



TfB Stakeholder Conference 2020 - Q&A

1. How do you manage regular maintenance of highways vegetation?

Grass cutting - Rural

Our focus on highway verges is around areas that are key to maintaining visibility such as at junctions, laybys, and the inside of bends. The aim of rural grass-cutting is to keep the highway safe by maintaining visibility for all road users. We are carrying out 4 cuts this year consisting of:

1. Vision splay/ Junction cut - completed in May
2. 2nd vision splay/ junction cut - completed in June.
3. 1m swath cut - completed in August.
4. A final vision splay/ junction cut – to be completed in October.

This program is designed to maintain the necessary sightlines and vision splays at junctions whilst minimising the destruction of flora/ fauna and wildlife which relies on unkempt grass. We are currently working with Natural Environmental Partnership (nep) who are involved with the management of rural grass for the benefit of wildlife. Currently TfB only cut a meter swathe once a year which, timing wise, is in line with good practice/ recommendations. We will also be looking at the potential for retaining more natural habitat and promotion of wildflower areas through local initiatives. In addition, we are looking at the possibility of grass collection in selected wildflower areas through a mechanism currently being trailed in Lincolnshire.

We manage a total area of 9'948'148 million M² of rural grass across Buckinghamshire.

Grass cutting – Urban

Our proposed cutting regime remains the same this season consisting of a total of 4 cuts. Each cut is carried out over a 7 - 8-week period. This program of works is publicised on the Bucks Web Site. Each cut across Buckinghamshire consists of Circa 1.2 million M²

Weed Spraying

Noxious weed

We continue to carry out herbicide treatment on known noxious weed sites, primarily Japanese Knotweed, Rag Wort and Giant Hogweed, throughout Buckinghamshire. These sites are on our noxious weed site registry and are now plotted on our confirm data base for annual programmed visits. A list of the current sites is available at request through your Local Area Technician. In addition, please contact your LAT with details of sites you are aware of which are not on the current program but require our attention. Herbicide application occurs 3 times a year. Established Knotweed sites can take up to 3 years to eradicate.

Cyclical weed spraying (footpaths)

In addition, TfB also secured funding to carry out cyclical herbicide treatment during 2020 on all urban footways across Buckinghamshire. This work commenced in April and will be completed in October. Audits were carried out following the first 2 applications between May and August which overall showed good take up and extensive die back. In addition, we then followed this work up with a road sweeper on the more strategic routes which removes all of the silt/ detritus from the kerb line. This is having a marked impact on reducing the damage currently caused to our footway network through vegetation encroachment/ root damage and potential trip hazards.

Hedge cutting Maintenance

Through our inspectorate team hedges, which are encroaching on the highway, are identified and works raised which go to form the annual maintenance program which is typically carried out in the winter months to avoid the nesting season.

In addition, TfB and the devolved services, have a duty of care to carry out the identification and enforcement of 3rd party hedge cutting where it is deemed to be a hazard to road users through restricted visibility/ sight lines and encroachment.

2. Residents have mentioned that they would like wide verges to be left alone and planted with wildflowers, would this be a possibility?

Buckinghamshire Council is fully committed to the promotion and development of biodiversity across the rural network. We have already been making great strides over the last few years into establishing and encouraging best practice in the management and maintenance of both flora & fauna across our county.

We have been actively engaging with local groups most prominently the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership (NEP) who, with the added assistance of the Wildlife Trust and other expertise from across other neighbouring authorities, are already working with Bucks in road verge management as part of our wildlife project, Bucks Buzzing.

In addition to this we have also been monitoring the progress on pilot schemes such as the Lincolnshire Sustainability and Biomass initiative and looked at other success stories across the UK such as the transformation strategy that Devon Council have adopted for the management of biodiversity within their verges. Our Biodiversity working group now actually includes the ecology expert Mr Philip Sterling who was the pioneer behind the Devon Council Strategy. With the current in-house expertise, our good working relationship with NEP and the wider group and now with assistance from Mr Sterling, Buckinghamshire Council is in a very good place for us to be able to achieve and promote our primary objective.

The primary aim of our Road Verge objective is to bring good management to as much of the rural road network as possible.

It is our objective to encourage and promote flowering plant diversity on our verges. We fully recognise that across the UK nearly 45% of our native flora grows on road verges.

Through the promotion of flowering plant diversity, we subsequently benefit the sustainability of the invertebrates and other wildlife through provision of food plant resources, including nectar and pollen.

Through promotion and the production of practical guidelines we are looking to also encourage adjacent landowners, parish councils and neighbouring local authorities to take up the initiative on as many verges as possible.

Achieving this whilst still meeting our legal obligation in keeping the roads safe for the highway users. Recognising that verges along sightlines and around junctions are a priority and need to be cut regularly.

