

## **CORE OFFER BUDGET FOR GROUNDS MAINTENANCE INCLUDING COMMUNITY HOUSING SERVICES, PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### **WHY DOES THE COUNCIL HAVE TO PROVIDE THIS SERVICE AND WHAT DOES IT NEED TO COVER?**

The Council has health and safety responsibilities and also owes a duty of care to ensure that people do not come to harm when visiting parks and open spaces and needs to maintain sight lines for safe passage on the highway and playing pitches, as this service will continue to be offered. Apart from those duties, the condition that the land is kept in has been more a matter of civic pride but this is now under considerable financial pressure.

### **HOW DOES THE CORE OFFER BUDGET MEET THE COUNCIL'S OBLIGATIONS?**

It is believed that the services below will meet the Council's obligations.

### **DOES THIS DIFFER FROM THE CURRENT SERVICE?**

This proposal covers a number of areas: grounds maintenance and horticulture, including grass cutting, shrub/hedge maintenance, leaf clearance, floral displays, general grounds maintenance work, repairs and maintenance, parks and open spaces, rural road grass cutting, weed control, Council house work including garden maintenance and sheltered accommodation.

The details of the proposal are set out below and can be summarised as follows:

- Grass cutting will be reduced by approximately 50% to a 30-day cycle including open spaces, parks and verges.
- Grass on the ring road will continue to be cut on a 10-day cycle.
- No floral displays except in sheltered housing, cemeteries and sponsored sites and those maintained by others.
- HRA land maintained to existing standards as this is a paid for service.
- Support to volunteers and voluntary groups will be through a Member-led approach, supported by one FTE post that will work with the various voluntary groups and Members. The overall coordination and support will be within Street Scene with both Brian Graham, Head of Environmental Services and Sandra Innes, Street Scene and Building Cleaning Manager taking on overall responsibility for the development and coordination of partnership work with the community.

#### **Grass Cutting**

This includes grass cutting of all roadside verges, open spaces on housing estates, general amenity grass such as village green at Cockerton or grass within all parks across the Borough that are not sports pitches, e.g. Green Park, Stanhope Green, Denes, North Lodge Park, North Park, South Park, Alderman Crooks Park and all other

large open spaces. These areas would only be cut every 30 days.

**Impact:** As the frequency of grass cutting is halved, grass will be longer and when cut remain in situ as present, however there will be significantly more grass left lying on open spaces, verges, parks, etc.

**Existing frequency:** Grass is generally cut on a 10-15 working day cycle.

**Frequency following cuts:** Grass will be cut on a 30 day cycle

### **Council Housing Land**

All work carried out for Council Housing would continue as this is paid for through the HRA. The existing standards and frequencies would be maintained unless the specification is altered by Housing.

### **South Park**

South Park would continue to be maintained to the existing standard.

### **Shrub Bed Pruning**

Shrub beds that are next to footpaths and the highways would continue to be maintained as they currently are with one full prune in the winter and other general maintenance throughout the year. This is to ensure that they do not become a health and safety hazard by encroaching on the highway or footpaths.

### **Hedge Cutting**

Maintenance of Council owned hedges would continue to the same standard as currently with one cut per annum. This is to ensure that they do not become a health and safety hazard by encroaching on the highway or footpaths.

### **Weed Spraying**

Weed spraying on hard surfaces would continue at the current service level with two operatives carrying out through the growing season. This work is essential for health and safety reasons ensuring there isn't excessive growth of weeds and vegetation on pavements, which would cause trip hazards.

### **Floral Displays**

All floral displays other than those in sheltered housing accommodation, cemeteries, sponsored sites and those maintained by others would be stopped.

### **Sports Pitches**

Sports pitches would continue to be maintained across the Borough whether in a park or general open space, however grass that is not part of the sports pitch would be cut in line with general grass cutting.

### **Parks and Countryside Management**

This service currently looks after 7 local nature reserves (Maidendale, Drinkfield Marsh, Brinkburn, Rockwell, Geneva Wood,, Brankin Moor, The Whinnies) as well as other local wildlife sites, e.g. Red Hall, Cocker Beck, Baydale, Faverdale, West Park, Lakeside and Snipe Pond, and the overall management of parks and play areas. This service is also responsible for organising and managing all the volunteer work of Environmental Services including Friends Groups, Street Champions, Countryside volunteers, Darlington Cares and other organisations/groups that wish to become involved in assisting in maintaining these areas. Alongside this the Parks and

Countryside Management provides advice and guidance to Planning colleagues with regard to green infrastructure.

Early discussions have taken place with Durham Wildlife Trust with regard to the possibility of them taking on responsibility and ownership through long lease of a number of Council nature reserves; Brinkburn, Drinkfield, Redhall, Whinnies, Maidendale, Brankin Moor and Geneva Wood. Staff within Environmental Services would work with Durham Wildlife Trust to support them in setting up a volunteer-led approach to the management and maintenance of the sites. There would be the opportunity of working with the Probation Service to provide resource to carry out work on site.

The broader aspect of the management of parks and open spaces will sit with the Head of Environmental Services and the management of the volunteers will be through the Member-led approach supported by one FTE and senior management within Environmental Services.

**Impact:** Whilst the majority of staff in this area have been made redundant, by adopting a new Member-led model with support from senior management in Environmental Services, the impact of the change will be significantly minimised.

#### **Cumulative Impact:**

Whilst resources have been reduced in the overall area of grounds maintenance and grass won't be cut as frequently as it currently is, the majority of services will continue through a revised model and working practices. There will be cumulative impact on the environment of this proposal alongside street cleaning, which will make the town a less attractive place to live and invest.

#### **WHAT IS THE CORE BUDGET MADE UP OF?**

**2019/20 budget £1,044,236**

	<b>Budget 2019/20 £</b>
Employee	697,539
Premises*	249,281
Transport	299,733
Supplies & Services	110,551
Support Services	35,098
Income <sup>^</sup>	(388,686)
Overheads	40,720
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,044,236</b>

\*Non-domestic rates would continue to be incurred with a cost of £32,000. Traffic management while cutting sightlines on highways would continue at a cost of £20,000. The remainder of the budget would be associated with maintenance arising from the reduced offer as well as works carried out on council housing land.

<sup>^</sup>Income is mainly associated with works carried out on housing council land.