

**Economy & Environment Scrutiny Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**27 February 2024**

**Grass Cutting Schedule and mapping of Council Assets**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Murphy – Portfolio Holder: Street Pride

**Related portfolios:** Cllr Flint – Portfolio Holder: Wellbeing, Leisure and Public Spaces

**Service:** Highways, Transport and Operations – Place and Environment

**Wards:** All

**1. Aim**

- 1.1. Grassed areas and open green spaces have a positive impact on wellbeing, connect communities to nature and, support carbon reduction.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The committee is asked to note the work being carried out to create grass cutting schedules that deliver a clean, green and vibrant borough that supports biodiversity and managed habitat preservation.

**3. Report detail – know**

***Background***

- 3.1. Our residents have told us that they recognise that their surrounding environment and access to green space is an important factor for their wellbeing.
- 3.2. Access to nature and green space alleviates stress, stabilises blood pressure and eases anxiety and depression. Green space also makes exercise more appealing and provides opportunity for healthy, active lifestyles. Grass verges and green spaces intercept rainwater and help to combat surface water flooding, reducing runoff by up to 99% compared to a paved surface.
- 3.3. In January 2023, the government published the Environmental Improvement Plan which set out plans for significantly improving the natural environment. The government has committed to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030, increase species abundance by at least 10% between 2030 and 2043 and restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats.
- 3.4. Guidance for public authorities notes that small changes to how areas such as roadside verges are managed can create habitats for wildlife and ‘nature corridors’ that connect existing habitats. This allows species to move between habitats, maintain or increase populations and be more resilient to climate change.

- 3.5. Mowing grassed areas less frequently presents an opportunity to encourage biodiversity. The grasses will set seed, wildflowers already in grassed areas will grab their opportunity to bloom, and the longer stems will create a sheltered microclimate.
- 3.6. Cutting grassed areas at the end of summer allows the areas to flourish, ensures flowers have set seed before cutting, and allows seed to fall onto bare ground for the following year. This ensures intervention to keep areas under control and areas are managed for the following season.
- 3.7. The borough already has some positive examples of rewilding on Nest Common and Walsall airport, where areas have been left unmown and species such as Orchids have started to flourish.

### ***The Current maintenance regime***

- 3.8. Current grass maintenance is primarily a three to five weekly cut from late March through to early October. Grass cutting takes place on a cyclic basis with teams visiting all grassed areas in a single ward before moving on to the next. If weather conditions mean that the grass has grown significantly between cuts, the process of cutting the grass can take considerably longer.
- 3.9. Operatives use a range of machines including ride on mowers, strimmers and pedestrian mowers. Grass is not routinely collected and is instead left to reside where it falls. Whilst generally this is an accepted practice and maintains lawn/grass areas in a tidy condition, it adds little value to wildlife, habits, pollinators, and microclimates.

### ***Rationale for creating long grass areas (rewilding):***

- 3.10. There are several opportunities where rewilding can prove to be beneficial:
  - Rewilding of areas adjacent to hedges, woodland and other existing ecological corridors maximises the benefit to wildlife.
  - Limited cutting of grass areas that contain trees increases the benefit to wildlife and reduces the time spent mowing around objects.
  - Areas that already contain a higher number of wildflower species are important for biodiversity and regular cutting may prevent them from flowering and setting seed.
  - Larger residential verges, slope and banks have low service value (e.g. are not used for children's play) but offer opportunities to increase biodiversity without reducing the availability of quality amenity space.
- 3.11. It's important to note that the success of rewilding initiatives depends on various factors, including proper planning, community involvement, and adaptive

management strategies. Additionally, the specific benefits may vary based on the characteristics of the grasslands and the broader ecological context.

3.12. Factors considered when reviewing the grass cutting regime include the following:

- Mowing desire paths through long grass for access, egress and dog walking
- Adding small wildlife signs in each long grass area (referencing pollinators)
- Keeping a strip along paths and roads mown regularly, giving consideration to sight lines, safety etc.
- Providing customer exchange centre agents and operatives with leaflets explaining the regimes so they could hand them out to the public if they get enquiries.
- Updated webpages explaining the approach being taken.
- Promotion of good news stories on social media and via press releases.

3.13. Finally, bringing operational frontline staff on board and re-training in wildlife friendly maintenance regimes will also assist successful implementation.

### ***Communication & Consultation***

3.14. In 2023/24, providing customers with a clear explanation of the grass cutting regime contributed to a significant reduction in complaint escalations.

3.15. Information boards, such as those pictured below, will help to raise awareness of the rationale behind the approach to service delivery. Additionally, smaller signage incorporating QR codes that link to council web pages will provide similar narrative for more compact sites.



#### 4. Financial information

- 4.1. Grass cutting is a revenue funded service. The 2024/25 grass cutting schedule will deliver the following efficiencies.

