

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Environment Committee		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	13th July 2023 7.00pm	LOCATION	Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Ruth Burgess, Streetscape Development Manager		
AGENDA ITEM	8		
REPORT TITLE	Low Mow Town		
Summary	<p>At Town Hall and Assets Committee on January 12 the Town Council agreed to a Low Mow approach to grass cutting for this season, with more swathes of grass left for the full growing season. The minute stated:</p> <p><i>THAS /35/2223 Resolved to accept the report regarding change of mowing regimes across Congleton Town Council maintained open spaces. Action Officers to develop a marketing campaign to clarify and to actively promote the changes in the grounds maintenance programme</i></p> <p>This paper is to update members of the new Environment Committee on the approach undertaken in 2023 and its justifications and is for noting.</p>		
Background	<p>Congleton Town Council's Streetscape services provide the grounds and street cleansing services for the Congleton area. This is under contract with Cheshire East to provide a minimum service and enhanced by the Town Council.</p> <p>The Town Council Streetscape team is responsible for 728,780m² of ground areas – including bedding, wooded areas and grassed areas. With current equipment and staff, it would take around three weeks to cut the grass in all areas.</p> <p>Council officers have assessed each area that the Town Council is responsible for and has decided how that area will be cared for. The mowing schedule varies from area to area depending on the location, highway sightlines, safety, visibility and what's practical. For instance, verges, where lots of people walk, will be cut more often than wilder areas. Congleton Town Council is not responsible for all the public grass-cutting. Some areas are cut by Cheshire East Highways, by Plus Dane or by other contractors.</p> <p>Each area will be considered individually, but overall, in 2023 mowing on areas maintained by Congleton Town Council will be reduced. CTC Grounds Maintenance schedule for 2023 is included on the Town Council website and identifies many areas where the grass will now be cut twice a year rather than 15 times. In total 266,000m² of Town Council-maintained grassland will be cut regularly (15 cuts) and 47,637m² will now be left wild for the growing season and cut in the winter to encourage regrowth.</p> <p>Some of the areas that CTC maintains are large sports fields which require cutting while residents will notice that some parks and gardens will have larger areas which</p>		

	<p>are left for nature. Signs will be put up in these areas to indicate that the areas are purposely being left to improve biodiversity.</p> <p>The Town Council is mindful of its Climate Change Emergency Commitment and the Nature Emergency Crisis and the need to moderate behaviour to give nature a better chance. Urbanisation, agriculture, and climate change have caused a long-term decline in much of the UK's wildlife-rich habitat and "common" species. As a result, since the 1950s, the number of hedgehogs has fallen by 95%, turtle doves by 98% and the common toad by 68%. The Town Council has agreed to adopt a 'low mow' all-year approach, cutting grass according to needs and leaving specific areas as wildlife areas throughout the growing season rather than just during May. Less frequent cutting, but still within the capacity of the machinery should prevent some of the issues faced in 2022 when the machinery struggled to cut the extra-long, thick grass and operators struggled to remove the wildlife living in the longer grass ahead of cutting.</p> <p>Residents will be aware of more areas of taller grass left for bees, hoverflies, butterflies, beetles, grasshoppers and moths etc. These insects pollinate 80% of all plant species in Europe, including food crops like tomatoes, rapeseed and strawberries. The longer grassed areas will usually be on banks, around the edges of open spaces and in clearly marked areas where people do not need to walk. These areas will still be checked by streetscape for litter, but will be left to grow for the season and cut back at the end of the growing season to allow the goodness to go back into the soil.</p> <p>The Streetscape manager has been in contact with Ansa Environmental Services who are responsible for grass cutting in public or large spaces in Congleton to seek support for leaving more areas for nature and areas that are to be cut to cut less frequently, adopting the 'low mow' approach. This was met with support and they are also carrying out the same within their areas.</p> <p>It's noted that an increasing number of councils across the UK adopt a similar 'relaxed' approach to their grass-cutting schedules.</p>
Recommendations	That the committee note this report
Financial Implications	Low Mow approach to grass cutting is not a money-saving exercise as the staff that would be cutting are switched to other duties, for example, the manual weeding of playgrounds where chemical weedkillers are no longer used.
Environmental Implications	The change to 'low mow' is part of working changes to support the Climate Change Emergency and Nature Emergency and encourage greater biodiversity in the areas left uncut.
Equality and Diversity Impact	This cutting regime will be applied across the town without prejudice. The effects of climate change and biodiversity loss have an impact on everyone, but those on low incomes are most adversely affected.
PROPOSALS	That the committee notes this report.