

COMMUNITIES ENVIRONMENT HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

5 JULY 2023

1. PUBLIC QUESTION FROM JULIE RUSS

"Why are verges cut 4 times a year in urban areas when sight lines are not an issue and twice a year in rural areas when once is all that is necessary? And why are arisings not collected when the Council states in its own Tree Strategy that they are bad for wild flowers as they enrich the soil? Money saved by cutting less could possibly be used to purchase cut and collect machinery for loan to contractors, or for paying contractors who do use such machinery."

Response:

For 23/24 the standard of grass cutting is 4 urban and 2 rural cuts. This spring, growth rates have been exceptionally high. There is no intention to amend the 2-cut approach for rural locations, as this is deemed a good balance between road safety and the environment. Highway safety is paramount, and we operate a separate programme for sight lines on high-speed roads. If residents identify an issue with sightlines, we encourage it to be reported via our website ([link here](#)) and an inspection and if needed an additional local cut will be made.

While various trials of cut & collect are happening across the country, we are not aware of any highway authority which collects all of the grass cuttings on their network. The estimated cost of doing so in Surrey is in the region of £2.67m, plus disposal costs which would be substantial in both costs and carbon. It is not practical or at this time a good use of public money. The County Council will keep this under review. However, the exception to this policy is that the Council does intend to collect arisings from those areas which form part of the Blue Campaign, which specifically encourages and seeks to protect wildflowers on verges. Further information about the Blue Campaign is available on our website ([link here](#)).

2. PUBLIC QUESTION FROM HELEN MONROE

"My concern is about all areas across Surrey where green spaces have been labelled as verges when they are not, Whitmore Green being a concrete example to illustrate this.

I would therefore like to please ask for all green spaces that have been incorrectly labelled as verges to be redesignated and a grass cutting regime appropriate to recreation areas to be implemented?"

Response:

Designated recreation areas are managed by the Districts & Boroughs as part of their general parks and recreation duties. There are no designated recreation areas on the public highway, although it is accepted that in some housing estates there are larger areas of highway verges. The standard number of cuts for these areas is four per annum. The County Council's Cabinet are considering options for revising general grass cutting standards next year.

Background: From Mrs Monroe - Whitmore Green in Farnham is a green space normally used as a recreation area for the local community to enjoy. Up until this year it was maintained by Waverley Borough Council and cut approximately 10-12 times per year. Since Surrey County Council took over responsibility for the Green earlier this year, it has been cut only once in late April. Apparently this is because the land has been incorrectly classified as a verge and as such is only due to be cut 4 times a year, leaving it looking more like wasteland than a Green. The local community have raised this as a concern to staff at Surrey County Council, as well as our councillor, Catherine Powell, who has submitted photographic evidence in an attempt to have the Green reclassified as a recreational space. Given the lack of action by the Council, [a petition](#) has now been mounted as the Green has become completely unusable. Mrs Monroe is seeking a grass cutting maintenance regime in line with other recreational areas to be restored to this Green.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION FROM HELEN MONROE

“There are green spaces in Surrey that are not highway verges (large or otherwise). They have been wrongly labelled highway verges and the grass cutting regime corresponding to verges is inadequate for these spaces. I am asking for these green spaces to be relabelled correctly and a grass cutting regime appropriate to recreation areas to be implemented.”

Response:

Any grass area that is adopted highway (such as Whitmore Green) is classified as a “highway verge” – it does not need to have a road adjacent to it. No part of the adopted public highway is classified as “recreational”.