

Meeting	Full Council
Date	10 th December 2024
Report Title	Parks & Open Spaces: Grounds Maintenance End of Season Audit: Grass Cutting
Agenda Reference	13A
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Officers Recommendations

1. To note the end of season Grass Cutting Audit

Background

The weather conditions allowed for an end of March 2024 cut, but there were not enough resources to carry this out effectively within the Parks & Open Spaces Team, so after planning and consideration it was agreed to commence the season in early April 2024. The mowing was able to continue to mid-November 2024, due to favorable weather conditions, which allowed an extra cycle. There were 11 cycles completed during this period.

The expectation each season is that each round takes approximately 3 – 3.5 weeks to complete, however, the duration is dependent on weather conditions, vehicle breakdowns and staff availability. At the beginning of the peak season, the first two cycles make slower progress due to the length of the grass and the ground conditions.

This season, there were a series of Grounds Maintenance Working Party meetings which took place from February 2024 with both Councillors and Staff so that expectations were discussed early on, and examples of both positive and constructive feedback were given. There was more support and understanding for the team, knowing the operational daily challenges faced.

Change in operations

Towards the end of the season in September 2024, the mower drivers began to conduct their own back up blowing and split in different directions to allow grass cutting coverage across the parish. One operative completes Abbey Meads, Greenmeadow, Haydon Wick and Moredon, the other focuses on Haydon End, Taw Hill, Mouldon Hill and Oakhurst.

During analysis of the two cycles that this took place, both operatives agreed that it gives better ownership of the areas and means that there is more time to finish off, leaving each area neat and complete before moving on to the next area. The cycles at the end of the season took approximately the same amount of time 3.5 weeks to



complete but it is expected when these cycles take place in the early spring, this may take up to 1.5 weeks extra.

Countrywide continued to cut the large grass cutting areas from May – October, a contingency cut was also requested prior to the peak season in April.

Communications with residents

Communications on social media and the website have improved. This year, the Council trialed a '*grass monsters*' story campaign which allowed the communications to be fun and informative, but also addressed any operational or weather conditions that were not assisting the schedule. The monsters created were then used for the Parks & Open Spaces stand at the Summer Event. Feedback from residents agreed that this was fun and engaging, whereas others felt that shorter snappier updates were taken more seriously.

Once the challenges subsided and the growth rate slowed down, the '*grass monsters*' stories ended, and the schedules were updated on the website. Simple before and after pictures are visual and receive a high amount of engagement.

A new schedule and reporting system is in its trial stages, this will be communicated to residents soon.

Lessons learnt this Season (April 24 – November 24)

1. Strimming ceased in August, due to operatives being deployed to other duties, due to low resourcing levels through annual leave and sickness. As the weather was warmer the growth rate was lower so allowed for some down time. However, skipping more than one cycle of strimming does then begin to look untidy, especially on kerbs where weed spraying is required. ***Therefore, ceasing strimming should only be done when other resourcing options are not available and for a maximum of 1 cycle.***
2. To work smarter and more efficiently by changing the schedules, grouping purchases together to avoid multiple supplier trips and having regular check-ins with the team to see what support is required.
3. The Parks & Projects Team has taken on the 3 weekly grass cutting of the Council Offices, Leisure Garden Sites and external grass cutting contracts which are renewed every May.

Improvements planned for next Season (April 25 – October 25)

1. There are six trained operatives able to use the ride on mowers, operations need to be alternated between them all rather than relying on the two most experienced operatives.
2. Operating from the new Grounds Maintenance Facility on the Old Blunsdon Road will save time and fuel.
3. A budget aspiration has been put in place for the hire a third mower at the beginning of the peak season to bridge this gap and allow the team to make a good start.
4. Improved analysis, grounds maintenance knowledge, work scheduling and the two Senior Managers being on the ground to support the day-to-day operation



leading from the front will put the team in good stead.

5. Continue with splitting the cycles to give maximum coverage across the parish and to make the Parks & Open Spaces Team more visible to our residents.
6. Updating the ground maintenance schedules and improving communications and transparency to residents.

Financial Information

Fuel for the season cost £4,295.51 for both mowers and the maintenance costs were £7,919.59 at the end of Month 8. Repairs included new tyres, replacement blades, mower deck and installation of new air seats and blower baskets.

More to follow.