

## POLICY REVIEW & DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Type of Report: Operational	Portfolio(s): Cllr David Pope: ICT- Leisure and Public Space
Will be subject to a future Cabinet Report:	YES
Will be need to be recommended to Council:	NO
Author Name: Sarah Moore	<b>Consultations:</b> Chris Bamfield, Lorraine Gore, Joy Coombs Nathan Johnson, Chris Durham, Toby Cowper
Tel: 01553 782079	
Email: <a href="mailto:sarah.moore@west-norfolk.gov.uk">sarah.moore@west-norfolk.gov.uk</a>	
OPEN	

### Regeneration, Environment and Community Panel

**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> January 2016  
**Subject:** Grounds Maintenance Review

#### Summary

The report considers current arrangements for Grounds Maintenance in the borough and changes to regimes for 2016.

#### Recommendations

The Panel considers the report.

### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Council carries out Grounds Maintenance work on public open space and highways areas across the borough. This includes large high profile areas including Mintlyn Crematorium, The Walks, Hunstanton seafront and a number of grass verges and open spaces across the 550 square miles of the borough.

The cost of grounds maintenance is charged either;

- To a service area, for example, grass car parks in Hunstanton are charged to car parks and Mintlyn Crematorium grounds to the Crematorium cost centre, seafront in Hunstanton to Resort Services.
- As a Special Expense for grounds work in particular Parish areas or in King's Lynn
- As a charge to County Council for Highways work, for example, verges on Edward Benefer Way, Lynn Road in Downham Market, and King's Lynn Road in Hunstanton and verges throughout Parish areas.

- 1.2 In 2015, as part of the Council's cost reduction process, a full review of grounds maintenance areas and costs has been carried out.

- 1.3 Until 2015/16 all charges have been based on historical paper maps based on information from the mid 90's. In 2015 all public open space has been plotted

on a Geographic Information System by staff physically walking the sites to ensure accurate measurement and plotting. This also included detailing the make-up of areas i.e. grass, shrubs, annual flower beds, sports pitches, etc.

- 1.4 The outcome of this work is an accurate and easily updateable picture for all grounds in the borough. The system allows staff to easily identify the square meterage of different types of open space in any area.
- 1.5 As a separate part of the exercise, all grounds costs have been reviewed by using the Spon's External Works and Landscape Price Book. Spon's books are used throughout industry and give a comprehensive source of information for compiling estimates, specifications, bills of quantity and work schedules.
- 1.6 Combining the GIS mapping and costing work has resulted in an accurate picture of costs.

## **2. Review**

The Council has already undertaken work to review annual flower beds, borders and hedge cutting. The focus of this review was on grass cutting schedules.

- 2.1 The grass cutting season runs on average from mid-March through to November each year equating to approximately 35 weeks. This can change from year to year slightly depending on the weather conditions. There is some variation in the grass cutting regimes across the borough, depending on the size of the area to cover and the number of staff working within the team. The schedules and frequencies can vary from 18 cuts per year to 8 cuts but not on a systematic or planned basis.
- 2.2 To affect any savings, the regimes would need to be reduced. This also offers an opportunity to regularise the regimes across the borough. Any reduced regime would have to:
  - Have a minimal impact of the outlook of the Borough
  - Still offer a good standard of service to both rural and urban populations
  - Be manageable in terms of logistics
  - Be manageable for auditing/monitoring
  - Be accurately and efficiently communicated to all councillors, town and parish councils
- 2.3 Other councils across the country have adopted a series of methods to reduce their grass cutting costs, such as withdrawing their services to the county council, and by reducing the regime to a maximum number of cuts per year regardless of the profile and importance of the area. This kind of approach in BCKLWN is likely to have a significant negative impact on the outlook of the area.

A more practical approach is proposed, affecting a compromise from the hard line taken by other councils, and still achieving savings.

