4th July 2023

Grass & grassland management



Parks for London

London Parks Benchmarking Group

Official



GRASS VERGE MAINTENANCE

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

In the beginning…

- Genesis! Meeting with representatives from Butterfly Conservation UK in 2018 stimulated our interest into how we could implement a similar approach to that of Dorset Council.
- In 2020 the Council finalised the Climate Emergency Strategy and Air Quality Action Plan, which both detail an ambition to beat climate change and reduce air pollution. The Parks Team has always been environmentally focused, with the conservation of ecology at the heart of how we deliver our service. However, with a local climate emergency being declared, we had an exciting opportunity to identify and explore new environmentally focused ways of working.
- The Parks Team with the support of Councillors introduced different maintenance regimes for grass verges in the borough.

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Grass Verges

Highway grass verges are located throughout the Borough and are one of the most visual green public amenities. Previously all highway grass verges were managed between a height of 15mm to 70mm with all arisings (cuttings) left, which inhibited the growth of native flowering plants, increased soil nutrient levels and stimulated vigorous growth for coarse grasses.

The Parks Team believes that highway grass verges have significant potential and that by introducing an environmentally sympathetic approach to maintenance we can:

- Increase biodiversity
- Improve habitats for native flora and fauna
- Reduce our carbon footprint
- Improve air quality

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Maintenance Regimes

Rural Cut

- The rural cut meets our objectives by increasing habitat for pollinators, biodiversity of flora and fauna, reduces our carbon footprint and improves air quality.
- The rural cut typically requires only two cuts, one in mid spring (March/April) and one in late summer (August/September). However, a third cut is scheduled if needed in the winter (January/December).
- Where possible arisings would be collected, but this would depend on growing conditions and the amount of arisings. For example, it may not be necessary to remove arisings on the winter cut, however the spring cut would need arisings removed as this is when competitive coarse grasses put on a lot of growth before they seed.



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Maintenance Regimes

Rural Cut

Benefits of this approach include:

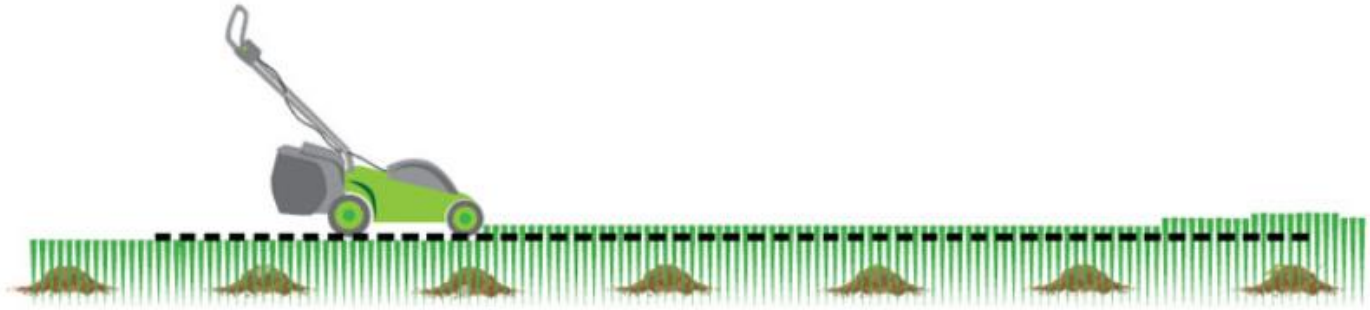
- Many native plants present on the highway grass verges are annual (grown from seed, produce seed in one year and die). The rural cut provides annual plants with the opportunity to complete their lifecycles and subsequently increase in population
- An increase in flowering native plants provides improved food source for pollinators
- The collection of arisings after the plants have completed their lifecycles removes nutrients from the soil, slowing the growth of competitive coarse grasses. It also allows for more increased light and air for native flowering plants, therefore improving their chances of success
- Improved soil health and reduced compaction increases the resilience of highway grass verges to drought and flooding, subsequently reducing the impact this may also have to people and property

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Maintenance Regimes

Urban Cut

- The urban cut is not environmentally focused, but by reducing the cutting regime it can help us to reduce our carbon footprint.
- The cut is completed in line with our amenity cut, which is every 2-3 weeks.



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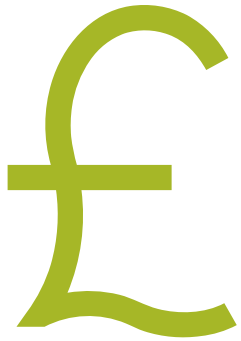
Percentages

The rural grass verges have decreased slightly since their inception, from 78.3% to 70.4%.

The reduction of these are due to requests from the public which have been supported by the Councillors, or where the Parks Team has identified hazards to highway safety.

	2020		2023	
	m^2	%	m^2	%
Urban	36841	21.7	49688	29.6
Rural	32389	19.1	118297	70.4
Conservation	100565	59.2		
	169795	100	167985	100

Challenges



Public Perception – Members of public assume that our approach is purely for financial reasons, rather than for environmental purposes.



Operational Delivery – The rural cut takes up a lot of resource and upon initial implementation did encroach onto other contractual operations. We have now amended the scheduling of rural cuts so that it does not encroach onto other operations.



PETERSHAM ROAD, HAM



HAM STREET, HAM


SHAEF WAY

Visit our Resources Hub

https://parksforlondon.org.uk/resource/managing-grass



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