

Wildflower and Long Grass

Introduction to New Grounds Maintenance Service

Our new grounds maintenance contract with ISS Facility Services Landscaping is focussed on clear outcomes, which means an end to the “one-size-fits-all” approach of previous years.

We are setting out clear objectives as to what this partnership will deliver. We have made a significant step forward in creating some challenging (although achievable) KPI’s (Key

Performance Indicators) for the partnership to deliver.

We have moved away from frequencies, and dates, for programmed works and shall instead focus our resources to where it is most needed, based on clear outcomes.

Our new approach is in its early days, and we are constantly reviewing and managing how our partnership with ISS is performing.



The most significant and obvious change relates to grass cutting, as follows;

Long Grass

Grass cutting will become far more targeted, and leads on something which we started last year;

- Large highway verges in both rural and urban areas will be left to establish into grassland habitats, but with grass cut regularly around the fringes to ensure grass doesn't encroach onto pathways, roads or obstruct sight lines.
- Areas in our large parks will have increased areas of grassland with wide mown footpaths through them, similar to Cantley Park and Ashenbury Park last year.
- In smaller parks where there are woodland areas we will allow margins of grassland to develop instead of cutting right up to the park boundary.
- We will avoid cutting grass right up to the bases of trees and instead allow the grass to grow.
- The time saved will be used to focus on maintaining regular mown areas to a higher standard than the past, mainly sports pitches, play areas, cemeteries and other high use sites.

Why is this happening?

- The National Pollinator Strategy details the decline of pollinating insects over the past 70 years, and offers some insight in reversing this trend which includes allowing grass and wildflowers to grow and complete lifecycles. This is especially important in more urban areas.
- Biodiversity 2020 also provides information relating to the decline of pollinators
- WBC held a consultation with our residents on the back of a difficult grass cutting season in 2014. This clearly identified that there should be greater attention given to high use sites which includes sports pitches and play areas.
- 2015 proved, through numerous compliments during our limited trial, how well received this change in approach has been and we decided to build on this positivity for the future.

Wildflowers

In 2015 we experimented with 13 different wildflower seed mixes. This was a proven success introducing a variety of wildlife habits and improving the look of several areas across the borough.

- You will continue to find wildflowers at Ashenbury Park (Woodley), Cantley Parkland (Wokingham), the Woosehill Spine Road, Winnersh Meadows and some highway verges across the borough.
- From 2017 we will start to increase the presence of wildflowers at selective sites by 10,000sq/m per year for 10 years.

Ongoing monitoring and review

- We are aligning ourselves with various projects across the country, endorsed by many plant life organisations including; RHS, BBC Countryfile & Gardener's World, CPRE, Kew Gardens, Alan Titchmarsh's Road Verge Campaign etc.
- We will have experts from Reading University assess the sites for biodiversity throughout the year to inform future plans, which we hope to share at various forums.
- We hope to see a marked increase in pollinators together with an increase in flower-rich grasslands.
- Performance Officers will make regular checks across the borough to ensure we are striking the right balance of increased grassland areas and increasing the quality of mown grass sites.
- We will maintain a flexible approach to this, and where there is a genuine example of limited recreational access to green space we will ensure that this is rectified.



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Visit: www.wokingham.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside
or contact customer services on (0118) 974 6000 for more information.