

Review of West Suffolk Council Grounds Maintenance Operations

Executive Summary

The Cabinet Member for Leisure has compiled this report with assistance from officers, a cross-party advisory group of Members, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, through feedback from Parish and Town Councils and other key stakeholders like In-Bloom groups.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who assisted in the preparation of this report.

The recommendations from this report are that:

- 1) WSC will continue to work to a target amenity grass cutting regime of every 3 weeks, subject to the prevailing weather conditions (March to October).
- 2) No further decisions on weed control will be taken until the SCC Highways position is clarified in early 2024, highways areas being the most visible in terms of weed growth.
- 3) External work for schools and private organisations will cease from April 2024 to provide more capacity (nearly 1 FTE) for WSC's remaining workload. This will result in a reduction of income of £38,679.
- 4) Subject to the wider budget setting process for 2024/25, staff resources in the Landscapes Team will be increased by 3 FTE from April 2024 at a cost of £192,833.
- 5) Work on acquiring and embedding an electronic scheduling system will be concluded during the year 2024/25.
- 6) The mower replacement programme will be accelerated in order that newer and more optimised equipment is available for use sooner.
- 7) WSC will continue to cut SCC Highway verges to an amenity standard (8 to 10 cuts per year) through an appropriate SLA which is subject to regular review.
- 8) WSC will continue to work closely with Parish and Town Councils to augment standards, adapt grounds maintenance regimes or transfer responsibility if desired.
- 9) WSC will seek to work more closely with RSLs to better coordinate work or to review options for co-delivery of these services.
- 10) WSC will continue to support volunteer and resident groups and seek to increase this valuable community asset.

- 11) Resources will continue to be kept under regular review to ensure they continue to match the required workload in future years (subject to the wider council budget setting process)
- 12) WS will continue to develop environmental enhancements such as wildflower meadows to its land where appropriate and desired.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The focus of this report is on the cutting of amenity grass areas throughout the district. Grass cutting is just one of the seasonal grounds maintenance tasks performed by the in-house Landscape Team. The Landscape Team share certain resources within the wider Operations Directorate. It is therefore important to consider grass cutting and any potential changes in this wider context.
- 1.2 The service is facing some significant, coinciding challenges which include:
 - Growth in the areas adopted and requiring maintenance. (refer to Appendix E – Adoptions)
 - An increase in Service Requests arising from people’s feedback and a resulting delay in response times. (refer to tables 4 & 5)
 - Ceasing the use of Glyphosate and other chemicals to treat weeds and growth in areas where it is not wanted
 - A loss of older, more experienced staff and problems appointing agency staff in a challenging local jobs market
 - An unprecedented pattern of warm and wet weather this year which continued into October.
 - As a result of the above, difficulty in holding our 3 weekly grass cutting programme where the 3 week period has been exceeded
 - Significant increase in the cost of our tools and equipment impacting on our purchasing ability (Both revenue & capital budgets).
- 1.3 This report seeks to outline current operations including what we maintain, for whom, how we maintain it, with what resources and at what cost. The report will also outline the current issues in more detail and explain some of our priorities including digitising our work, biodiversity, communications and customer feedback.
- 1.4 The report has been drawn together following consultation with a small cross party advisory group, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (meeting 9 November 2023) and through ongoing feedback from Parish and Town Councils and other stakeholders including In-Bloom groups. The report identifies several recommendations and a proposed plan of action for the service to implement.

Background

2. What do we maintain?

- 2.1 West Suffolk Council (WSC) owns or is responsible for a significant amount of public open space in the district amounting to over 500 hectares. The responsibility for maintaining the grass within these areas rests with the

landscapes team within the Green Space and Heritage Service in the Operations Directorate. A large proportion of the landscapes team’s work between March and early November is associated with cutting amenity grass in the district.

- 2.2 Amenity grassed areas include parks, amenity greens, playing fields, recreation grounds, cemeteries, playgrounds and very visible residential highway grass verges that sit between the road and the footpath which we maintain on behalf of Suffolk County Council (SCC) Highways. As discussed in 3.2 below, SCC are responsible for highway verges and pay for them to be cut by West Suffolk Council in urban settings but this only funds approximately one cut. WSC has traditionally carried out more cuts than is funded for safety and aesthetic reasons. The highways verges can be difficult to maintain being narrow strips adjacent to parked cars and complicated by obstacles like trees and street furniture.
- 2.3 The total amount of amenity grass that we currently maintain across the district, including highway verges, amounts to 308 hectares (761 acres). This is the equivalent to 432 football pitches and a significant proportion of it is made up of very small patches of grass in and around our residential areas.
- 2.4 The landscape team are responsible for other grounds maintenance functions like sports pitch maintenance, planting out, shrub and hedge maintenance, weed control in non-highway areas. Some of these have to run concurrent with the grass cutting season, others are carried out over the winter months.
- 2.5 The management of amenity grass areas is divided into three geographical zones and assigned to staff based out of the three depots located in each of the zones. A breakdown of the percentage of grass located within each zone is indicated below in table 1:

Team Area	Wards	% of amenity grass
South	Haverhill West Haverhill North Haverhill South Haverhill East Haverhill South-East Haverhill Central Clare, Hundon & Kedington Whepstead & Wickhambrook Withersfield	27%
Central	Southgate Risby Pakenham & Troston Westgate Minden Abbeygate Eastgate Tollgate Horringer	44%

	Chedburgh & Chevington Barrow St Olaves Moreton Hall Rougham The Fornhams & Great Barton Pakenham and Troston Ixworth Bardwell Barningham Stanton	
North	Newmarket North Newmarket West Newmarket East Manor Iceni Kentford & Moulton Exning Brandon West Brandon East Brandon Central Lakenheath Mildenhall Great Heath Mildenhall Queensway Mildenhall Kingsway & Market The Rows	29%

Table 1: Percentage of amenity grass within each work zone area in the district

2.6 We are not the only body in the district responsible for cutting grass in public open space. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are responsible for the areas around their housing stock and tend to have their own arrangements for maintaining these areas. Understandably, these different areas of responsibility are not always evident to the public, especially when these are adjacent which can lead to some confusion and frustration. We therefore spend time advising people who owns what pieces of public open space and will continue to work with RSL's to further align service standards.

2.7 The council's mapping system (GIS) has tree and grounds maintenance layers which can be accessed from the ["find my nearest"](#) area of our website to help understand how we maintain the areas we are responsible for. We will investigate if it is possible to add a further accessible layer to establish the public ownership of land.

3. Who do we maintain it for?

3.1 Most of the amenity grass that we maintain is our own but about a fifth is classified as SCC highway verge. These areas of amenity grass are situated across thousands of disparate very small plots of land across the entire district.

- 3.2 The amount of cuts each year that SCC Highways pay us for has steadily diminished over the years and they now only pay us for a single cut (but at a higher rate). SCC have made it clear that their primary concern with regards highway verges is not aesthetics and they will therefore only pay for the cutting of the verges for safety purposes to maintain visibility at junctions, and to ensure that road and pavement widths are not reduced. In order to maintain the visual appearance of the neighbourhoods in our district we have continued to cut the highways verges at the same frequency as our neighbouring amenity grass areas (8 to 10 cuts each year). The work for SCC is carried out under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and we estimate that the cost to subsidise the number of cuts to an amenity level amounts to approximately £220,000 per year (based on 8 cuts in a season).
- 3.3 Rural highway verges are not maintained by WSC and are cut once or twice a year by contractors appointed by SCC Highways Authority. They may cut more frequently at certain road junctions for safety reasons. Issues with highway verges on rural roads can be reported to SCC via their [online reporting tool](#).
- 3.4 The option of simply handing back responsibility of highway verges to the Highways authority was considered by the Portfolio Holder and the cross-party group of members who met to discuss this review. Their conclusion, given the further complaints and public dissatisfaction that a surrendering of the responsibilities would generate, was that this was not a recommended option.
- 3.5 In addition to SCC Highways, WSC also carries out grounds maintenance work for other organisations including Parish and Town Councils, schools, sports clubs and some private businesses. Income from this work currently amounts to c£100,000 per annum. This work and income has been purposely diminished in recent years in order to increase capacity for our own work and that of SCC Highways. The remaining work is largely complementary to our own and the income is important to support the service and help offset the cost of our machinery and equipment. A summary of our external work can be found at **Appendix A**.

