The briefing note itself contains an Appendix A, which is a Welsh Government Information Note on the use of Glyphosate-based

products. Denbighshire County Council's Head of Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services requested this information note from Welsh Government because of concerns raised about the use of Glyphosate by some residents. The reason for requesting the information note was to provide assurance that the Council's position is aligned to the position of Welsh Government.

4.4. In respect of pesticide (Glyphosate) use, the current Welsh Government policy is as attached at Appendix IV, which was issued to the Welsh Local Government Association by Welsh Government in August 2018.

4.5. For injurious weeds (under the Weeds Act 1959) e.g. ragwort and invasive species e.g. Giant Hogweed see <https://gov.wales/weeds-invasive-nonnativespecies>.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1. No decision is being sought by this paper. However, the Council's policy on the maintenance of highway verges does support the corporate priority "to ensure that the environment is both attractive and protected, but also supports community well-being and economic prosperity". One of the specific ambitions within that priority is to "increase the biodiversity quality of important habitats and species across the county".

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. This paper is provided for information, and it contains no proposals for change which would incur any costs or affect other services.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1. A Well-being Impact Assessment is generally required for decisions or proposals for change. This paper requests no decision and contains no proposals for change.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. As highlighted in 2.1 and 2.2, the Council's policy on verge cutting and weed spraying was subject to a discussion as part of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee discussion on 13th February 2020.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. There are no direct financial implications of this report.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. The Council's policy on verge-cutting presents risks, but only if it is not applied properly. The main risk relates to the safety of road users, but this is clearly recognised and addressed within the policy. Any risks around the use of pesticides again relate to misapplication, and this is addressed in the briefing note and also within the contract, which is actively monitored via the contract management process.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. No decision is being sought by this paper. However, Scrutiny's powers to examine the matter and to review and develop policies are set out in Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and are outlined in Sections 7.2 and 7.4 of the Council's Constitution.