



Stakeholder Events March 2021 - Questions and Answers

The following questions were asked ahead of the stakeholder events held in March 2021.

Hedges and Trees

Q. *Can we please have an update on the arboriculture inspection which took place in Bucks, as we are aware there were a number of dead/dying trees that need work on Highways land. I have several dead trees in Seer Green that I would like cut down.*

A. There have been circa 2000 works orders carried out for the maintenance of trees over the last 3 years. The following totals are for tree removals only:

2017 – 2018 Chiltern & South Bucks **195**

2018 – 2019 Handy Cross **62**

2019 – 2020 Aylesbury Vale **43**

Q. *Now that HS2 is about to start major earth works, some routes affected may have fallen, falling or dying trees (on the A355 and A413). Could the roads affected be surveyed ahead of the work?*

A. Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) has no jurisdiction over HS2 and their proposed works. Any vegetation removal they intend to carry out is agreed at the planning stage. We would not want to waste money surveying/carrying out works on trees that they may well have the authority to remove.

Q. *We all know how sensitive residents are to trees being cut down. We had a tree in a local CDC car park cut to a stump 18 months ago without any notification and residents and the PC tore into us with complaints.*

A. TfB only remove trees that are within the highway extent and only when they are deemed a risk / threat to the highway and its users. We do not remove trees from 3rd party property which includes car parks.

Q. *A tree survey is carried out in our town once every three years. Please can we know when this will take place?*

A. A risk based visual inspection of all the tree assets are carried out on a three-year rotation. This was carried out in Amersham/South Bucks and the Chilterns in 2015, 2018 and is due to be carried out again this financial year 2021/22, pending budget approval.

Q. *Can prior notification be given in writing to the town hall that the survey is about to be undertaken?*

A. The survey will commence in November 2021, exact timings can be sent to the Town Council once the programme has been put in place later this year.

Q. *Can the survey findings be supplied to the town hall so that our local environmental partners can comment on findings and raise any concerns over what they believe to be 'grey areas'?*

A. If the Town Council had a specific query, a request can be made for details on a tree and/or trees on a specific road. TfB uses a fully qualified and competent Arboriculturally Approved consultancy to carry out the tree survey. The liability/any risk posed by highway trees is the responsibility of TfB/Buckinghamshire Council, therefore decisions made regarding remedial works or removal of trees on the highway is not open for debate.

Our contractors only carry out works that are instructed by TfB and which has been highlighted through the tree survey/ inspection. The contractors that are carrying out the work do not have any influence in the decision making and are simply there at our bequest.

Q. *If any trees are agreed for removal, please can you make sure the tree stump is ground out so that we are not left with trip hazards, or may be able to replant in that location without waiting 50 years for a prominent stump to degrade sufficiently.*

A. Stumps should be left at 1m high for no longer than 28 days after the tree has been removed. It is also not always practical to replant a tree where another tree has been because there could be a reason that tree was cut down – it could have been decaying there, for example, so it wouldn't be practical to plant another tree there.

Q. *Can TfB make a 'token' financial contribution to our ongoing Communi-Tree budget for each tree that absolutely must be removed, so that we can purchase a replacement and ensure it is planted in each location?*

A. TfB do not set the budgets and any potential contributions would be at the decision of Buckinghamshire Council. Only trees that have been agreed through the correct process, as previously highlighted in the presentation, will be considered on the highway. Not every location that a tree is removed from is suitable for replanting and alternative locations might be preferred.

We have to adopt a balanced approach to managing trees which takes into account their contribution to biodiversity, the environment, human health and quality of life but also maintain safety for the users of the highway and acceptance that trees do not last forever.

Gullies

Q. *Can the gully programmes be published to Town and Parish Council's as it would be good to know when it is.*

A. In previous years we have not been able to run a cyclic programme and reactive programme with the funding available – therefore it was difficult to publish a programme that could change daily especially during the winter months when reactive emergency jobs are raised for immediate action. Following the increase in budget, the ambition is that we will be working to review our programme and make it user friendly to be able to share.

Q. *What is the frequency for emptying gullies please? If gullies are blocked what is the policy for re-visiting them and clearing them?*

At present gullies on A roads are cleared annually, and all other roads every three years on a cyclic programme. If a gully is blocked the LAT will assess the location, history and causes of the gully getting blocked. It then either goes on a reactive programme if the gully is not on the years cyclic programme and is prioritised using our Highway Inspection Policy, or if larger work is required it is looked at as a wider piece of work through the capital improvement schemes team.