Activity	Saving
<b>Staff reduction</b> Delete vacancy - STPR001200 (Grade 5) Reduction of one FTE post	£35,155
<b>Reduction in fleet assets</b> Reduce 1 tractor (FJ09 NGP)	£3,000
<b>Reduction in follow up work</b> e.g. strimming, pedestrian mowing, herbicide control Reduction in agency budget	£11,845
<b>Total efficiency</b>	<b>£50,000</b>

#### 5. Reducing Inequalities

- 5.1. Providing access to nature and biodiversity mitigates inequalities by fostering inclusive well-being. Green spaces offer equal opportunities for recreation, promoting physical and mental health for all communities and socio-economic groups.

#### 6. Decide

- 6.1. The committee is asked to note the work being carried out in respect to rewilding and grass cutting and provide their feedback on the approach being taken.

#### 7. Respond

- 7.1. Grass cutting schedules will be implemented from late March 2024.

#### 8. Review

- 8.1. Elected members will be invited to provide feedback on the 2024 grass cutting service in the autumn. Comments received from councillors and members of the public will be used to inform the approach taken in the following year.

#### 9. Appendices

- 9.1. Appendix A: 2024 Grass Cutting Programme

#### 10. Background Papers

- 10.1. None arising from this report.

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## Appendix A

### 2024 Grass Cutting Programme

Grass cutting plans for adjustment to specific locations for 2024 season onwards are detailed in the tables below. The majority of the sites selected have been allocated for rewilding, heathland and tree planting.

Ward No.	Ward	Location	Total before reduction	Total after reduction	Reduction area m2	% reduction of cut area	Specification for unmown area	Rationale	Current schedule	Specification for areas mown
1	Brownhills	Whitehorse Road Open space	9977	4267	5710	57	Flail collect annually (October)	Potential for heathland restoration	2 to 3 weeks	Play area cut and maintained in line with district schedule
1	Brownhills	Cherwell drive	5259	1430	3829	74	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Recreational area and pathways in line with district schedule
2	Pelsall	Moat farm pool - Lichfield Rd	2600	1090	1510	58	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Pathways and highway boundary only
2	Pelsall	Moat farm way - play area	640	240	400	62		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Recreational area in line with district schedule
2	Pelsall	Ryders Hayes open space	2320	970	1350	58	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Recreational area and play area maintained in line with district schedule
3	Aldridge North and Walsall wood	Vigo common	13906	3646	10260	74	Flail annually (October) divide into two sections and alternate each year	Long grass for birds of prey	2 to 3 weeks	Play area cut and muga maintained in line with district schedule
3	Aldridge North and Walsall wood	Rusty men o/s Brook lane open space	4442	380	4062	91	Flail collect annually (October)	To allow a balanced ecosystem to thrive and not allow plants to dominate the natural balance	2 to 3 weeks	Pathways only inline with district schedule

3	Aldridge North and Walsall wood	Greenwood Road P/A	12664	2145	10519	83	Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Play area and boundary cut in line with district schedule
3	Aldridge North and Walsall wood	Lindon Road	1560	240	1320	84	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Perimeter cut only n line with district schedule
3	Aldridge North and Walsall wood	Druids Walk	4270	3640	630	15		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Play area and recreational area in line with district schedule
4	Sheffield and Rushall	Grange Crescent Open space	17194	6939	10255	59	No cut	Accept natural tree regeneration form adjacent woodland	2 to 3 weeks	Pathways cut in line with District schedule
4	Sheffield and Rushall	The Parkway & Brookmeadow Open Space	30000	25595	4405	15	Flail collect annually (October)	Possible wildflower area	2 to 3 weeks	Centre strip cut in line with District schedule
4	Sheffield and Rushall	Radleys play area	7370	2625	4745	64	Flail annually (October)	Potential tree planting area	2 to 3 weeks	Play area cut and pathways maintained
4	Sheffield and Rushall	Westgate P/A	7500	3800	3700	49	Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Play area and recreational area cut in line with District schedule
4	Sheffield and Rushall	Stubbers Green/ Barnes Lane	10000	600	9400	94	Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Highway boundary line only
5	Aldridge Central and South	Sunny Bank Quarry	8167	5217	2950	39	Flail annually (October)	Potential tree planting area	2 to 3 weeks	Recreational area park area cut in line with District schedule
5	Aldridge Central and South	Redhouse play area	5450	3000	2450	45	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Recreational area, paths and play area maintained in line with district schedule
6	Streetly	Hundred acre wood/ Goodwood Park	5300	3320	1980	37		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Play area and recreational area in line with district schedule
7	Pheasey	Moreton avenue - Open space	1900	750	1150	60		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Boundary, pathways and recreational area in line with district schedule