4. How do we maintain it?

- 4.1 As outlined in 2.5 above, our Landscapes staff are arranged in three teams based in depots at the following locations:
- North - covering Mildenhall, Newmarket, Brandon and surrounding villages and based in Mildenhall
 - Central – covering Bury St Edmunds and surrounding villages and based at the West Suffolk Operational Hub
 - South – covering Haverhill and surrounding villages and based at the Haverhill depot
- Team areas and depot locations can be found at the map at **Appendix B**.
- 4.2 The staff structure comprises a Landscape Manager, Landscape Supervisor, and 25 operational staff as shown in the staff structure at **Appendix C**:
- 4.3 The Landscape Service operates an extensive range of tools and equipment which, for accounting reasons, is divided into two categories, capital fleet items with a replacement value of over £10,000 (e.g. tractors, vans, large

mowers) and small plant/equipment items valued at under £10,000 (e.g. pedestrian mowers, strimmers and hedge trimmers). There are approximately 125 items of small plant/equipment and around a further 50 capital items. Owing to the escalating costs of equipment we are seeing a growing number of items falling into the realms of being capital fleet.

- 4.4 The district has seen significant growth in public open space over the past 20 years with over 20 additional developments being adopted, adding to our workload. These are detailed in the table at **Appendix D**.
- 4.5 By contrast the number of operational staff (excluding managers/supervisors /apprentices) deployed to grounds maintenance by the council has declined from a peak of 28 in 2013 to 25 now as indicated table 2 below. The decline in staff can, to a certain extent, be attributed to technological advancements within the landscape industry (e.g. more mechanisation) and the Council having to maintain council spend, associated with over a decade of austerity.

Year	Staff deployed to GM West Suffolk District Council		Total
2023	25		25
Year	Staff deployed to GM St Eds BC	Staff deployed to GM Forest Heath DC	Total
2018	19 + 2 x apprentices	6	25
2013	22 + 2 x apprentices	Out sourced (6 staff)	28
2008	18	Out sourced (6 staff)	24
2003	18	Out sourced (6 staff)	24

Table 2: staff employed in the service over the past two decades.

- 4.6 The teams are currently tasked with trying to cut amenity grass areas on a three-week schedule. It has proven difficult to meet this target given the current resources and in some areas this year the actual frequency has increased to 5 or 6 weeks.
- 4.7 Changes in the growing season has a significant impact on grounds maintenance activities. In past decades we could more easily define the weeks on which we would commence and then complete grass cutting in a year but more recently we've had to be more flexible. Owing to the very wet ground conditions in March the teams couldn't get on to cut certain areas until mid/late April. In past summers there has been a lull in the need to cut grass because it's been so hot and dry. However, this year with the warm wet conditions the grass has continued to grow with vigour throughout the summer months into late Autumn. The summer lull in grass growth has traditionally given the landscape team an opportunity to complete a summer trim of the many shrub beds and hedges that they are responsible for maintaining but unfortunately that did not occur this year.
- 4.8 The length at which grass is cut is also a consideration when trying to work out how fast our landscape team get around their cutting rounds. Long grass, not surprisingly, takes longer to cut and is particularly challenging for cylinder

mowers (which currently makes up a significant proportion of our grass cutting fleet of machines). As mowers come up for renewal we are replacing them with more robust flail or rotary cutting machines. We can look to accelerate this replacement programme.

- 4.9 The Council has, in recent years, been purposefully reducing the frequency of grass cutting in certain areas to increase biodiversity. Many of these areas have been set aside to favour a specific flora and or fauna which benefit from a cutting at a less frequent interval and collection of the cut arisings. Whilst there is a marginal saving in labour time associated with staff visiting the areas less frequently, any financial saving is lost because of the increased time associated with collecting the arisings and paying for their disposal when these areas are eventually cut.
- 4.10 In recent years we have benefited from community group and volunteer labour helping to maintain areas. Most of this work has taken place in parks and along the river meadows. Whilst this assistance is gratefully received it does require coordination and an element of officer time which should not be underestimated.

5. At what cost?

- 5.1 The current cost this year to the council for grounds maintenance is £2,101,733 which is net of a total external works income figure of £181,000 (see table 3 below). A more detailed budget for 2023-24 is set out at **Appendix F**. This includes an annual contribution of £141,185 revenue allocated to a capital renewal fund which is the means by which the service funds the replacements of large items of equipment and fleet with a capital value of £10,000 or over. The landscape team have a plan which is reviewed on a five-year basis which sets out the replacement programme for the equipment over that timeframe.
- 5.2 The funding for the grounds maintenance work undertaken by its landscape teams is derived from a range of internal and external sources as set out in table 3 below.

Sources of funding	Value (£)
WSC Parks & Open Spaces budgets	£1,075,205
WSC Car Parks budget	£37,800
WSC Public Buildings Budget	£49,228
WSC Streets & Highways Budget	£920,600
WSC Industrial & Business Units budget	£18,900
External works - SCC Highways	£55,000
External works - Other (TCs/PCs & sports associations)	£126,000
Total	£2,282,733

Table 3 – Sources of funding 2023/24

- 5.3 When the Council adopts green space, that adopted land comes with ten years' worth of revenue funding from the developer. The sum of money

agreed at the point of adoption is set out in the section 106 agreement. One tenth of the sums obtained via the section 106 agreements are then paid into the landscape service budget each year, for the period of the agreement. The section 106 sums are paid into the WSC Parks & Open Spaces Budget referenced in table 3.

- 5.4 Table 3 also references the income paid by SCC Highways for cutting the highway verges. The sum received is set out in a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between WSC and SCC and is based on an estimate of the cost to conduct a single cut of the highway's verges in the district (based on an enhanced rate for just a single cut). As mentioned in 3.4 above, SCC Highways priority is only to provide a safe verge for road users in terms of visibility. We effectively subsidise this to make additional cuts to these very visible neighbourhood areas to an amenity standard of aesthetic. We estimate that the cost to WSC of this subsidy is around £220,000 in the current year (based on 8 cuts).
- 5.5 Reference is made to external works in table 3 and this sum relates to the work the landscape team does on a commercial basis for other outside bodies including town and parish Council's a more detailed breakdown of how that sum is accounted for is included in **Appendix B**.

6. Communications

- 6.1 A communications campaign for the maintenance of public green spaces is in place and includes:
- A weekly update bulletin (during the grass cutting season) to all Councillors, Town and Parish Council's on what has been cut and where we are scheduled to cut next week.
 - As encouraged to do so, the material contained in the weekly update was also shared by some parish, town and West Suffolk councils online, in their local community groups as well as local publications.
 - Information on the council's decision not to use glyphosate and the fact that areas may look more untidy than normal until strimmed later in the year.
 - Explanations have been given to the media on cutting and biodiversity since the Council decided to stop using glyphosate and that this would mean grass areas may look untidier.
 - Releases to the media and social media on what the council is doing to encourage biodiversity and treating some areas differently to others in terms of cutting regimes.
 - [updated web pages](#) that have been under constant review included updated FAQs
 - Information for Councillors on how to find out what areas West Suffolk Council are responsible for and how they could encourage people to apply for areas to be cut less if they wanted.
 - Questions from councillors as well as parish and town councils have been answered including at weekends in conjunction with the service.
 - This has also included the operations service going to talk to localities and local councillors about issues.

- Graphics of new signs being used were also supplied through these emails which had the logo and non-logo versions so people could use them in their own areas explaining why areas were being left long.
- A social media campaign continues to run across the major platforms of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok – currently reaching more than 35,000 people.

6.2 Going forward, communications will be kept under review and information about any new initiatives or campaigns will be rolled out appropriately. Such campaigns could include seeking to encourage and support communities to undertake work of their own to care for open space in their locality or promote diversity gain through wildflower planting as an example.

