

Denbighshire County Council
Highway Rural Verge/Grass Cutting Policy (A, B and Unclassified Roads)

Introduction

Road verges must be managed to ensure the safety of all road users. They 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. This policy aims to address these desired outcomes in a realistic and economic way.

1. Underpinning duties and responsibilities

- 1.1 Denbighshire County Council Highway Authority has a legal responsibility to keep its highways available and safe for the passage of the highway user.
- 1.2 Denbighshire County Council also has the duty to (reasonably) maintain and repair the highway and to keep the road surface free from material that might otherwise obstruct or prevent its safe use.
- 1.3 Under Part 1 Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Denbighshire County Council has a legal duty to 'maintain and enhance biodiversity' where it is within the proper exercise of its functions, and in doing so must seek to 'promote the resilience of ecosystems'. This responsibility is supported by the duties placed upon public bodies by the Well Being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, to maintain long-term sustainability.
- 1.4 Sympathetic management of road verges enables Denbighshire County Council to contribute effectively to the Welsh Government's 'Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales', by providing better and more connected flower-rich habitats both in urban and rural areas.
The service has recently identified a number of sites across the county suitable for annual biodiversity cuts to encourage habitation by pollinators.
- 1.5 The 'Well Maintained Highway – Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance' sets out recommendations and good practice for cutting highway verges, including the advice that local authorities should develop their own local standards.
- 1.6 Section 41 of The Highways Act 1980 requires all Highway Authorities to ensure that road users have safe passage along the highway. In relation to vegetation, this has been interpreted to mean that overhanging branches are cut back and that grass is cut, such that forward visibility is not unduly impaired.
- 1.7 In order to fulfil these duties, Denbighshire County Council is required to follow a road verge cutting policy that considers both the needs of the road user as well as the requirements of wildlife.

2. Verge Cutting Frequencies

- 2.1 Verges require cutting both for the safety of road users (including pedestrians) and for maintaining the species they support. The safety of road users is of paramount importance, and visibility splays and public footpaths need to be maintained at key locations. In all other areas, plants should be allowed to flower and set seed before they are cut, and habitat for animal species needs to be maintained. To achieve these aims requires careful attention to be paid to the timing and height of cuts.
- 2.2 Throughout the County there will be one cut per year based on the contract schedule to all grass verges on the Principal and Non-Principal Road network. Principal roads are defined as those roads classified as A or B roads. Non-Principal roads are defined as those roads not classified as A or B roads.
- 2.3 Principal Roads shall be cut after the 1st June with estimated completion by the end of June.
- 2.4 Non Principal Roads shall be cut from the 1st August with estimated completion by the end of September.
- 2.5 Existing Biodiversity Areas, which consist of those Community Councils that are wholly or partly within the Clwydian Range, Dee Valley AONB and those Community Councils that chose to become part of the former Biodiversity Area, will now be absorbed into the whole County cutting schedule as defined in Clauses 2.3 and 2.4 above.

Exceptions

- 2.6 Roadside Nature Reserves will be cut as per their individual management prescriptions.

3. Cut Specifications and Standards.

- 3.1 The minimum height of all cutting undertaken by a tractor and flail will be 100mm. Other equipment (brush cutters etc.) may be used on a limited number of sites where access with a tractor and flail is not possible. In these instances, it may not be possible to cut to a height of 100mm, and the verge may be cut shorter. In all instances, the height of the cut will be such that the top soil is not exposed or disturbed by the cutting activity.
- 3.2 On all roads including 'A' and 'B' roads the swathe shall be no more than 1m wide from the edge of the road, to a height of no less than 100mm. A cut greater than 1m wide may be required at specific locations at the discretion of the Highway Authority

for the purposes of Health and Safety. This may result in some roads being cut earlier than the dates stated in clauses 2.3 and 2.4

- 3.3 More frequent cutting may be required to maintain visibility splays in any location deemed necessary. This will be at the discretion of the Highway Authority for the purposes of Health and Safety.
- 3.4 Every effort will be made to delay the cutting of the non-principal road network for as long as possible, to allow flowers to set seed and avoid unnecessarily disturbing wildlife.
- 3.5 A complete cut of the entire verge width may be undertaken at the discretion of the Highway Authority to prevent scrub encroachment onto the verge and to restore forward visibility for health and safety purposes.
- 3.6 To date, the Council has designated eleven Roadside Nature Reserves, for rare/notable plant species and/or habitats, which receive special environmental management as set out in individual site management prescriptions. These are clearly marked with signs on the verge and white square bracket road markings.
- 3.7 The Council will collect grass cuttings from designated Roadside Nature Reserves according to their individual management prescription. The Council will work towards a policy of collecting cuttings from grass verges once resources become available.