As with all local authorities there is legal requirement to maintain highway verges to a serviceable and safe standard by maintain vision splays at junctions and either cutting a 1m strip immediately adjacent to the highway, to prevent the collapse of vegetation on to the highway, or through a periodic full width cut which prevents the spread and encroachment of woody plants/ trees/ hedges and other undesirable vegetation.

TfBs current maintenance regime consists of the cutting of vision splays three times throughout the year and a single 1m verge cut which was completed between July and August. In addition, following a full width cut carried out last year on the strategic routes, we have no plans to repeat this element for a further 3 – 5 years or until such time as encroachment becomes a safety or management issue.

Over recent years the frequency of grass cutting across Buckinghamshire has been reduced to the bare minimum whilst still maintaining proper exercise of statutory functions. Through our understanding of the aspirations around biodiversity within other local authorities we are considered to be leaders in the field when it comes to minimising the number of cuts we carry out.

Our current practices have been merited as best practicable practice from the afore mentioned authorities for the purposes of conserving biodiversity.

In addition, we have adopted the Good Verge Guide: a different approach to managing our waysides and verges

These guidelines are based on a review of grassland, meadow and verge management, especially long-term studies that investigate the effects of cutting dates on vegetation. These show two interesting things:

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Firstly, early cutting dates reduce floral diversity over time. Deprived of an opportunity to seed, early cutting encourages the vigorous growth of robust, long-lived species that are more likely to spread vegetative.

Secondly, late cutting dates also reduce floral diversity over time. If cutting is delayed too late in the season, this encourages the build-up of a thick 'thatch' of dead and dying vegetation forming a mat over the soil. Again, this encourages the growth of more vigorous species that don't rely on open soil for seed to germinate, as many of our wildflowers do.

Even worse is no cutting at all; if grasslands and verges are left uncut even for just one year their composition begins to change, and species begin to decline. Basically, grassy verges are very sensitive to changes in management and there appears to be a narrow window of opportunity each year. From mid-July until the end of September – is when cutting helps to maximise species diversity.

Our principle aim, therefore, has been to delay the first cutting date of grassy verges from early spring until late summer.

All roadside verges need mowing at some point in the year. If this wasn't done, shrubs like hawthorn and trees like sycamore quickly grow, shading out wildflowers as well as impacting road visibility and safety. Our program is carried out when most flowers have had a chance to set seed and spread. Precisely when this first mowing takes place depends on several factors, including the type of grassland on the verge, climate and location (it will be earlier in warmer springs and further south). Inevitably, it can take place when some plants are still in flower, but if it's generally carried out after the middle of July most of the plants will have set seed.

Achieving a sustainable balance

Different plants, insects and animals require different ecological conditions, so verges with a diversity of open areas, scrub and woodland will support more species. We currently carry out a 1m swathe cut which creates a mixture of long and short grass which benefits invertebrates. Even a whole width verge cut invariably leaves some long grass standing at the back of the verge, providing essential habitat.

How we are proposing to further improve Biodiversity within Buckinghamshire

The key to establishing good Biodiverse verges is to ensure that conditions are favorable for the colonization of wild plants/ flowers. Invariably across Buckinghamshire, as is the case in many counties, the verges are made up of a thick layer of nutrient rich topsoil designed to promote grass growth. Soils with a low fertility/ high nutrient levels encourage the growth of coarser perennials (such as nettles and cow parsley) at the expense of a greater range of smaller, more desirable species (including many orchids).

Our current objective is to look at ways in which we can reduce the nutrient content of the soil therefore reducing grass growth and making it more desirable for wildflower.

This is achieved by 2 methods:

Timing of the cut - as mentioned above leaving the cut to late creates a thick thatch of nutrient rich grass which leaches back into the soil thereby enriching and encouraging coarse herbage. So, generally, if the management and soil conditions are right, wild plants will naturally colonise.

Collecting the cut clippings – One clear way to boost wildflowers on road verges is to reduce nutrient content in the soil. This can most effectively be achieved by ensuring arising from grass-cutting are collected and not left behind to enrich the soil. Currently, arising is not collected as this would require specialist machinery that has to date proven too expensive.

However, through our working group there may now be a call to review costs. We are looking at the current growth/ interest in the market for the acceptance of arising by treating the cut grass as a by-product for anaerobic digestion/ compost. Although litter can be a real issue in achieving this, we are hopeful the recycling centres would be able to accommodate it.

Buckinghamshire Council is already working with several Parish Councils on initiatives to set aside areas of previously cut grass land. In addition, we are also now looking to introduce pilot sites where we will be collecting cut arising whilst trialing new machinery.