7. Current challenges and issues which have impacted on Capacity

Cessation of chemical weed treatment

7.1 A [Motion on Notice to Full Council on 13 December 2022](#) resulted in the Council ceasing its use of Glyphosate, or any other chemicals, for the treatment of weeds or unwanted growth, save for identified pernicious weeds (e.g. Japanese Knotweed), This was on the grounds of promoting better biodiversity. This took effect from April 2023. This decision was taken in the knowledge that there was insufficient capacity to reduce weed growth by alternative mechanical means and understanding that areas would therefore look more unkempt than they previously had. To address an inevitable rise in complaints it was agreed that a communications campaign would be undertaken (and has since been deployed) to explain the environmental benefits of the adopted change. Coinciding with this, SCC Highways also ceased the use of Glyphosate from April 2023 and as a trial has used Acetic Acid as an alternative. From our own trials of alternative weed treatments in 2022, we know that Acetic Acid is far less effective for weed treatment than Glyphosate. Highway footpaths and kerbs are much more visible and the combined cessation of Glyphosate by WSC and SCC has had a significant visual impact leading to unavoidable complaints, despite efforts to communicate the positive reasons for the change. It is understood that SCC Highways are reviewing their own position on this including their trial use of Acetic Acid.

Customer complaints

7.3 In recent years the Grounds Maintenance telephone enquiries have been channelled through the Customer Services team. A comparison between the numbers of telephone and email enquires received between the current year to end of August and last financial year are set out in tables 4 and 5 below:

Month	Year 2022-23	Year 2023-24	Difference	% increase/decrease
April	33	31	-2	6% decrease
May	55	103	+48	87% increase
June	125	130	+5	4% Increase
July	72	72	0	No difference

August	43	79	+36	84% increase
September	58	-	-	-
October	31	-	-	-
November	28	-	-	-
December	14	-	-	-
January	14	-	-	-
February	16	-	-	-
March	17	-	-	-

Table 4 – Telephone enquires handled by WSC Customer Services team

Month	Year 2022-23	Year 2023-24	Difference	% increase/decrease
April	12	9	-3	33% decrease
May	51	36	-15	42% decrease
June	39	100	+61	61% increase
July	66	78	+12	15% increase
August	15	123*	+108*	88% increase*
September	20		-	
October	10		-	
November	18		-	
December	9		-	
January	5		-	
February	12		-	
March	11		-	

Table 5 – Email enquires handled by WSC Customer Services team

*NB from August 2023 the Customer Services team merged the wider Parks Service email enquiries with the Landscape team email enquiries.

The Weather

- 7.4 As previously mentioned in 1.2 and 4.7 above, the weather has a significant impact on our grounds maintenance operations. In 2023 the challenges included a cold wet March and April which resulted in the grass cutting season not starting until late in April, By May, temperatures rose and it remained wet and unlike 2022, the grass did not stop growing in the height of summer (July & August) so there was no let-up in growth.
- 7.5 Grass growth periods and rates vary from season to season depending on rain fall and temperature. There is normally a spring flush of growth in May/early June and then a secondary flush in mid-September. The grey line in the chart below indicates a decade's average growth period.

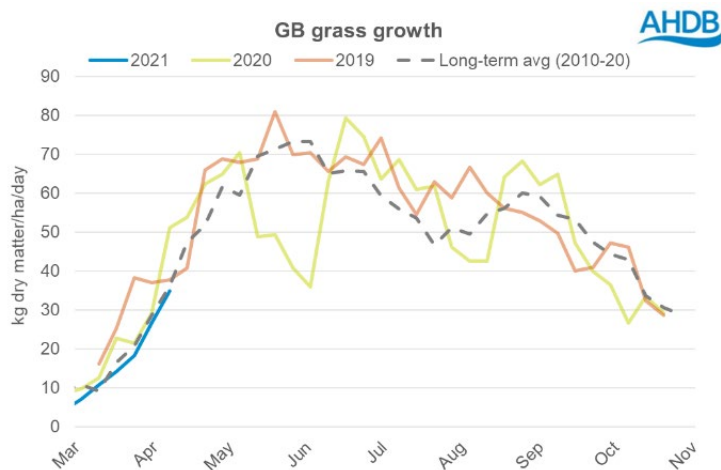


Chart 1 average grass growth over a growing season
Source Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)

7.6 Hard Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS), also known as 'white finger', is a serious and disabling disorder of the blood supply to the fingers and hand. The Health and Safety Executive for the UK estimate that nearly two million people are at risk, in industries such as manufacturing, construction, forestry, and commercial landscaping. The authority has been proactive in deploying the Reactec system to monitor its landscapers staff exposure to HAVS. The mitigations that the authority has deployed to lessen exposure to HAVS includes:

- Ensuring that staff receive adequate training.
- That staff wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Limiting the time staff are permitted to operate certain tools known to omit high levels of vibration (e.g. strimming, hedge cutting and chainsaw use).
- Purchasing and deploying alternative equipment.
- Looking at the landscaped areas to see if adaptations can be made to it which lessen the need to carryout tasks which expose staff. (e.g. putting in mowing margins beneath fence lines)

Whilst clearly necessary, this has become a further limiting factor on the deployment of our resources, particularly in terms of an operative nearing agreed limits and having to desist from using certain types of equipment.

Cemeteries

7.7 The Landscape Team are also responsible for the maintenance of three Cemeteries; Bury St Edmunds cemetery, Haverhill Cemetery and Newmarket Cemetery on behalf of Newmarket Town Council. The team also maintains an additional [fifteen closed churchyards](#).

As part of its duties in maintaining the cemeteries the landscape team also excavate, dress', and backfill graves as and when required. The details of how many interments take place in the three cemeteries are set out in table 6 below. Management cannot determine when burial requests will come in and

this element of work can necessitate changes to work regimes which can impact on the routine maintenance work such as grass cutting.

Financial year	Bury Cemetery	Haverhill Cemetery	Newmarket Cemetery	Total
2020/21	57	86	41	184
2021/22	53	65	59	177
2022/23	67	77	62	206

Table 6 - interment numbers in each of the three cemetery sites (includes all interment types)

Digitising open spaces and scheduling.

- 7.9 Whilst the service has digitally mapped the areas of land that it is responsible for maintaining, work schedules and rounds are currently generated via excel spreadsheets and routes are learnt by routine. The service does not currently have a digitised work scheduling system. Having a digital routing system, similar to that deployed in the WSC's refuse collection service, would make the scheduling and monitoring of work and real time reporting and data gathering more efficient. Officers are working with a number of options to introduce such a system as soon as possible.

8. Potential options

Outsourcing

- 8.1 The wholesale outsourcing of the service has been considered as a possible option, but it is not a course of action currently being recommended as an outcome of this review.

Subcontracting some of the work

- 8.2 As referenced in 2.1 a large proportion of the landscapes team's work is associated with grass cutting between March and early November. During that period there are other grounds works which need to be progressed including sports pitch markings, seasonal planting and pruning work to shrubs and hedges. The Council will continue to use the services of external contractors flexibly to fill voids in expertise and to help ensure that standards are met.

Reduce service standards

- 8.3 There is an option to reduce our target service standards to what can be achieved with the current level of resources. This would likely mean decreasing target grass cutting frequencies from our current 3 weekly to 4 or 5 weekly depending on rates of growth and yield no improvement in the current standards for shrub and hedge maintenance. Clearly, this would continue to have a detrimental impact to the visual amenity of our open spaces and service complaints would likely remain at a high level.

