

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

1. To note the end of season Hedge & Shrub Cutting Audit

Background

The Council has hired the tractor and flail consecutively for 12 months this year, which has sped up the process and has been able to reduce the height and width of many overgrown shrub beds. The prime focus was the road verges, main footpaths, local play areas and school crossings. Many of the side streets still need to be attended to if they haven't been picked up in the daily work schedules/reactive works. Using the tractor and flail has meant the chippings are pulverized and there are less trips to the tip to dispose of debris.

The tractor and flail team consists of three people, two banksman and the tractor driver. Where there are two trained tractor operators in the team there is regular switching over and sharing the load. If three operatives are not available, the tractor team works on public open spaces away from footpaths and roadsides.

Scheduling and Work Planning

There has been a review of the service and improvements where necessary. Statistics show that there has been a lot of time off the published schedules to do reactive works and better planning is required for next year. The POST Managers are also trained tractor operatives and actively leading the team.

Reviewing the work and understanding the impact of reactive work has on the scheduling work has helped with the resourcing and job allocation across the Team. Enabling the tractor to continue on the schedule visually makes an area look better and allows the team to set up the vehicles with tools and signage for the week ahead.

The scheduling for the remainder of the season includes key dates and a contingency of one week between each of the zones to allow for any reactive works. The timings have been considered by on the ground knowledge and experience built up over the last 12 months. This will be reviewed for the next 3 months and brought back to Council in March 2025.



Communications with residents

Regular posts are shared linking to the maintenance schedules on the website. A new schedule and reporting system is in its trial stages, and this will be communicated to residents soon.

Lessons learnt this Season (April 24 – November 24)

1. Having a reactive team to contend with daily work sheets and non-schedule work.
2. Scheduling in big projects, such as Akers Way, the Leisure Gardens and planned winter works.
3. Spill kit always created and kept on the van in case of burst hydraulic pipes (x2 in 12 mths)
4. Spare flail teeth are kept on site to replace missing or broken teeth. This reduces downtime considerably.
5. Chapter 8 (traffic management) learnt and practiced where necessary. A road sign kit has been created with radios and hand tools to enable all teams to grab and go.
6. School areas prioritised during half term and summer hols.
7. Tractor now registered with Swindon Borough Council to simplify refuelling and reduces downtime.
8. Tractor grass cutting capabilities to be investigated to establish if cutting large areas is feasible.

Improvements for next Season (April 25 – October 25)

1. Completing each area as a whole; roadsides, footpaths, etc. so that each area is completed prior to moving on to the next zone.
2. Training two more tractor drivers so that an extra tractor can be hired to bolster the team if required or for other scheduling work on play areas, leisure gardens and project based work.

Financial Information

Tractor hire for full twelve months is £16,800. During 2024/25 this cost has been met by a combination of budgets including, arboricultural, grounds maintenance contracts and the arboricultural EMR. There is an aspiration in the 2025/26 budget setting to include a full years tractor hire plus a second tractor for up to 6 months as a new budget line.