

Mr Ian Edwards
C/O Stephen Henderson
Secretary of North Swindon Labour Party
10 Jasmine Close
Woodhall Park
Swindon
SN25 3JN

7th July 2021

Dear Mr Edwards,

I write in reference to your letter dated 15th June 2021 sent on behalf of the Constituency Labour Party Chair and Secretary of North Swindon.

Upon receipt of your letter, I sent an email acknowledgment to advise that this matter would be investigated by the Deputy Clerk & Services Manager and the Head of Parks & Open Spaces who will report their findings to the Parks & Open Spaces Committee in July. We have now completed our investigation and this letter represents a formal response in respect of the maintenance of the open spaces within the parish.

The Parks & Open Spaces Committee discussed the concerns at its recent meeting on Tuesday 13th July 2021. The period in question suffered some adverse weather conditions with a week of heavy rain causing the ground to become boggy to cut followed by a period of warm weather causing the growth of the grass to surge. The Parish Councillors, SBC Ward Councillors and the Conservative Party Candidates were also receiving the same concerns and brought these to the Parish Council's attention. It was apparent from social media that several other parishes in Swindon (and nationwide) also faced the same issues. To rectify the issues the Council ramped up their service from our external Contractor (who incidentally were experiencing the same issues) and utilised our internal Parks & Open Spaces team with an increase in their working day to bring the grass cutting schedule back on track.

In response to your questions:

1. What are the key performance indicators for verge and green area management?

The Council measures the performance on:

- The length of the grass following a cut of a maximum of 50mm.
- If the 50mm cut is not achieved then the mowers will go over the area again, cutting it twice to get the length of the grass down to a manageable standard.
- The grass is to be cut on a three weekly cycle (subject to the weather conditions).
- A back up strimmer will cut around any street furniture, kerb edges and boundary walls within 24 hours of the area being cut.
- A back up blower, will attend with the strimmer to clear any debris to give a generally well kept appearance. The debris is blown back into the verges to mulch down.



- Large areas of open spaces are cut by our external contractors and work to a specification as identified in the contract.
- Regular maintenance of the machinery including regular sharpening of the blades or replacement blades, to achieve a sharper cut.

The team is currently on their fifth cut of the season and the aim is to complete ten cuts during the season which can run from March – October (subject to weather conditions). This averages out at a cut every 3-weeks and is a schedule of work which the Council has successfully delivered over the past three years. Our team takes pride in the service it delivers for the community.

2. When and by whom are they audited to ensure that these key performance indicators are met?

- The Parish Council has 18 Councillors, 11 of which sit on the Parks & Open Spaces Committee. The Councillors are asked to check on the grass cutting via a request from the Officers soon after an area has been completed.
- The back-up strimmer and mowers who follow the grass cutting team closely will also flag any concerns and cut these with hand tools or call the team back to complete an area.
- The Head of Parks & Open Spaces inspects the areas daily in between site visits to ensure the team is on track and meeting the schedules.
- The Parish Council has also built up a rapport with its residents and if there are any concerns phone calls, emails or contact via social media channels.
- A report of the month's grass cutting schedule and any matters arising is taken to the Parks & Open Spaces Committee on the second Tuesday of every month.

3. What is the process to identify emerging issues and react to them quickly?

- The above reporting methods identify emerging issues.
- Regular checks on the weather forecasting, planned activities, resources and project planning.
- An additional contingency amount is budgeted every year for extra resourcing at the beginning of the season and the end of the season due to inclement weather or any other issues, such as resourcing or machinery issues, that the Parish Council may face.
- Regular contact with external contractors and additional work programmed as soon as there is an issue identified.
- Any planned expenditure is approved via the Committee during the discussion and any unplanned expenditure, up to limits identified within the Council's financial regulations, can be approved via the Chief Officer for a quicker turnaround.

4. Is there a performance report evidencing the effectiveness of the green management and grass-cutting performance of the Parish Council?

A monthly report is circulated to the Parks & Open Spaces Committee monthly detailing the grass cutting schedule, any maintenance costs and any matters arising. These reports are available to review on the Parish Council's website www.haydonwick.gov.uk for openness and transparency. You may find some of the answers to your queries within these reports.



The Parish Council invests over half a million pounds or 60% of the annual precept each year into delivering our parks and open spaces maintenance. We understand the importance of maintaining a high level of grounds maintenance in the parish. To this end we have recently agreed to invest further into a building a permanent grounds maintenance facility in the parish and we are trialling a street sweeper this winter. We hope such investments will demonstrate to our residents that we go above and beyond to provide great service levels to the residents within our parish.

Yours sincerely

Georgina Morgan-Denn FSLCC, BA (Hons)
Chief Officer and RFO