Weed control

- 8.4 The council ceased its use of chemical based weed treatment from April 2023 (see 7.2 above). This has led to a significant increase in weeds and other growth in areas where it is not wanted (e.g. around obstacles, along fence lines and hard landscape areas). Whilst products like Monsanto Amenity Glyphosate are approved for use in the public realm by the Pesticides Safety Directorate (an arm of the Health and Safety Executive), studies have shown that it can be harmful to bees and pollinators and that it can be a carcinogen but safe if handled properly.
- 8.5 With consideration to what SCC Highways may decide to do, WSC may wish to review its options on weed treatment. This could be on the basis of:
- a. Remaining with the current policy of not using Glyphosate, or other chemicals, for the treatment of weeds and other unwanted growth (save for identified 'pernicious' weeds).
 - b. Allow a return to a controlled, limited and targeted use of Glyphosate, specifically:
 - i. We would not use it around trees or hedge lines in grass
 - ii. We would use it sparingly around non-living structures in grass such as sign and lamp posts, raised service covers, utility boxes and along fence/wall boundaries, the rationale being to reduce staff time having to trim such areas.
 - iii. We would also use it sparingly as a means of controlling unwanted vegetation in hard surfaces in order to prevent physical damage to those hard surfaces.
- All staff deploying herbicide will be suitably trained, protected and qualified.
- c. Allow the use of other chemicals or methods which may be more costly and only marginally effective in the treatment of weeds.
- 8.6 It should be noted that the most visible weeds in our urban areas are the responsibility of SCC and not WSC. If, for example, WSC were to decide to return to using Glyphosate to treat weeds in its open spaces, and SCC decided not to for its highways, the net visual impact might only marginally improve. It may therefore be prudent to understand what SCC Highways intend to do before making any decisions on this for WSC.
- 8.7 Members may wish to consider a recent study on this issue recently carried out for Cardiff City Council (CCC) and reported to their Cabinet on 19 January 2023. In deciding to continue using Glyphosate for the treatment of weeds, CCC's Cabinet considered a research study which was led by Dr Dan Jones, an Honorary Research Associate in Swansea University's Department of Biosciences, and Commercial Director of Advanced Invasives, a consultancy founded in 2016 to bring evidence-led thinking to the commercial management of invasive plants. The research concluded that:

“Glyphosate is the most efficient and effective way of controlling weeds, but once you look at the full life cycle of the product, factoring in things like the amount of fuel and water-used, it is also the least damaging to the environment.”

Dr Dan Jones

Full details of this research along with the Cardiff City Council Cabinet report can be found [here](#).

The final project report from Advanced Invasives can be found [here](#).

Amenity Forum information on Glyphosate can be found [here](#).

APSE briefing on Glyphosate use by local authorities can be found [here](#).

Reduce income to increase capacity

- 8.8 Setting aside the grass cutting we do for Suffolk County Council Highways, there is the potential to further reduce other external work outlined in 3.6 above to increase capacity for our own tasks by accepting a reduction in the income we derive from this work. The remaining external work comprises Town and Parish Councils, community associations, schools and private enterprises. There is arguably a greater synergy with our work for Town, Parish Councils and community associations as grounds maintenance for these public bodies invariably mirrors our own in areas which are often adjacent and are therefore dealt with more effectively. However, work of this type needs to break even in terms of its cost v revenue at the very least and this will continue to be kept under review in terms of pricing. The ongoing relationship also provides a continuing opportunity to discuss and suggest that Town and Parish Council’s consider augmenting, part-funding or taking-on WSC owned land through an appropriate transfer in their localities. The split of this income is shown in table 7 below:

Income type	Income value
Town and Parish Councils	£62,198
Community groups / associations / park trusts	£4,756
Schools	£7,229
Private organisation	£31,450
Total	£105,633

Table 7 – distribution of income by type (exc SCC Highways)

If we were to no longer carry out for private organisations or schools our income would reduce by £38,679 but we would accrue roughly the equivalent of nearly 1 FTE additional capacity.

Staff resources

- 8.9 As outlined in section 7, there are a number of factors which have impacted on the ability of the in-house landscape service to deliver the desired standard of service. In order to meet the three-week cutting programme during the peak growing period (up to 10 cuts per year) and shrub and hedge maintenance regimes (twice yearly summer trim & heaver winter cut) along with all the

other services provided by the service there is a need to increase the permanent staff resource as follows in table 8:

Team	Hours Existing staff resource (hrs PA)	Hours Grass cutting Amenity Grass (10 cuts)	Hours Shrub & hedge maintenance (2 x PA)	Hours Other duties (Excluding cemeteries)	Total Hours Needed	Additional Resource needed
North	6555	3375	2531	3917	9823	3268
Central	18026	6750	4928	8198	19875	1849
South	9833	3563	2886	5288	11737	1904
Totals	25892 (21 FTE's)					7021 (4.28 FTE's)

Table 8 – resources required to maintain service levels

The existing staffing resource deployed to cemetery maintenance and grave digging duties is excluded from the above assessment of need.

As outlined in 8.5 above one option of freeing up capacity would be to surrender certain commercial contracts and forgo the income that they generate. The equivalent of nearly 1 FTE could be saved by such a move.

We will continue to look at reinstating apprentices to the landscapes service. Whilst this has previously been challenging in terms of appropriate local college support, we will continue to research options to reinstate a scheme for medium term staff development.

To further aid efficiencies in the deployment of staff resource there is potential scope to look at some seasonal hours that slightly increase working hours in the summer daylight period and reduce them in winter and this will be further investigated.

8.10 The cost to the Council of increasing the landscape team by three operatives are set out in table 9 below:

Item	Cost Per person	Cost x 3 persons
Employee Costs		
Basic pay (Band 4, SCP 14)	£27,334	£82,002
NI	£3,040	£9,120
Pension	£8,088	£24,264
Uniform & PPE, Including HAV Tag	£184	£552
Essential Training	£1,524	£4,572
Tools & equipment (Based on 3/25ths of the current transport costs PA)	£24,108	£72,323
	£64,278	£192,833

Table 9 – Costs associated with adding three operatives.

Electronic scheduling system

- 8.11 As outlined in 7.9 above, to maximise efficiency and to be able to monitor progress against the service standards there is a need to invest in a digital system. Officers are currently investigating the merits of two systems one being a trial product being developed by Bartec, the owners of the system currently utilised in waste management and the other being an established system used by SCC which we could use under licence from them ([Kaarabon Tech Grass Smart](#)). Estimating and accounting will be assisted by using such a system which uses unit rates for different functions and records actual times taken to complete tasks against estimates (job costing). Costs associated with operating these systems are yet to be confirmed.

Accelerate mower replacement programme

- 8.12 As referred to in Section 4.8 above, the service has been moving away from cylinder mowers and replacing them with flail or rotary mowers as items have come up for renewal. Through reprioritising the existing capital renewal budget it may be possible to pull forward some of those replacements which would help speed up the time taken to complete certain mowing rounds.

Suffolk County Council Highways verge grass cutting

- 8.13 As outlined in 3.2 and 5.4 above, SCC Highways will only fund grass cutting for their highway verges in the urban areas on the basis of highway safety. This amounts to paying WSC for just 1 cut per year, albeit it at a higher rate for flailing and removing arisings. This currently amounts to an income of £65,217 for 2023/24. In order that these very visible verges are maintained to the same standard as our amenity grass areas, WSC further subsidises the cutting of these areas by £220,000 so they are cut 8 to 10 times each year.
- 8.14 WSC could decide to hand back the maintenance of these highways verges to SCC. Whilst this would potentially result in a significant saving to the council, it would mean that these visible areas would become much more unkempt and lead to further complaints. Clearly, the public are not well versed in the respective responsibilities of different tiers of Local Government and WSC would likely still receive the blame and complaints, despite communications that we might put out to the contrary.

Town and Parish Council options

- 8.15 We work closely with Parish and Town Councils in supporting their open spaces. As part of wider discussions on what work or responsibilities we may collectively want to transfer to more local decision making bodies, we will continue to consider options that deliver the services people want in their localities. This may include:
- a. Town or Parish Councils augmenting the standard service by contributing additional funds for a higher level of service
 - b. Town or Parish Councils augmenting the standard service by contributing their own labour resources where they have them

- c. Transferring land assets from WSC to Town or Parish Councils control

This may be a particular focus for consideration when an area of public open space is subject to investment or upgrading.