8	Paddock	Park hall pool	8550	3280	5270		Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Boundary cut and small recreational area only cut in line with district schedule
8	Paddock	Woodend road play area Gillity Park	13300	1843	11457	86	Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Pathways and small recreational areas cut in line with district schedule
8	Paddock	Newquay road Play area	5381	550	4831	89	Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Boundary cut, Play area and small recreational area
8	Paddock	Treyamon Rd	1816	282	1534	84	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Highway boundary line only
9	St Matthews	Highgate Drive play area	5245	559	4686	89	Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Play area only - Possibly needs reviewing
10	Palfery	Walstead Road O/S	8600	8600	0	0	Flailed annually until planted in 2024/25	Potential tree planting area	2 to 3 weeks	Boundary cut inline with district schedule
10	Palfery	Laburnum Road	5475	1625	3850	70	Flail annually (October)	Potential tree planting area	2 to 3 weeks	Boundary cut plus pathway inline with district schedule
10	Palfery	Bescot crescent play area	3020	545	2475	81	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Play area only in line with district schedule
11	Pleck	Hough road					No cut		No cut	Bund maintained 3 x annually only
12	Birchills and Leamore	Sydenham playing fields Green lane o/s (birchills)	15400	6750	8650	56	Flail annually (October)		Monthly	Cricket pitch, Boundary and pathways cut in line with district schedule
12	Birchills and Leamore	Odell road o/s	26150	1560	24590	94	Flail collect annually (October)	Potential for Wildflower meadow	2 to 3 weeks	Pathway only in line with district schedule
12	Birchills and Leamore	Green lane o/s (leamore)	14320	900	13420	93	Flail annually (October)	Hedgerow planting with potential for meadow and tree planting 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Boundary lines, small recreational area and Pathways cut in line with District schedule

12	Birchills and Leamore	Croft street/ Penkridge close	1423	1168	255	18	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Play area and recreational area in line with district schedule
13	Blakenhall	Essex street / Coalpool lane Walkers bequest	10000	4848	5152	51	Flail collect annually (October)	1555m2 of tree planting planned for 2024/25, reason for collect is to reduce any ASB with long grass left on site	2 to 3 weeks	Play area, recreational area, Pathways cut in line with District schedule
13	Blakenhall	Leckie wildlife/ Proffitt street open space	5800	980	4820	83	Pathways only		2 to 3 weeks	Pathways cut in line with District schedule
14	Bloxwich East	Mallory crescent Livingstone road	15000	6675	8325	55	Flail annually (October)	Potential tree planting area	2 to 3 weeks	Play area, recreationall and Boundary cut inline with district schedule
14	Bloxwich East	Ashbourne road open space	7210	5410	1800	25	Flail collect annually (October)	Potential wildflower area to supplement tiny forest area	Monthly	Maintain access to community orchard inline with district schedule - Needs a Map
14	Bloxwich East	Drake road island	3500	1417	2083	59	Flail annually (October)	Area to be planted 2024/25	Monthly	Recreational area and Boundary cut inline with district schedule
14	Bloxwich East	Ingram road open space	1790	1240	550	30		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Recreational and boundary cut in line with district schedule
14	Bloxwich East	Church street open space	1700	695	1005	59		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Pathways, boundary and recreational area in line with district schedule
15	Bloxwich West	Glastonbury o/s	11198	3468	7730	69	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting area 2023/24 - fail cut what isnt planted	Monthly	Pathways and recreational area cut in line with District schedule
15	Bloxwich West	Mossley youth club amenity greenspace Sneyd Lane open space	25700	8416	17284	67	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting area 2023/24 - flail cut what isnt planted	Monthly	Recreational, Muga and Pathways cut in line with District schedule



15	Bloxwich West	Abbey square	3050	1990	1060	34	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting area 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Recreational area and Boundary lines cut in line with District schedule
15	Bloxwich West	Sneyd Hall Road o/s	6610	4710	1900	29	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting area 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Recreational area, Boundary lines and Pathways cut in line with District schedule
15	Bloxwich West	Isacc Walton pool - Newtown pool	2440	710	1730	70	Flail collect annually (October)	Potential for meadow	Monthly 2 to 3 times annually	Pathway only in line with district schedule
15	Bloxwich West	Fisher road	3600	1000	2600	72	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting area 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Boundary lines, Pathways and small recreational area cut in line with District schedule
15	Bloxwich West	Turnberry o/s	9972	5465	4507	45	Flail collect annually (October)	To allow a balanced ecosystem to thrive and not allow plants to dominate the natural balance	2 to 3 weeks	Small recreational areas and pathways cut inline with district schedule
16	Willenhall North	Coppice farm o/s	45900	19560	26340	57	Flail annually (October), once tree planting has been completed flail collect approx 9000m2	Tree planting area 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Muga Pathways and recreational area cut in line with District schedule
16	Willenhall North	Littleton road/ Brereton road	14750	6200	8550	42	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting area 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Play area and recreational area cut in line with District schedule
16	Willenhall North	Poets estate field/ Tennyson field	11,555	4,285	7,270	63	Flail collect annually (October)	To prevent ruderal weed growth. Some tree planting planned	2 to 3 weeks	Boundary lines cut in line with District schedule

