

GRASS CUTTING

This is an update on the grass cutting being implemented throughout the Borough so you will be able to let your Parish Council and Association Members have information about the changes and how these may impact everyone. We have published similar information in the latest edition of the Courier which goes to all homes throughout Christchurch. However we appreciate that some may not have read this and concerns about standards may be reported back to you rather than us.

'Responsibility for grass and hedge cutting on highway verges lies with Dorset County Council (County) with Christchurch Council carrying out the work on the County's behalf. Due to financial pressures affecting all local authorities, the County Council has decided to make changes to the schedule for cutting grass verges. In urban areas, they will now be cut about once a month between the months of March and September, the main growing season. Rural highway verges and hedges will continue to be cut when sightlines are obscured, as has happened in the past.

Many other grass areas adjacent to the highway are the responsibility of Christchurch Council. Normally these areas will continue to be cut to their usual standard.'

Following discussions about how we should operate this year it was decided to do a number of things:

- Modify working practices so the new cutting standards can be provided as cost effectively as possible. The set up with the cutting gangs has been changed from the past service. Inevitably adjusting rounds that operators work can lead to problems but hopefully these will be ironed out very quickly.
- To avoid confusion and misunderstanding from residents and the public in general it has been agreed that the County's Highway grass should be cut during the season in line with their funding contribution. This is thought to be a cleaner way forward as well as not compromising this council's own standards applied to Open Space grass which on average benefits from up to 12 and sometimes more cuts a year. However with different standards being applied there will be occasions when our teams will be cutting certain areas more regularly than others. This could lead to public criticism about missed areas, when in practice they have not been.
- We will identify areas and specifically large areas of open space that could easily adopt a change in cutting regime allowing grass to be left longer. This not only helps with the overall funding gap but also demonstrates a more environmental and sustainable maintenance principle.

No doubt poorer standards in cutting will generate enquiries and probably an increase in complaints received but we will endeavour to explain the position before referring any unsatisfied customer to the County. Please remember that the number of cuts has been set by County to ensure that the highway is safe, so it is important that any concerns over safety are flagged. We are happy to advise on the work we do and, if there is a potential safety issue notwithstanding the revised cutting undertaken, we will check to ensure we are cutting according to programme. If we are, then the concern will need to be addressed by County. We will log all concerns and provide them with details of these through the year.

County's reduction has been caused by the pressure on public funding so there remains a concern that further pressure to save more money may be applied next year. If so, additional changes may be required, but safety will remain paramount.

This has been a difficult start to the season generally for grass cutting with the wet spring preventing any real progress. Other contractors are also behind on their schedules. Amenity areas are cut on an average 3 weekly cycle but this can fluctuate. Some sites around Christchurch are especially vulnerable and affected by unsuitable ground and poor weather.

For further information about grass or hedge cutting, see www.dorsetforyou.com or contact me on 01202 495068 or aottaway@christchurchandeastdorset.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

Alan Ottaway
Principal Open Spaces & Countryside Officer
Christchurch & East Dorset Councils

Circulation: Hurn and Burton Parish Council; Residents Associations