- 8.16 To inform this review, we have engaged with Parish and Town Councils along with other key partners like the In-Bloom groups to seek their feedback. We will continue to engage with our community partners beyond this review into the future. A summary of the feedback to date can be found at **Appendix G**.

Open space belonging to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)

- 8.17 As outlined in 2.6 above, significant areas of open space within some housing estates are the responsibility of RSLs (e.g. Havebury or Flagship). WSC will continue to engage with these organisations to help better coordinate work or to review options for co-delivery of these services.

Volunteers

- 8.18 There are already a number of volunteer groups engaged in maintenance operations at various specific venues around the district which include those shown in table 10 below. We are keen to support and grow such groups to augment the work in our parks and open spaces across the district.

Group	Venue
Abbey Gardens Friends	Abbey Gardens BSE
Nowton Park Volunteers	Nowton Park
East Town Park Volunteers	East Town Park
Brandon Country Park Volunteers	Brandon Country Park
River Lark	
Brandon In Bloom	
Bury in Bloom	
Haverhill In Bloom	
River Lark Partnership	

Table 10 – Volunteer groups

9. Actions agreed by the Portfolio Holder

- 9.1 The following actions are agreed by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure:

- 1) WSC will continue to work to a target amenity grass cutting regime of every 3 weeks, subject to the prevailing weather conditions (March to October).

- 2) No further decisions on weed control will be taken until the SCC Highways position is clarified in early 2024, highways areas being the most visible in terms of weed growth.
- 3) External work for schools and private organisations will cease from April 2024 to provide more capacity (nearly 1 FTE) for WSC's remaining workload. This will result in a reduction of income of £38,679.
- 4) Subject to the wider budget setting process for 2024/25, staff resources in the Landscapes Team will be increased by 3 FTE from April 2024 at a cost of £192,833.
- 5) Work on acquiring and embedding an electronic scheduling system will be concluded during the year 2024/25.
- 6) The mower replacement programme will be accelerated in order that newer and more optimised equipment is available for use sooner.
- 7) WSC will continue to cut SCC Highway verges to an amenity standard (8 to 10 cuts per year) through an appropriate SLA which is subject to regular review.
- 8) WSC will continue to work closely with Parish and Town Councils to augment standards, adapt grounds maintenance regimes or transfer responsibility if desired.
- 9) WSC will seek to work more closely with RSLs to better coordinate work or to review options for co-delivery of these services.
- 10) WSC will continue to support volunteer and resident groups and seek to increase this valuable community asset.
- 11) Resources will continue to be kept under regular review to ensure they continue to match the required workload in future years (subject to the wider council budget setting process)
- 12) WS will continue to develop environmental enhancements such as wildflower meadows to its land where appropriate and desired.

Appendix A – Summary of external work

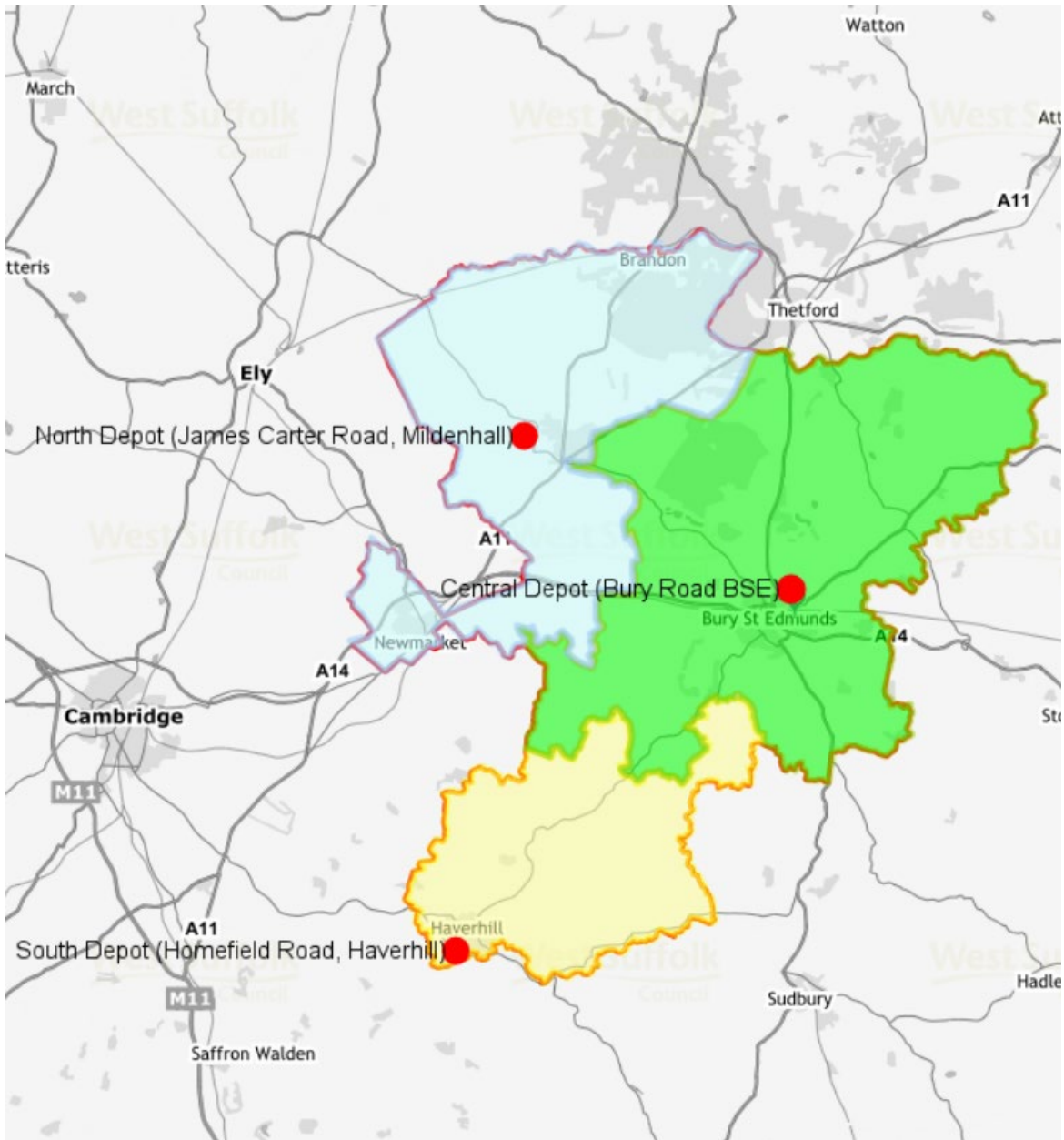
Customer Name	Customer Type	Summary of work quoted for	Team
Cavendish Parish Council	Parish	Grass cutting - village green, sports field, cemetery, ditch, orchard, cemetery hedges.	South
Chedburgh Parish Council	Parish	Grass cutting, various sites	Central
Clare Town Council	Town Council	Sports field cutting and marking up.	South
Denston Parochial Church Council	Church Council	To cut grass in Denston Cemetery from April to September 2023 on 6 occasions	South
Flempton & Hengrave PC	Parish	Cut triangle 8 occasions	Central
Fornham All Saints Parish Council (Church)	Parish	Grass cutting in the church yard on 8 occasions. To spray the footpaths once PA.	Central
Fornham All Saints Community	Community Council	Grass cutting Football Pitch, Community Centre, and Play Area Apr to Oct	Central
Fornham St Martin PC	Parish	Cut football pitches & play area between April and October. Herbicide treatment, recreation ground and boundary footpath of churchyard	Central
Great Whelnetham PC	Parish	Grass cutting various sites	Central
Hawstead PC	Parish	Grass cutting various sites	Central
IES Brandon School	School	Cut school playing fields on 9 occasions per year. Initial Marking of running track & rounders pitch. Overmarking of track and pitch commencing 1 May.	North
Lackford PC	Parish	Cut the grass areas with no herbicide x 8	Central
Little Thurlow PC	Parish	Grass cutting, parish and sports field	South
Moreton Hall Community Assn	Community Assn	grass around community centre (only)	central
Newmarket Town Council	Town Council	Cutting of closed church yards, Planting of bedding.	North
Private organisation	Private	grass and hedge cutting	Central
Stoke by Clare	Parish	Grass cutting various sites	South
Private organisation	Private	Grass cutting	Central
Haverhill Cricket Club	community	Grass cutting	South
Stanton Parish Council	Parish	GM contract per parishes specification	Central
Sheltered Housing	INTERNAL	Quotes for all sites, grass, hedge & car park	North & Central
SET Ixworth school	School	Grass cutting, shrubs, annual tree inspection, sports field markings, MUGA area clearance	Central
Moreton Hall Youth FC	Youth Club	Grass Cutting 13 times April to September	Central
Clare Castle Country Park SLA	Park Trust	Grass Cutting	South

