

**Agenda Item:** To receive costs from East Sussex County Council on verge cutting and consider next steps

**Report to:** Full Council (Appendix H)

**Date:** Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2021

**Subject:** Addressing verge maintenance issues

**Summary:** To receive a series of options to consider how the town council can improve the appearance and safety of the verges around the wards.

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## **Recommendation**

**Subject to the survey results, the council is asked to consider assessing the 2022-23 budget to fund increased grass cutting for next season and to carry out a feasibility study for the town council to take on the full delivery of services in the future.**

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### **1. Background**

- 1.1 At the meeting of full council on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2021 councillors raised questions of the County Councillor concerning the poor state of the verges across the wards. It was noted that the verges are untidy, overgrown and sometimes unsafe, as vision is impaired for drivers on junctions.
- 1.2 It was discussed that the town council could contribute financially to the verge cutting to increase the number of cuts that are currently scheduled by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and the clerk was tasked to investigate the options available to the town council to improve the verges.

### **2. Existing Grass Cutting Schedules**

- 2.1 ESCC carry out urban and rural grass cutting in all Bexhill-on-Sea wards.
- 2.2 Rural grass cutting is performed by Tractor 1 on a round of Hastings West, Sidley and Bexhill with 2 cuts per year. One between 03/08/21 - 17/08/21 and another between 16/11/21 - 30/11/21.
- 2.3 Urban grass cutting is performed twice per year. This season, the first cut was on 23/07/21, the next cut is due 18/10/21. Cuts take place over a period of time from that date, subject to weather conditions.

### **3. The Costs**

- 3.1 ESCC have provided three options for the town council to consider for the maintenance of verges within the wards.

- 3.2 The costs are those quoted for 2021-22. Costs for next season will be released in September/October 2021.
- 3.3 **Option 1 - Standard:** Two cuts over the course of a year to be carried out by ESCC at no cost to the town council. Urban grass will be managed for safety purposes only.
- 3.4 **Option 2 – Extra cuts:** the town council may fund an additional four cuts to be carried out by ESCC, totalling six cuts (two standard and four extra) over the course of the year at a cost of **£17,426** for the year.
- 3.5 **Option 3 – Self delivery:** the town council can take on responsibility to deliver all urban grass cutting in their area. This must include a minimum of two cuts over the course of the year. ESCC will not carry out any urban grass cutting in the area if the town council decide on this option. ESCC would pay the Parish/Town Council the sum of **£8,713** to do this.

#### 4. Other parishes

- 4.1 Within the ESCC boundary the following parishes have chosen option 3 ‘Self Delivery’:  
Alfriston; Battle; Brede; Burwash; Crowhurst; Eastbourne; East Dean and Friston; Herstmonceux; Horam; Newhaven; Newick; Ninfield; Northiam; Pevensey; Polegate; Rotherfield; Rye; Telscombe; Westfield; Westham; Willingdon and Jevington; Wivelsfield.
- 4.2 Within the ESCC boundary the following parishes have chosen option 2 to fund an additional four cuts per year:  
Beckley; Berwick; Bodiam; Camber; Catsfield; Danehill; Ditchling; Etchingham; Ewhurst; Fairlight; Falmer; Frant; Guestling; Hailsham; Hartfield; Hellingly; Icklesham; Iden; Isfield; Kingston near Lewes; Long Man; Maresfield; Mayfield; Peacehaven; Peasmarsh; Piddinghoe; Playden; Plumpton; Rodmell; Salehurst and Robertsbridge; Ticehurst; Uckfield; Wadhurst; Wartling; Withyham in Groombridge and Blackham

#### 5. Economic Case

- 5.1 The town council has not set aside a budget for grass cutting in 2021-22.
- 5.2 A budget could be considered for this service in 2022-23. The budget building process will begin in September/October this year.
- 5.3 The ESCC contribution to self-delivery will not cover the full cost of the maintenance, therefore with option 3 additional funding would be required.
- 5.4 Either option 2 or option 3 will have a direct impact on the council’s budget.

## **6. Is it value for money?**

- 6.1 The town council does not currently have any resources other than the town clerk. An increase in budget would be required for option 2 and option 3 but both options would deliver a smarter visual appearance for the town and its wards.
- 6.2 Option 2 would provide an uninterrupted service for the new season without any impact on existing town council resources.
- 6.3 Option 3 would require further research. There are several possible ways the cutting could be delivered by the town council – a tendered contractor; inhouse staff; volunteer groups; or a mix of all three.

## **7. Financial Case**

- 7.1 The costs of option 3 would need to be investigated in some detail for the council to make an informed decision on self-delivery. The council could consider funding the additional cuts as an interim measure until a longer-term strategy has been formulated.

## **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1 The parish council has the power to provide and maintain open spaces under the Open Spaces Act 1906 and the power to submit an interest in running a service provided by a district, county or unitary authority under the Localism Act 2011 ss81-86.

## **9. Insurance**

- 9.1 If ESCC carry out the additional four cuts there are no insurance implications for the town council. Option 3 could incur insurance implications if staff are employed to cut grass or voluntary groups are involved.

## **10. Impact on Local Crime and Disorder**

- 10.1 There is a view that parishes that have well maintained grass and open spaces are less susceptible to graffiti and littering and promote civic pride

## **11. Impact on Climate Change and Biodiversity**

- 11.1 Whilst grass can function as a 'carbon sink' and soak up Carbon Dioxide from the atmosphere, the carbon cost of mowers and fuel can outweigh the benefits.
- 11.2 Wildflower verges could be considered as alternatives where it is safe to do so, although this will require a heavy cut of maintenance at least once per year.

## **12. Community Consultation/ Engagement**

- 12.1 No community engagement has taken place as yet to establish a need to provide additional verge maintenance. This should be undertaken first to ascertain the demand. The results of the forthcoming survey could be used to ascertain the need.

**13. Risk Assessment**

- 13.1 If the council was to provide funding for additional cuts there is a risk that the precept will rise as the annual budget may need to be increased. There are other budget lines that could be reconsidered to offset the verge maintenance.
- 13.2 This risk may be mitigated by the improved appearance of the town.
- 13.3 Option 3, self-delivery, would require its own risk assessment due to the various possibilities available within this option.

**14. Recommendation**

- 14.1 The council is recommended to review the survey results to ensure that there is a resident need to improve verge appearance, should the verge maintenance be a priority for residents option 2 could be implemented in 2022-23 to ensure an immediate solution.
- 14.2 Further investigations could then take place with regard to the town council implementing option 3 in the future.

Julie Miller  
Town Clerk  
12<sup>th</sup> August 2021