The working group is also exploring additional funding possibilities – including cross-service use of machinery (parks & open spaces), sharing the machinery and associated cost with neighbouring counties/ authorities and actively looking for government funding opportunities such as the Highway England scheme.

Buckinghamshire Council is providing overarching support for the new approach in how we manage our highway verges in achieving a biodiverse landscape which promotes both flora & fauna.

3. A tree survey was promised to the Parishes, has this already happened and, if not, when will it happen?

Parish councils were not promised access to our tree survey however should they require details on a specific tree or road we can make this information available. All the BC tree asset has been surveyed and continues to be inspected on a rolling 3-year program.

4. Houses in new developments sometimes have their fences set back from the road. Does TfB become responsible for dealing with vegetation in the strip between the fence and the road?

Land boundaries are highlighted on the property owners deeds/ land registry. It is this and the mapping/ limits of the highway extent that we gauge tree/ vegetation ownership.

5. Can Members get access to KoorbonTech App? If not, when will it be made available?

Not at present it isn't available as a read only application, we are working with the app creators and other County Councils to explore this possibility but have no date yet. We however appreciate that this would be a positive step forward to shape drainage issues within the County and will continue to work on exploring the possibility.

6. During the surface dressing process, do you think that weed clearance and edge sealing should be undertaken to increase the lifespan of the work?

The surface dressing process is a preventative treatment and not designed to return a road to an as new condition. It is therefore best used on rural roads. Weeds should be cleared before the process begins, but inevitably new weeds can grow particularly along the edges of roads. In some cases, roads have been "widened" by default over the years where previous treatment have over spilled the previous edge of the road. In these cases, the structure beneath the top surface simply doesn't exist. When this is overrun by traffic the edge fails. Ideally, we would strengthen the edges of roads too, in a process known as haunching, but unfortunately this is very expensive and, in most cases, we cannot justify such large expenditure within the budgets available.

7. How do you assess the benefit of surface dressing compared to the cost of remedial measures to prevent ponding/property damage and how can surface dressing be made to be more long-lasting?

As discussed in my presentation surface dressing is a preventative safety led treatment e.g. it is designed to stop a road deteriorating by sealing the surface with a series of layers of bitumen and stone chippings. These layers are designed to stop water softening the substructure and to stop potholes forming by providing waterproof barrier. The stone chips embedded in the surface have the benefit of providing texture and enhancing the safety characteristics of the road.

When we ask our Engineers to assess suitability of a site, i.e. before work commences, they are considering many aspects including current condition, previous maintenance choices, overrun issues effecting the edge, flooding/ponding issues, alignment/geometry, underlying historic construction and geology. All these elements have a bearing on if a site is right for surface dressing and the longevity of finished work. Where possible we do address minor issues as part of preparatory work for surface dressing (small scale patching for example).

We don't want to surface dress a road if the defects are too far developed or the underlying or construction/geology doesn't allow, as preparation work would be too costly, and the finished product is likely to fail quickly. The site being "right" for surface dressing and treating a road at the right point of its lifecycle is of paramount importance in maximising the longevity and success of the finished treatment.

Our engineers pick the most suitable type of dressing and in many cases, we use the most durable dressing available. We assess the value for money of the treatment by including its expected life in our prioritisation scoring process. We know that surface dressing will not last as long as full resurfacing, but it is far cheaper. It has been shown nationally that including surface dressing at the right time as a road deteriorates can save substantial sums over the lifetime of the road.

8. What is the TfB position on introduction of 20mph speed limits through our villages to support other traffic calming initiatives?

We do have a page on our website regarding speed limits and road safety, there is information on there regarding applying for a new speed to be introduced

<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/transport-and-roads/road-safety/managing-speed/how-to-tackle-speeding/dealing-with-speeding-traffic-in-buckinghamshire/#speed-limits>

9. Please would you advise whether TfB shares the net carbon zero target as BC and has any plans to reduce carbon, including offsetting carbon it cannot eliminate.

TfB supports the Authority's plans for carbon reduction and have several Performance Management Indicators in this area:

PMI-4.05 Volume of In-Situ Recycling on Strategic Highways Maintenance Programme

PMI-4.08 Miles Travelled Per Gallon of Fuel Used

PMI-4.12 Depot Energy Consumption (kWh)

PMI-4.13 Consumption of Streetlighting Asset (kWh)

PMI-4.14 Annual Energy Consumption Saving

Ultimately, we have a net-zero target in line with the government and are currently working to establish the baseline to work to. We do not currently undertake carbon offsetting, though this may be something we would consider as part of our actions to support this target in the future.

10. Who will be part of the three new focused regional forums membership? Are there any further details on this new forum?