Subtotal of works above = £105,633

Suffolk CC Highways	County Council	Single cut of the highway verges	All
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Subtotal of works above = £65,217
Grand total = £170,850

Appendix B – Depot locations and areas of responsibility



Appendix C – Landscapes Staff Structure

	Landscape & GM Manager	
	Landscape & GM Supervisor	
Charge Hand South South Teams operating out of Haverhill Depot	Charge hand Central Central Teams operating out of Bury St Edmunds depot	Charge hand North North Teams operating out of Mildenhall depot
6 X Operatives	11 X Operatives	5 X Operative
28% of the operational staff	48% of the operational staff	24% of the operational staff

**Appendix D – Adoptions
Those Completed since 2003**

Developer	Location	Year
Matthew Homes Ltd	Chalkstone Way, Haverhill	2003
J S Bloor(Sudbury) Ltd	St James Park, BSE	2003
Hopkins Homes Ltd	Hospital Road, BSE	2003
J S Bloor(Sudbury) Ltd	St James Park, BSE	2003
Chelsteen Homes Ltd	Hargrave Road, Chevington	2003
Hargham Properties Ltd	Lewis close, Hopton	2003
Land Charter Ltd	Cullum Road Road, BSE	2003
Twigden Homes Ltd	Park Road, Haverhill	2003
Wilcon Homes Ltd	Mount/Kingsworth Road,BSE	2005
Billrise Ltd	Land at Rougham Rd BSE	2005
J S Bloor	Land at the Grange Fornham All Saints	2005
Redrow Homes	Saxongate, BSE	2006
Hopkin Homes	Drovers Went, Moreton Hall, BSE	2006
J S Bloor (Sudbury) Ltd	St James Park (Phase 7 & 8), BSE	2006
Mr & Mrs Sills	Whites Farm, Haverhill	2007
Wilson Connolly Ltd	Mount Rd, BSE	2007
George Wimpey UK Ltd	Moreton Hall East, Phase VI	2007
Secrtry of St for Health	Risbridge Hospital, Kedington	2008
Meldire Ltd	Hanchett End,Haverhill. Phase V	2008
Meldire Ltd	Hanchett End,Haverhill. Phase VI	2008
Hills Residential	Northgate Avenue, BSE	2008
Hopkins Homes Ltd	Drovers Went, Moreton Hall, BSE	2008
Bovis Homes	Broomly Green Lane (Morton Hall), BSE	2010
Persimmion Home	Broad Oaks, Moreton Hall, BSE	2011
Bovis Homes	Hales Barn, Haverhill	2011
J S Bloor	Tayfen Meadows, BSE	2013
Taylor Wimpey	Bradbrook Close, Abbotsford Close, BSE	2013
Crest Nicholson	Kings Warren, Red Lodge	2014
Wilcon Homes Ltd	Gainsborough Park, Haverhill	2014
Taylor Wimpey	Hales Barn, Haverhill	2014

**Appendix D – Adoptions
Those Completed since 2003 Continued**

Developer	Location	Year
Hopkins Homes Ltd	Cotton Lane, BSE	2014
Taylor Wimpey	Millfields Way/Chalkstone Way, Haverhill	2014
Bloor Homes	St James Park, Moreton Hall, BSE	2016
Suffolk County Council	Glastonbury Court, BSE	2016
Abbey Homes	Heathlands Way, Mildenhall	2017
Howard Group	Ehringhausen Way, Haverhill	2017
Leach Homes	Jeddah Way, Kennett	2018
Meldire Ltd	Hanchett End, Haverhill	2018
S106 monies	Risbridge Meadow, Kedington	2018
Hopkins Homes Ltd	East Close, BSE	2022
Taylor Wimpey	Manning Road, Moreton Hall, BSE	2022
Barley Homes	Manor Road, Haverhill	2023
Barley Homes	Chivers Road, Haverhill	2023
Logan Homes	Cemetery Road, Wickhambrook	2023
Hopkins Homes Ltd	Grove Park, Barrow Hill, Barrow	2023
Countryside Properties	Marham Park Parcels C & D, BSE	2023

Adoptions expected to be completed in the next 5 years

Developer	Location
Hopkins Homes Ltd	Beale Road, Barrow
Persimmon Homes	Chancery Park, Exning
Persimmon Homes	Chilton Place, Clare
Fleur Homes	Fishers Field, Risby
Matthew Homes	Kennett Park, Kennett
Taylor Wimpey	Larks Grange, Moreton Hall, BSE
Land Charter Homes	Laundry Lane, BSE
Countryside Properties	Marham Park, BSE
Taylor Wimpey	Orchid Grove, Haverhill
Persimmon Homes	Sycamore Park, Beck Row

Appendix E – Grounds Maintenance Revenue Budget

3060	Grounds Maintenance	
Account	Account Details	2023-2024 Budget £
	External Contributions & Reimbursements totals:	(55,000)
	Other Sales totals:	(126,000)
	Cost of Employment totals:	1,161,068
	Premises Costs totals:	47,895
	Transport Costs totals:	200,897
	Supplies & Services Costs totals:	79,282
	Third Party Payments totals:	14,000
R2610	Operational Buildings Recharge - Depots	176,144
R2725	Waste & St. Cleansing - Operational Charge	0
R3050	Vehicle Workshop - Operational Charge	84,290
R7000	Support Service Recharge - HR & Payroll	31,331
R7001	Support Service Recharge - Central Training	22,353
R7002	Support Service Recharge - Health & Safety	6,334
R7003	Support Service Recharge - Policy	6,939
R7004	Support Service Recharge - Communications	4,433
R7005	Support Service Recharge - Customer Services	0
R7006	Support Service Recharge - Legal Services	3,400
R7007	Support Service Recharge - Resources & Performance	14,402
R7008	Support Service Recharge - ICT	0
R7009	Support Service Recharge - Internal Audit	3,128
R7015	Support Service Recharge - Customer & Digital Services	14,979
R7030	Central Services - Courier & Post	619
R7031	Central Services - Printing & Copying	321
R7060	Central Recharges - Corporate Services	15,385
R9998	Internal Recharges - Operational Services	(2,101,733)
	Internal Recharges totals:	(1,717,675)
	Capital Costs. MRP & Borrowing totals:	254,348
	Reserve Contributions totals:	141,185
	Grounds Maintenance totals:	0

Appendix F – Service Action Plan

No:	Aim	Action	By whom	Timeframe
1.	Improve the deployment of resources	Whilst the routine Grounds Maintenance activities continue to be delivered predominantly through an in-house team we continue to apply the principles of best value in augmenting work, where necessary, through the use of sub-contractors.	Green Space & Heritage Manager	Per occasion
2.	Improve the deployment of resources	In order to cut open spaces amenity grass more efficiently, we pull-forward the vehicle and plant renewal programme to purchase flail and rotary mowers to replace cylinder mowers more quickly than currently planned. This should have a negligible financial impact but will be subject to equipment availability;	Landscape Manager & Supervisor	Financial year 24-25 Reviewed annually thereafter
3.	Increase income	The council retains SCC Highways verge cutting work and continues to seek improved compensation from SCC and make our continued support contingent on access to their back-office system.	Green Space & Heritage Manager	April 2024-25 At the review period negotiated
4.	Work with partners	As part of wider discussions, we continue to work closely with Town and Parish Councils and other third party organisations to bring forward options that augment standards at their additional cost or seek to transfer open space assets to their ownership and control.	Wider Corporate initiative	TBC
5.	Improve transparency of what we do.	We seek to adopt a more coherent land adoption policy to be created in order to clarify and control the amount of public open space that falls to the council to maintain.	Operations & Planning	TBC