It was proposed to look at each area of grass cutting and assess its amenity value. This included trying to assess:

- What use it served if cut, i.e Highway visibility splay, residential amenity play space
- The proximity to residential areas and houses.
- The proximity to main carriageways/arterial routes.
- Its geographic location within the Borough, compared to other areas that required cutting
- The impact that a reduced cut may have

2.4 Following this assessment of each area, categorised land into the following:

High Profile Parks and Gardens – These areas already receive a higher standard and frequency of cut. It was felt that these areas should not be subject to changes as they are considered the main POS assets of the areas they serve. These include The Walks; Tower Gardens; Central Park, The Esplanade, Boston Square and Downham Market Memorial Ground.

Highway Splays – These areas are those at entrances and exit of most residential areas and at most minor and major junctions in both rural and urban areas. In the majority they are owned by Norfolk County Council and are maintained by POS on their behalf.

They only serve the junctions they are located at, and are cut to prevent obstructions to the visibility of those using the roads. These areas could be significantly reduced in cutting frequency, with a minor impact on the local residents and road users. In some areas of straight road, cutting could be eliminated altogether, especially in the rural areas where longer grass is more easily accepted by the local residents.

Norfolk County Council grass in built up residential areas – These are the splays of grass that are situated along the pavement edge in most residential areas. They can be mixed up with some highway visibility plays. Examples include Queen Elizabeth Road in Gaywood, Clack Close estate in Downham Market. They are interspersed with larger amenity areas that serve as informal recreation areas.

Land immediately adjoining the front boundary of properties – It was considered that this land could be significantly reduced in cutting frequency. If adjacent property owners felt that the council would not be cutting at the same rate that they cut their front lawns they would carry out additional cuts.

2.5 The next question was the best way to ensure that any changes in cutting regime would be as simple and straightforward for the operatives to follow as possible. Most parishes will continue to receive a form of ground maintenance service, whether to cut NCC land, BCKLWN or both.

2.6 It was conceived that a regime of 18, 12 and 6 cuts, would be the best way to exercise a reduction in cutting. 18 cuts equates to a cut every 2 weeks, 12 every 3 weeks and 6 every 6 weeks.

2.7 Whilst the high profile areas would continue to receive a high standard of cut at a rate of 18 cuts per season, the lower profile areas would be split between 12 and 6 cuts. On the ground this would mean that, every second time the

operatives visited an area/parish they would cut the full complement of grass. In summary the new regime could look like this:

- High Profile Parks and Gardens – 18 cuts
- Highway splays within and built up residential – 12 cuts
- Highway splays not in built up areas or immediately interfering with views of road – 6 cuts
- Land immediately adjoining frontages of properties – 6 cuts

2.8 To allow the variation in cutting regimes the current ride on cylinder mowers will be replaced with Flail mowers. The relevant equipment has been trialled and produces a good standard of cut, with the advantage of removing bents.

### **3. Council Services**

3.1 The recharge to the Council's service areas for 2016/17 will use the new formula and achieve a saving of circa. £20,000. This reflects the fact that the majority of the areas, for example Mintlyn Crematorium are high profile sites with limited opportunity to reduce grass cutting frequency.

### **4. County Highways Work**

4.1 County Highways work is more complex. The County Council has historically only paid the Borough Council for five grass cuts per year. The Borough has carried out work to a higher standard including 12-18 cuts of highway verges, additional work to some roundabouts, with shrubs and annual bedding. As part of their own budget review work, County have advised that they will reduce grass cutting frequency in 2016 to four cuts.

4.2 The County payment for grass cutting in 2015/16 was £48,700, it is likely this will reduce to circa £38,900 in 2016/17.

4.3 The estimated costs in 2016/17 for Norfolk County Council Highways work was £149,000 using the methodology/frequency of cutting, in 2016/17 this will reduce to £99,000. A saving for the council of £50,000 but still £61,600 more than the anticipated payment from Norfolk County Council.