Although my team are happy to organise and facilitate these meetings, we would not be the lead officers so I think it might be better to ask Louise McCann or Dave Stewart? However, I would expect the regional forums to be aimed at Town/Parish Councillors and Buckinghamshire Councillors but suggest they could be opened to other stakeholders if Louise / Dave / TfB felt it was appropriate?

The proposal was that they would be less often and have more senior officers in attendance which would enable a more strategic conversation about budgets, priorities and major issues. In terms of officers, the meetings could be organised, facilitated by Localism Managers or Community Board Coordinators.

11. Where are the forms for the Community Board Highways Scheme?

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/community-and-safety/improving-your-local-community/apply-community-board-funding/>

12. Many local councils have estates of streetlights and numerous local contracts for inspection, repair and maintenance. Given TfB has significant economy of scale, would elements of local street lighting be better supported by TfB (e.g. structural testing)

Wherever possible we always strive to combine works to achieve the best economies of scale. We will be structurally testing over 4,500 Columns this year.

13. With permit applications, can one of the conditions be that traffic lights and road/lane closures don't get installed until the crews are on site and ready to work?

Current legislation issued from the Department for Transport enables Local Highway Authorities to impose several national conditions, but we are unable to impose the suggested condition on a local basis. We regularly feedback to the Highway Authority and Utility Committee and raise suggestions for additional conditions that would benefit the management of the highway network. We do have the ability to impose when traffic management is able to be set up on some traffic sensitive streets, but this does not dictate when crews must be in attendance.

14. What steps are taken to co-ordinate permits to minimise road closures?

All road closures are requested by the undertaker of works depending on the risk assessment carried out for that specific site, as an authority we are unable to refuse if we do not agree. We can however challenge the duration of closures requested through the national conditions at our disposal. We use several co-ordination tools that enable us to plan when closures can take place and cause the least disruption, we also use this planning function to identify opportunities for undertakers to share road closures and limit the need for repeated disruption.

15. Is there a contact telephone number for the Street Works Team?

01296 383848

16. Where there are several defects close together, how can this be pinpointed on Fix My Street?

Please pinpoint the location as centrally to the defect's location as possible. Users can enter additional information on the defect's location i.e. "2 defects located between 3 & 5 High Street" within box titled "Location of the problem".

17. I currently get Fix My Street reports however is there any way the reports can be more selective to a Parish?

You can choose to subscribe to all problems reported in an area, or reports based on their destination. You can select which wards reports you would like to be updated on by selecting, "Local alerts" and entering the relevant postcode. It will then populate an option to select updates for the relevant ward.

18. What changes are planned to improve safe forms of 'active transport' such as improvements for cyclists and pedestrians?

The Council is trialling several 'Emergency Active Travel' schemes, with Haddenham and Southcourt being implemented very shortly. Full details of all proposed schemes can be found here <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/active-travel/>

We are also driving forward a pipeline of longer-term strategic walking and cycling improvements and run regular campaigns such as walk and bike to school weeks. Further details can be found here - <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/cycling-and-walking/>

In addition, e-scooter trials are set to take place in Aylesbury and High Wycombe in partnership with Irish based company, Zipp. An e-bike scheme is also being installed along the Waddesdon Greenway, connecting Aylesbury Vale Parkway station with Waddesdon Manor. The Council has developed a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Aylesbury Garden town, setting out an ambitious future network of walking and cycling improvements, and is currently working on a similar plan for High Wycombe.

19. Are there any plans for on-street electric charging vehicle points?

The Council would like to support the move towards cleaner electric vehicles. We have already installed charging points at several of our car parks and actively work with suppliers, workplaces and Parish Councils to facilitate their installation in these locations. We have also been undertaking analysis on where further charging points are most needed, and where there is a lack of off-street places for people to charge their vehicles. We hope to install another 30-40 charge points within the next 6 months, focusing primarily on residential areas without off street parking, subject to there being a suitable electricity supply and grant funding.

20. Could Parish Councils be provided with permits for household waste sites to dispose of fly-tipped rubbish and public spaces green waste?

Parish councils need to contact Jessica King email - Jessica.King@buckinghamshire.gov.uk. Please provide details of vehicle details including a registration, confirm if a trailer will be used and likely frequency of use. We will issue a formal letter and other necessary paperwork (if required) and designate an appropriate site. We will also undertake necessary arrangements directly with the specific recycling centre in advance.

21. Please can someone clarify who will be responsible for road and pavement sweeping as I don't believe that TfB has any?

They are to be reported online also using the following forms.

For former Chiltern and Wycombe District areas:
<https://www.chiltern.gov.uk/street-cleansing-issue>

For former South Bucks District:
<https://southbucks.gov.uk/street-cleansing-issue>