

Grass cutting on Hertfordshire's roadside verges

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Grass cutting on Hertfordshire's roadside verges has started.

Grass cutting started in April, despite the ongoing coronavirus situation and the constant review of safety measures, Hertfordshire County Council's contractors, Ringway, will continue to maintain all highways grass as normal.

It's important that we keep on top of this, particularly as more people are walking on grass verges as a result of social distancing advice, and we want them to be able to do that safely.

As the start of the grass cutting season gets underway in some areas, the results of the first cut may look messy, with clumps of grass and possible litter being left behind. Please bear with us on this.

There will be other areas where it is not possible to cut due to the density and proximity of parked cars. These areas will be assessed before mowing takes place and may need to be revisited when current government advice to stay home is relaxed.

Last year, for the first time, we cut some roadside verges in rural areas in a different way, this was to encourage the growth of wildflowers. These areas were cut only once last year, between mid-July and mid-September, with the grass cuttings removed. This will allow for the growth, flowering and seeding of wildflowers, as well as preventing the verges from being dominated by more aggressive plant species. This will provide a better habitat for bees and other pollinating insects. Last year we did 16 sites as part of our Alternative Verge Maintenance project and learning a considerable amount of information from last year's trial, this year we are aiming to add more sites to help contribute to the Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy - the county council's ambitious programme to improve sustainability in the county. These are mainly in North Hertfordshire. In addition to the Alternative Verge Maintenance project we also reduced our rural swathe cut from 2 to 1 where it was safe to do so, this has also had a positive effect with wildflowers and wildlife. This year we will also be monitoring the sites and carrying out vegetation surveys.

Hertfordshire County Council's objective this year will be to work with partners such as district and borough council's to make further improvements and where possible reduce cutting frequencies on highways verges currently managed by the district and borough councils on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council.

Routine grass cutting generally takes place throughout the growing season (March to October). Each area of grass will be cut between one and six times a year, depending on how fast it grows, and will be cut to a height of 150mm or 250mm, depending on whether it's in an urban or rural area.

The county council undertakes highway grass cutting in the following areas:

- Hertsmere
- Three Rivers
- Dacorum (in part)
- Surrounding villages in North and East Herts

The local district or borough councils undertake highways grass cutting in the remaining areas.

Grass cutting is highly weather dependant and our plans can change depending on weather and ground conditions, and on the rate of grass growth.

Phil Bibby, Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment, said: "We need to keep the grass cut fairly short so that road users can see clearly at junctions and bends in the road. However, we know that roadside verges are often home to a wide range of plants and animals, so we don't want to cut back vegetation too much. We're determined to protect and improve Hertfordshire's natural environment, and the changes to how we cut roadside grass that we introduced last year will help increase the habitats and food that our pollinating insects rely on.