16	Willenhall North	Beacon p/a - Sandland Road	5,760	2,670	3,090	53	Flail collect annually (October)	To allow a balanced ecosystem to thrive and not allow plants to dominate the natural balance Tree planting planned for 2023/24	2 to 3 weeks	Recreational and pathway areas cut in line with district schedule - May include some boundary work
16	Willenhall North	Greaves crescent	3,460	2,555	905	26	no cut	Tree planting already in place	2 to 3 weeks	Recreational area only cut in line with district schedule
16	Willenhall North	Miles Meadow Close	2,570	2155	415	16	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting planned 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Recreational area, Boundary lines and Pathways cut in line with District schedule
16	Willenhall North	Delamere road Open space	4300	2090	2210	51	Flail annually (October)	Area to be planted 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Highway boundary line only
16	Willenhall North	Harlech rd open space	1535	825	710	46	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Recreational, boundary and play area only in line with district schedule
16	Willenhall North	Buckingham drive open space	408	120	288	70	Flail 3 x each year		Inline with district schedule	2 x entrances cut in line with district schedule
17	Short heath	Pool hayes Rear of School part of O/S	20000	4500	15500		Flail annually (October)	Tree planting area 2024/25	Flail annually	Pathways cut in line with District schedule - Needs a map
17	Short heath	Oakridge drive off Bentley Linear WW	End of year cut only				Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	End of year cut only
17	Shorth Heath	Queens Lea roundabout	1980	530	1450	73	Flail annually (October)		Inline with district schedule	Perimeter cut only n line with district schedule
17	Shorth Heath	Birch coppice Gardens	1635	1300	335	20		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Recreational, boundary cut in line with district schedule
18	Willenhall South	Harthill street p/a Tyler Rd	6,720	2,900	3,820	56	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting site 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Play area/ Muga and Pathways cut in line with District schedule

18	Willenhall South	Lowry Close corridor and Noose crescent open space	9500	2527	6973	73		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Pathways and boundary cut in line with district schedule
18	Willenhall North	Ullswater road	10500	1200	9300	88	Flail 3 x each year	Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Pathway cut in line with district schedule
18	Willenhall South	Festival avenue x 2	6900	2700	4200	71	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting planned 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Boundary cut and pathways and small recreational area inline with district schedule
18	Willenhall South	Broadwaters p/a	6605	2390	4215	73	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting planned 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Play area cut and perimeter maintained in line with district schedule
19	Bentley and Darlaston North	Park lane/ Cook street o/s	9400	1800	7600	83	Flail annually (October)	Tree planting planned 2024/25	2 to 3 weeks	Boundary cut and pathways inline with district schedule
19	Bentley and Darlaston North	Bush Park - Owen Street	9320	1340	7980	87	Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Boundary cut, pathways and recreational area inline with district schedule
19	Bentley and Darlaston North	Poplar Avenue - ABC Park	9970	3610	6360	73	Flail annually (October)		2 to 3 weeks	Pathways, play area and small recreational area inline with district schedule
19	Bentley and Darlaston North	Anson rd	2070	660	1410	68		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Recreational, boundary cut in line with district schedule
19	Bentley and Darlaston North	Edward street open space	500	0	500	100	No cut	Potential for meadow and tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	No cut
19	Bentley and Darlaston North	St Lawrence way wide verge Darlaston	2200	818	1382	62		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Pathway and small recreational spaces in line with district schedule
20	Darlaston South	Lower Bradley Playing fields / Great bridge rd	37000	25600	11400	38%	Flail annually (October)	Potential tree planting area	2 to 3 weeks	Football pitches maintained as per agreement

20	Darlaston South	Curtain drive p/a - Queen Street Amenity space	9,482	3,140	6,342	66	Flail collect annually (October)	Potential for some wildflower, or sow with yellow rattle to reduce dominance of grasses and reduce amount of grass growth	2 to 3 weeks	Recreational area, Play area and Pathways cut in line with District schedule - May include in some boundary work
20	Darlaston South	Dangerfield lane open space - Pinfold Street	5,415	3,315	2,100	39	Flail collect annually (October)	s106 funded meadow and tree planting planned for the site	2 to 3 weeks	Recreational area, Boundary lines and Pathways cut in line with District schedule
20	Darlaston South	Kendrick place	3950	2000	1950	49		Tree planting 2024/25	Inline with district schedule	Recreational only in line with district schedule