### **5. Special Expenses**

5.1 The results of the GIS work and cost review is that most Special Expenses charges will vary from the current charges. The proposals to reduce frequency will help reduce any increased charges but in some areas there are significant variations. In most cases the actual charge for Special Expenses is relatively low in value but high as a percentage.

5.2 The chart at Appendix 1 shows the charge for 2016/17 on special expenses. This take accounts the previous freeze on special expenses and other charges street lighting, play areas, etc

5.3 Any Special expense increase has been capped at £10 in any financial year.

## **6. Financial Implications**

### **6.1 Revenue**

The schedule changes will produce an annual budget saving of £110,000 in the 2016/17 financial year and on an ongoing basis.

Council Services	£20,000
Highway Works	£50,000
Cost Recovery Special Expenses	£40,000
Total	£110,000

### **6.2 Capital**

The Council has a replacement schedule for mowing equipment and will replace existing cylinder mowers with flail mowers by the end of March. The replacement costs can be contained within the Grounds Capital provision.

## **7. Review**

7.1 The proposal is to report to panel on the implementation of the new arrangements.



Appendix 1

Parish	Taxbase 2016/17	Current Cutting Regime			Revised Cutting Regime			2015/16 Special Expenses Band D Charge £	2016/17 Special Expenses Band D Charge Current Regime £	2016/17 Special Expenses Band D Charge Revised Regime £
		Special Expenses Cost £	Less Central Government Support Grant £	Net Special Expenses Charge £	Special Expenses Cost £	Less Central Government Support Grant £	Net Special Expenses Charge £			
Downham Market	3,450	75,383	2,959	72,424	60,880	2,959	57,921	14.39	20.99	16.79
East Winch	270	1,389	19	1,370	1,300	19	1,281	1.74	5.08	4.75
Feltwell	657	1,795	89	1,706	1,020	89	931	2.87	2.60	1.42
Heacham	1,811	5,026	7	5,019	3,400	7	3,393	0.07	2.77	1.87
Hilgay	408	5,662	184	5,478	3,920	184	3,736	8.87	13.41	9.15
Hockwold	362	816	36	780	370	36	334	2.35	2.16	0.92
Hunstanton	1,879	93,295	1,999	91,296	82,650	1,999	80,651	18.11	48.59	42.92
King's Lynn	9,630	500,236	34,990	465,246	452,260	34,990	417,270	41.45	48.31	43.33
Leziate	262	1,341	5	1,336	910	5	905	1.10	5.09	3.45
Methwold	463	1,284	39	1,245	620	39	581	2.10	2.69	1.26
Northwold	365	398	0	398	0	0	0	0.60	1.09	0.00
North Wootton	843	9,118	8	9,110	7,350	8	7,342	0.77	10.81	8.71
Old Hunstanton	338	1,775	16	1,759	1,710	16	1,694	3.33	5.20	5.01
Outwell	592	2,068	92	1,976	1,910	92	1,818	1.85	3.34	3.07
Pentney	190	122	6	116	70	6	64	0.60	0.61	0.34
South Creake	269	1,056	45	1,011	440	45	395	3.99	3.76	1.47
Southery	374	2,122	105	2,017	1,850	105	1,745	4.53	5.39	4.67
Terrington St John	261	1,046	14	1,032	800	14	786	1.48	3.96	3.02
Upwell	820	5,960	260	5,700	5,000	260	4,740	4.58	6.95	5.78
Wiggenhall St Mary Magdalen	218	944	42	902	860	42	818	3.59	4.14	3.76
Barton Bendish	86	60	1	59	20	1	19	0.00	0.69	0.22
Bircham	224	446	0	446	150	0	150	0.00	1.99	0.67
Brancaster	714	291	4	287	270	4	266	0.00	0.40	0.37
Burnham Market	568	2,956	77	2,879	1,730	77	1,653	0.00	5.07	2.91
Burnham Thorpe	80	356	10	346	170	10	160	0.00	4.32	2.00
Castle Acre	324	60	2	58	20	2	18	0.00	0.18	0.06
Clenchwarton	610	2,042	94	1,948	990	94	896	0.00	3.19	1.47
Denver	294	1,729	55	1,673	1,170	55	1,115	0.00	5.69	3.79
Dersingham	1,703	1,374	82	1,292	1,070	82	988	0.00	0.76	0.58
Docking	450	1,252	43	1,209	610	43	567	0.00	2.69	1.26
East Rudham	213	114	3	111	40	3	37	0.00	0.52	0.17
Emneth	817	1,150	63	1,087	680	63	617	0.00	1.33	0.75
Fincham	183	971	27	944	420	27	393	0.00	5.17	2.15
Gayton	457	395	26	369	250	26	224	0.00	0.81	0.49
Great Massingham	329	184	6	178	80	6	74	0.00	0.54	0.22
Grimston	656	1,298	52	1,246	930	52	878	0.00	1.90	1.34
Hillington	122	142	3	139	50	3	47	0.00	1.14	0.39