No:	Aim	Action	By whom	Timeframe
6.	Improve transparency of what we do.	We continue to carry out proactive communications.	All concerned	ongoing
7.	Improve Bio-diversity	There is increased focus on the sustainability of our grounds maintenance services in the medium to long term.	All concerned	medium to long term
8	Improve the deployment of resources	continue to work with RSL's to try and align service standards	Green Space & Heritage Manager	medium to long term
9	Improve transparency of what we do.	We will investigate if it is possible to add a further accessible layer to establish the public ownership of land.	Green Space & Heritage Manager + IT section	Next 3 months
10	Improve the deployment of resources	We will explore the merits of seasonal hours that slightly increase working hours in the summer daylight period and reduce them in winter.	Landscape Manage & Supervisor	Next 3 months

Appendix G - Summary of the feedback by Parish & Town Council's (as at 4-12-2023).

Summary of feedback from organisation	Summary of proposed response:
<p>1. Bardwell Parish Council submits that: Maintaining the three weekly grass cutting schedule is essential.</p> <p>In Bardwell, as in other parishes no doubt, the amenity areas cut by West Suffolk Council are those on which children play, residents walk and are very visible to the community generally. Failing to ensure these areas are maintained appropriately leads to a high level of complaints from residents.</p> <p>Bardwell Parish Council is in the process of writing its own biodiversity policy and may respond further in the near future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content with 3 weekly cuts of amenity grass. • Noted • Would be happy to assist the PC with this.
<p>2. Brandon in Bloom CIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the support with the campaign this year. • Concerned about the appearance of weeds in paved areas & roadside gutters & the damage they are causing. • Concerns around the safety aspects of volunteers dealing with weeds in busy roadside verges & what their volunteers achieved in 2023 is not sustainable. • Support the reduced use of Glyphosate, however we do understand that invasive and injurious weeds require treatment. We firmly believe that it is time to move away from chemical weed control towards safer methods such as mechanical and thermal weed removal solutions. • Winter: Hard surfaces need brushing detritus needs removing to remove the weeds growing media. • Spring: Several treatments with heat will kill the emerging weeds before they seed. When these weeds die they can be swept up to keep the surface clean. • Summer: Sweep up grass cuttings, hedge clippings and other organic debris to prevent these from decomposing and forming more soil. • Autumn: Collect dead leaves and other organic debris that naturally falls from deciduous and annual plants in autumn to prevent these from decomposing and forming more soil. Again, this work can be carried out by a sweeper and more bulky material can be moved with a blower or vacuum collector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted • SCC are responsible for weeds in adopted highways. • H&S and an over reliance on volunteer labour is noted. • Acknowledged, support for reduced use of Glyphosate but not outright ban - Supportive of moving away from chemical use. • Valid point about the need for street cleansing to do their bit to keep detritus down.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular roadside sweeping is key to preventing weed growth. <p>Grass Cutting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They'd like us to trim around the base of posts and around trees and shrubs. • They've concerns about the amount of litter found in the long grass areas when they were eventually cut. • Town centre grassed areas should not be neglected and roadside junctions should be clear for safety. • Once areas have been grass cut, the grass is not collected. This in turn blows into verges, rotting into soil for weeds to take hold. <p>Shrubs & Trees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There does not seem to be a routine structure for maintenance of shrubs and trees. As residents we have to continually complain or deal with overgrown shrubs, hedges and trees ourselves. • In February, I reported a dead tree on the corner of the one way system of Wellington Close/ George Street and its still there in October. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas were historically spray. • We litter pick as a matter of course prior to grass cutting. • Noted • We have never box cut verges, by cutting frequently the need for collection is diminished. • shrub beds & hedges should be visited twice a year mid-summer (light trim and tidy) and winter (heavier reduction works). Because of the limited budget we don't have a replanting programme. • We have a four-year cyclical inspection and work regime. Work identified during the year of inspection is normally programmed in for the subsequent year. The fact that a tree is dead does mean it's dangerous the dead elm suckers locate next to 32 George Street have been noted for removal and will be dealt with next financial year.
3.	<p>Brandon TC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grass cutting and wider grounds maintenance service has fallen well below parr this year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledged – it's been a challenging season.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We appreciate the weekly update of which areas are being cut, but, often, this is not adhered to and it is not always because of the weather although, we don't ever receive an explanation as to the reason. • There has been no spraying of weeds this year, at all, with any type of weed killer. As a consequence, Brandon looks like an abandoned town with weeds and grass covering roads and pavements and growing out of kerbs and gutters. • Some areas even have trees growing at the edge of the road! This lack of attention to responsibility is very likely to be a lot more costly than doing the job properly, as, I'm certain that re-surfacing roads and pavements would cost a lot more than maintaining them correctly in the first place. • These issues have been reported on more than one occasion with a generic response sent in reply. This generic response refers to weed killer having been applied, but we all know that didn't happen so, you should probably check that any information that is sent is correct. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were a few instances when we weren't able to achieve the round but that was seldom and by no means the norm. • WSC haven't but SCC have applied acetic acid which hasn't been very effective. • Street trees are SCC highways responsibility. • WSC is not the highway authority and is not responsible for the control of weeds in the adopted highway.
4.	<p>Brockley PC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PC has recently introduced their Biodiversity Policy and we are currently consulting on what local people would like to see prioritised over the next year. • The PC owns the village green and contracts the grass cutting to a local farmer. • Aware that WSC maintain a green in Woodcrofts Close and they'd like to speak to us about the merits of rewilding that area for Bio-diversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WSC own a green space (900m2) between 10 & 25 Woodcrofts Close and are happy to make contact. • We'd be happy for the PC to take the green or work with them on making it more bio-diverse.
5.	<p>Bury in Bloom</p> <p>The arrangement between West Suffolk Council (WSC) and Bury in Bloom (BIB), by which WSC maintains and keeps weeded the town's roundabouts and verges and BIB rewards it by sponsorship and a more attractive, prize-winning town, has served both sides well. It has always been a partnership with both sides doing their best to help the other.</p> <p>Over the last year or so, the roundabouts have not been given adequate care. BIB have received complaints from sponsors and members of the public and one sponsor has demanded his funding back.</p>	<p>B in B has historically been well supported and the sponsorship from the roundabouts has help support the wider in bloom initiatives around the Town.</p> <p>The challenges of the last few years are references in the main report.</p>

	<p>We really do not wish to be seen to criticise WSC or to give out incorrect information, but we do have to give some sort of answer or explanation and it is unclear to us why the weeding is not being done. We have been told variously that there is a shortage of staff, money, time, traffic management issues and the ban on use of glyphosate. But that is simply not acceptable for a high-profile floral town that promotes itself as 'a jewel in the crown of Suffolk'.</p> <p>BIB is now beginning its campaign leading to the judging next year, and so we would be very grateful for guidance on WSC's plans for the year and for some commitment to look after the roundabouts and verges so that we can present the town for inspection with confidence.</p>	<p>There is now prescribed training, which are Landscape Operatives have received in order to be able to work in the highway. There was an acceptance by the Council that areas would look weedier because of stopping the use of herbicide.</p> <p>Officers have recently met with the current B in B coordinator to clarify what we can do and not do.</p>
6	<p>Cavendish PC As a Parish Council we rely on the grass cutting services you provide either as part of your District Council responsibilities or as a paying customer.</p> <p>We receive a quotation each year outlining the village areas we are responsible for and which you are going to cut, the frequency of cuts and cost per area.</p> <p>In general, we are satisfied with most of the standard of service and cost. Apart from the odd hitch with machinery and labour shortages, the Village Green, Sports Field, Orchard and various verges are maintained to an acceptable standard. This year we did have complaints regarding the amount of growth allowed in the early Spring, but this was eventually dealt with after we had raised the matter.</p> <p>There were concerns this year regarding the frequency of cuts to the Cemetery, Cemetery Extension and Cemetery Extension Hedge. The frequency fell well below the number initially requested and complaints were received.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledged • Acknowledged • That's positive. • We didn't achieve all the cutting rounds we'd hoped to do last year, the reduced number of cuts is reflected in the reduced sum we've invoiced the PC.

