

Cabinet – 24 June 2015

Tractor Mowing of Large Grassed Areas

Portfolio:	Councillor Harrison, Clean and Green
Related portfolios:	None
Service:	Clean and Green Services
Wards:	All
Key decision:	No
Forward plan:	No

1. Summary

- 1.1 Following the change in Administration of the Council on the 3 June 2015 a review of the annual grass cutting of 26 sites across the borough was requested with a view to reinstating fortnightly grass cutting at those sites.
- 1.2 This report advises members of the costs and implications of re-introducing fortnightly grass cutting to these sites which were previously reduced to an annual cut via the 2015/16 Budget Savings process.
- 1.3 The frequency of grass cutting was reduced from fortnightly to just once a year, delivering a saving of circa £43k including the cost of an Environmental Operative plus associated vehicles and equipment.
- 1.4 Following the switch to the new arrangements, complaints were received on some of these sites from local residents stating that the long grass was having a negative impact on site users and was visually unattractive.
- 1.5 Opposing views were expressed by some residents who felt that, where vegetation had been allowed to develop, they enjoyed seeing the variety of wild flowers and associated wildlife that began to appear.
- 1.6 To re-introduce fortnightly grass cutting to the above 26 sites would cost circa £28k for a grass cutting season based on use of an agency resource over the summer season together with associated equipment costs. Proportionately for the remainder of this year the cost would be around £25k.
- 1.7 Any amendment to this particular budget saving requires Cabinet approval as it involves a change in policy. An early decision is required as the problem of long grass and any related complaints will become proportionately worse the longer it is before any amended cutting regime is implemented.

- 1.8 To determine the impact or benefit of cutting fortnightly or annually on each site a further review and public consultation would be required and could not practically be carried out this grass cutting season.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That fortnightly grass cutting be reinstated to the 26 sites identified in this report for the 2015/16 season with the cost pressure of £28k being met from the Economy and Environment directorate budget.
- 2.2 That a review of grass cutting arrangements on the 26 sites is carried out to inform the 2016/17 budget taking into account residents' views and biodiversity benefits.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 As part of the 2015/16 budget process, savings totalling £524,050 in respect grounds maintenance activities were approved as follows:

Description	Saving (£)
1 x Environmental Officer post	-25,889**
Assistant Manager green spaces	-34,711
2 x Environmental officers Arboretum	-45,841
2 x Environmental officers Grounds North	-51,777
1 x Environmental officers Grounds South	-25,889
Eliminate agency budget (Grounds North)	-88,884
Eliminate agency budget (Grounds South)	-88,884
Seasonal bedding	-60,000
Christmas tree	-3,500
Tyres	-4,000**
Fuel	-7,000**
Maintenance	-7,675**
Reduction in private contractor fees	-18,000
Reduction in overtime	-32,000
Other staffing efficiencies (e.g. replacement staff on lower grades)	-30,000
Total	-524,050

- 3.2 The grass cutting on 26 sites throughout the borough, as listed below, was reduced from fortnightly to a regime of cutting just once each year. This saving equated to circa £43k** including the cost of an Environmental Operative and associated fleet costs.

Area/Sites
1. Aldridge Airport
2. Clayhanger Common
3. Open space at Green Lane, Leamore

Area/Sites	
4.	Open space rear of Cavendish Road
5.	Pouk Hill open space
6.	Open space at Odell Road/Irvine Road
7.	Ross Farm open space
8.	Open space to the rear of Lichfield Road, Bloxwich (the site runs adjacent to Bloxwich Cemetery)
9.	Open space to the rear of Glastonbury Crescent
10.	Open space known as Kent Road Rec (located opposite Old Hall pool)
11.	Open space at Poplar Avenue (located to the rear of Jane Lane Close)
12.	Open space at Fallings Heath (located at Cook St/Wood St, Darlaston)
13.	Open space to the rear of properties at Wilkes Avenue, Bentley
14.	Open space at Woodend Road (leading to Gillity estate)
15.	Delves Common
16.	Open spaces at Walstead Road (one adjacent to Walsall golf club, and one at the junction with Walstead Road and Laburnum Road)
17.	Nest Common
18.	Open space known as Leylands Farm (located to the rear of Wolverhampton Road, Pelsall)
19.	Pelsall common (area of the common located adjacent to Commonsides)
20.	Open space to the rear of The Parkway and Brook Meadow Road
21.	Open space at Stubbers Green
22.	Open space known as Bentley Railway (located adjacent to the southern end of Lodge Farm estate)
23.	Open space known as Rhys Thomas open space (located off Pennine Way, Lodge Farm estate)
24.	Open space at Pool Hayes Lane (located to the rear of properties at Milford Avenue, Pool Hayes estate)
25.	Open space known as Pooles Lane Rec (located between Pooles Lane and the southern end of Littleton Road playing fields)
26.	Open space known as Fibbersley Canal (located between Fibbersley and Monmer Lane)

- 3.3 Following the change in Administration of the Council on the 3 June 2015 a review of the annual grass cutting of 26 sites was requested with a view to reinstating fortnightly grass cutting at those sites.
- 3.4 A review of the grass cutting arrangements was carried out, based on the recent complaints received, along with the consideration of the biodiversity benefit of allowing grass to grow for a whole season before annual mowing.
- 3.5 Two options were identified:
- a) Option 1 - Revert to fortnightly grass cutting for all of the 26 sites
 - b) Option 2 - Revert to fortnightly grass cutting for a number of sites
- 3.6 Due to time constraints of the cutting season, it was considered that there was insufficient time to fully assess the views of the local communities in respect of

their preferences, or fully consider the biodiversity benefits for each of the 26 sites at this time. It is therefore proposed to reinstate fortnightly grass cutting with immediate effect and carry out a review to determine the impact or benefit of cutting fortnightly or annually on each site with appropriate public consultation at the end of this grass cutting season.

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2015-19, "Shaping a Fairer Future", includes a priority of Helping Local High Streets and Communities which makes a commitment to listen to the voice of the community, putting Walsall residents and businesses at the heart of decision making.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 The risks identified with increasing the grass cutting frequencies on the above sites are identified below:
- a) It will take 4–6 weeks to re-introduce fortnightly grass cutting due to the fact that the length of grass will require a flail 'cut and collect' operation to bring it back to a maintainable standard. The impact will therefore not be seen immediately.
 - b) To introduce fortnightly grass cutting to all sites may increase complaints from groups/residents that support natural grass land and the associated biodiversity benefits.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 To re-introduce fortnightly grass cutting to the above 26 sites would cost an additional £28,000 pa. This additional cost pressure will have to be met from the Economy and Environment directorate budget.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications with this report.

8. Property implications

- 8.1 There are no property implications with this report.

9. Health and wellbeing implications

- 9.1 In September 2012 the Council adopted the Marmot Objectives as objectives for improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities for the people of Walsall. These objectives have provided the framework for the Joint Strategic

Needs Assessment, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Sustainable Communities Strategy and "The Walsall Plan". The recommendations in this report are consistent with these priorities.

10. Staffing implications

- 10.1 One additional Agency employee will be required to work until 30 September 2015 to carry out grass cutting of the re 26 areas at a fortnightly frequency. The agency resource will be used as seasonal labour in order to minimise employee costs.

11. Equality implications

- 11.1 It is considered that there are no equality implications with this proposal but the EqIA will be revisited in the review at the end of the year.

12. Consultation

- 12.1 Consideration of public comments regarding the condition of some of the sites listed in this report has been taken into account in the preparation of this report.

Background papers

None.

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