Marham	769	1,695	18	1,677	830	18	812	0.00	2.18	1.06
Marshland St James	353	994	55	939	650	55	595	0.00	2.66	1.69
Middleton	539	19	0	19	10	0	10	0.00	0.03	0.02
Nordelph	122	58	0	58	0	0	0	0.00	0.47	0.00
North Creake	179	303	9	294	170	9	161	0.00	1.64	0.90
Roydon	127	200	5	195	120	5	115	0.00	1.53	0.90
Runcton Holme	216	76	6	70	80	6	74	0.00	0.32	0.34
Shouldham	223	24	0	24	10	0	10	0.00	0.11	0.04
Snettisham	1,012	601	34	567	390	34	356	0.00	0.56	0.35
South Wootton	1,615	7,288	125	7,163	5,190	125	5,065	0.00	4.44	3.14
Stoke Ferry	354	1,486	47	1,439	470	47	423	0.00	4.07	1.20
Syderstone	197	221	9	212	140	9	131	0.00	1.08	0.67
Terrington St Clement	1,181	2,517	175	2,342	1,710	175	1,535	0.00	1.98	1.30
Thornham	362	109	1	108	40	1	39	0.00	0.30	0.11
Tilney All Saints	179	215	13	202	150	13	137	0.00	1.13	0.76
Tilney St Lawrence	429	1,019	119	900	930	119	811	0.00	2.10	1.89
Walpole	528	361	87	274	880	87	793	0.00	0.52	1.50
Walpole Highway	204	653	30	623	230	30	200	0.00	3.05	0.98
Walpole Cross Keys	137	288	0	288	0	0	0	0.00	2.10	0.00
Walsoken	471	441	24	417	250	24	226	0.00	0.88	0.48
Watlington	777	2,877	189	2,688	2,580	189	2,391	0.00	3.46	3.08
West Acre	70	86	4	82	50	4	46	0.00	1.17	0.66
West Dereham	152	63	0	63	0	0	0	0.00	0.41	0.00
West Walton	531	538	14	523	290	14	276	0.00	0.99	0.52
West Winch	915	3,009	102	2,907	2,590	102	2,488	0.00	3.18	2.72
Wiggenhall St Germans	431	934	55	879	800	55	745	0.00	2.04	1.73
Wimbotsham	232	854	31	823	490	31	459	0.00	3.55	1.98
Wretton	130	26	0	26	0	0	0	0.00	0.20	0.00
		<b>41,775</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>40,075</b>	<b>27,700</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>26,000</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>82.55</b>	<b>46.86</b>
		<b>752,610</b>	<b>42,615</b>	<b>709,996</b>	<b>655,020</b>	<b>42,615</b>	<b>612,405</b>	<b>118.37</b>	<b>279.49</b>	<b>208.52</b>