7.	<p>Cavenham PC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a well-used children's play area, at Cavenham Green, within our village. It consumes more than 50% of our annual parish precept simply to keep the grass mown. • We in the past have seen no sign of West Suffolk attendance to the general maintenance of amenities, sidewalks etc. • The parish would welcome a visit to our village, by a member of your team to discuss how you might be able to improve the level of service provided. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WSC don't currently maintain any land in Cavenham. We would be happy provide the PC with a quote for the cutting of their green if they'd like.
8.	<p>Clare Town Council</p> <p>Clare Town Council has discussed the above and would like to make the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would not like the grass cutting done any less than it already is. • We would not object to any efforts in keeping the weeds down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted • Noted – Not adverse to herbicide use.
9.	<p>Exning Parish Councils</p> <p>Will be considering this at their meetings at the end of November and will be putting in a response but it will be a few days later than your date of 24th Nov.</p>	<p>Noted – Nothing received 04-12.</p>
10.	<p>Honington and Sapiston</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a tidy villages. • The PC employ's a person to cut grass in areas not covered by WSC. • They have an annual litter-pick and individuals also act when they see the need. • They already have a designated "Wild Area" that is maintained by their Tree Group and is used by Honington Primary school. • We would not want anymore "wild areas" and expect WSC to continue at the same level of activity in respect of grass cutting. • They do not agree with a total ban on the use of weed killer as there is often a need for its limited use in targeted areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed • Acknowledged • Noted. • Noted • Content with 3 weekly cuts of amenity grass. • Accepting of herbicide being used.

<p>11. Lackford PC Most smaller parishes only have bi-monthly meetings, such a short deadline meant that the parish councils' comments could not be discussed at a meeting.</p> <p>Lackford Parish Council has a contract with West Suffolk Council to cut two small areas in Lackford which are the responsibility of the Parish Council. Last year the cost of the contract increased considerably but this was not reflected in the level of service we received and we had to make several complaints about the grass not being cut.</p> <p>Whilst we appreciate that a number of factors came into play, in particular the weather and lack of manpower, we expect the contract to be fulfilled. If you do not have the resources to fulfil contracts, then this service should not be offered.</p> <p>In Lackford, Holden Road and Kent Road are cut by West Suffolk Council, some of the verges are meant to be cut by Suffolk County Council and the village entrances are cut by West Suffolk Council on behalf of Lackford Parish Council. There were occasions when Holden Road and Kent Road were cut, but not the areas we pay for. We believe that it would be more cost effective if all these areas were cut at the same time. Ideally West Suffolk Council would work with Suffolk County Council and have some sort of agreement to ensure that all areas are cut by one contractor rather than two different contractors.</p> <p>Parish councils are being told that new homes are putting pressure on existing services. We would expect that they would also generate income for West Suffolk Council due to more homes paying Council Tax. What happens to this income if it is not being used to cover the cost of services provided?</p> <p>Communication from West Suffolk Council is poor. If West Suffolk Council is experiencing operational difficulties please let parish councils know as our clerk spends a considerable amount of time chasing West Suffolk Council when there is a problem.</p> <p>Whilst we understand the reasons behind limiting the use of glyphosate, the result has been that roads and pavements have become overgrown with weeds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair point • We didn't achieve all the cutting rounds we'd hoped to do last year, the reduced number of cuts is reflected in the reduced sum we've invoiced the PC. • Again, a fair point. We are therefore reducing our client base accordingly. • The Highway authority employs a contractor with a large tractor and side arm flail who cuts the rural verges (those outside of the 30 mile and hour zone) twice a year. There large equipment isn't really suitable for the smaller verges and amenity greens we cut in the residential areas. • Refer to the District Council's proportion of Council tax. • Last year we sent out weekly updates.
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	<p>and non-native species like giant hogweed have been allowed to take hold. If glyphosate is not going to be used, a better alternative needs to be found. The risk of falls and injury on paths and roads which are overgrown needs to be balanced against the risk from glyphosate. In our experience not using glyphosate where weeds proliferate has resulted in a reduction in the level of service provided.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WSC are not responsible for the treatment of weeds in roads and pavements.
12.	<p>Mildenhall Town Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We recognize the difficult position regarding funding for grass cutting and wider maintenance service. • We are, however, concerned about how shabby and unloved our town is beginning to look. • We would lend our support to lobby for better services. • We feel it would be a plan to return to the use of herbicide chemicals in a targeted and limited way. • We would like to explore options to enhance our service provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted • Concerned about the look of the town are valid. • They want a better standard of service than they are getting. • They'd support a return to herbicide use. • Happy to meet.
13	<p>Moulton Parish Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cutting of areas cut by West Suffolk Council has been inconsistent and has meant that parts of the village have looked very unkempt. • Parishes should be notified if West Suffolk Council is unable to keep to its published schedule so that individual parishes do not have to make contact, particularly as it can be difficult to get a response from West Suffolk Council. • It would be better if local contractors were used with payment made to parishes/contractors by West Suffolk Council to cover the cost. This would allow West Suffolk Council's contractors to focus on areas where no alternative is available. The grass areas in Moulton used to be cut by SP Landscapes and this was done extremely well. Since West Suffolk Council took over the contract the service provided has deteriorated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledged • WSC issued weekly updated throughout the grass cutting season. • This would add contract monitoring and more administrative burden on the district. It would also further dilute responsibilities amongst a wider set of agencies/contractors across the district.

14.	<p>Newmarket Town Council Will be considering this at their meetings at the end of November and will be putting in a response but it will be a few days later than your date of 24th Nov.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted – Nothing received 04-12.
15.	<p>Nowton Parish Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciate being consulted. • Councillors of the PC are firmly against the return of the use of Glyphosate in any area of Nowton village. • Nowton Parish Council are intending to join the Community Self-Help Scheme and, in doing so, hope to reduce the increased burden for minor yet time consuming maintenance, and thus keep ahead of the need for the use of Glyphosate within the village. • If more Parish Councils could be made aware of and encouraged to join one of the schemes, this could make a significant impact on resource allocation; Councillors would encourage discussion at Committee level as to how more parishes could be incentivised to partake in such schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted • Don't want to see a return to glyphosate. • See link to the SCC self help web page: Community Self-Help Scheme - Suffolk County Council and yes this is something we should help promote.
16.	<p>Stradishall Parish Council Have experienced problems in establishing who is responsible for what in the village particularly with regards St Margaret's Place and the triangular green on which the village sign is located.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have been given the run-around between SCC & WSC over ownership and responsibilities. Area looked a complete mess for several month whilst the denials of ownership went on. • A manager from WSC had requested that the PC ask residents not to park at the base of the embankment so that we could cut it. We do not understand why this problem has only arisen this year when cars have been parked in front of the bank for years. • The PC has its own contractor who cuts its playing field and would probably do a much better job if he cut other areas in the village. If SCC/WSC paid the parish they'd ask their contractor to do it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been a anomalies identified in what should be maintained by whom in this parish area. We believe that we have now addressed them and we apologise for giving SPC the runaround. • It is a steep embankment and given the potential for damage to parked cars this request of the PC doesn't seem unreasonable. • Whilst we'd not pay for it if the PC wants to take on those areas to enhance amenity, then we'd happily relinquish it.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is disappointing that parishes were given such a short timescale to respond to this consultation.• It would be great if there were better partnership and communication between the different local government organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noted.• I don't think anyone would disagree with that.
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