Q. Would it be possible for you to advise Parish Clerk's the day before, so we can keep the area clear for you to access?

A. It is our aim to review the communication streams however, it is not always possible to get the information out to each and every Parish Clerk. Our aim is to empower the LAT's with the information and to build up relationships once again with the Parishes. We also plan on enabling a lot more information to be put onto the Member and Parish portals.

Q. Flooding of carriageways and footways is occurring on frequent basis. Does the authority plan to increase the frequency of cleaning and/or provide a more immediate response to requests to address the flooding issue?

A. The Council has taken the recent flooding events very seriously and our aim is to cleanse every gully once within the new financial year. However, should further problem arise with the gully becoming full again very quickly remedial works will be planned and repairs made as it isn't always the gully that is the problem.

Q. The gullies in Eastern Dene, Western Dene and Sawpit Hill are regularly blocked - please can they be cleared as a matter of urgency?

A. The three areas are already on our schemes programme for improved drainage, they all sit within the bottom of hills and frequently get overwhelmed, a new system is required at the locations mentioned as well as annual cleansing.

Q. Do ditches to which gullies feed come under the TfB responsibility? I have no memory of any highway ditch maintenance.

A. Many ditches are the responsibility of adjoining landowners to maintain however, where areas have been identified as high priority, this financial year TfB has made improvements having ditched over 190 locations across the County.

Q. Councillors feel it would make sense to sweep the roads after the gullies have been cleared to ensure debris doesn't accumulate. Is it possible to co-ordinate these activities?

A. Within the unitary authority this is an area we will be working to improve with the street cleansing teams.

Q. Can gully crews be given a jack screw or similar device to tackle stuck gullies to prevent them being deferred and forgotten?

A. They already have tools and devices however due to the amount of gullies requiring cleansing, crews cannot work on every gully they come across as being stuck as the gully machine would not be worked to its maximum capacity if the crews were to work on each and every stuck gully cover. They are given an allotted time to spend on a stuck gully cover before moving on and raising the stuck cover as an order. Most covers once unstuck need replacing.

Devolution

Q. At the TfB Stakeholder Event in July 2020, several parish and town councils requested that Buckinghamshire Council share access to the TfB GIS map to help us more easily establish areas of responsibility and improve management and delivery of devolved services in particular maintenance of grass verges. Please can you provide an update on when the maps will be shared with parish and town councils?

A. All of the highways extents are now publicly available [here](#)

- Q.** *On numerous occasions Hazlemere Parish Council has asked for more devolved services but have not heard anything, please can you confirm how to proceed?*
- A.** The scope of what can and cannot be devolved is currently being looked at in line with the re-procurement of the service and looking at risks such health and safety and environmental impact. To discuss the potential to expand devolved responsibilities, I would encourage local councils to attend the upcoming focus groups (Dates TBC).
- Q.** *If a Parish Council is interested in devolved services, please can you confirm how to proceed?*
- A.** The scope of what can and cannot be devolved is currently being looked at in line with the re-procurement of the service and looking at risks such health and safety and environmental impact. To discuss the potential to expand devolved responsibilities, I would encourage local councils to attend the upcoming focus groups (Dates TBC).
- Q.** *Will Buckinghamshire Council/TfB assure the parties expected to takeover devolved services that they will receive adequate funding for this and will further funds be available to cover works beyond the routine and thus outside of the allotted budget? Will budgets cover the management time of planning and manning work: services do not just come down to hours of hedge cutting and there will be a period of risk management and prioritisation that will arguably cost more per hour than the actual operation and this needs to be paid for so will the budget reflect this? With rising inflation and ops costs how often will budgets be reviewed?*
- A.** Exact details of budgets are still to be confirmed. However, it is good that these costs are being recognised, as this is part of the reason the TfB cost can be perceived as less value for money.
- Q.** *If a Parish has taken on Tier 1 devolved grass cutting services (broadly the 30mph urban areas) it feels it would make sense to devolve non-urban grass cutting (we have to drive past many of the verges anyway). Is this being considered?*
- A.** It can be, though this would need to take account of the much higher speed roads involved.
- Q.** *Devolution agreements require a parish to issue hedge cutting notices where necessary. How can parishes be assured that Bucks will fully support such action and issue enforcement notices when asked by a parish?*
- A.** We are not aware of any specific cases where this hasn't happened, but each case would need to be considered on its merits.

