

## RURAL VERGES AS WILDLIFE CORRIDORS – TRIAL OF EARLY SEASON REDUCTION IN RURAL GRASS CUTTING

### BACKGROUND

East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has received an increased level of contact regarding rural verge cutting since May 2020. Most notably an increase in requests to stop cutting rural verges or change the schedule in line with wild plant cycles. ESCC has also set targets for carbon reduction of which increased biodiversity plays an important part.

### TRIAL

A trial reduction in verge cutting has been undertaken over the last two years, 2021 and 2022 in select Parish and Town Councils who have previously expressed an interest.

Overall, the trial has been well received, however, neither of the trial years was a typical growing season therefore it was agreed at a Lead Member for Transport and Environment meeting to roll the trial out further and evaluate the impact of reduced rural cuts over more grass cutting seasons.

### GRASS CUTTING SERVICE

**The standard rural grass cut** is carried out as a 1metre wide swathe undertaken along the verge length (with wider areas cut around junctions and bends to ensure good visibility is maintained) twice a year in May/June and Autumn. In addition, a full cut back of around one quarter of the rural verges is undertaken each year in the autumn to prevent brambles, invasive weeds and trees from taking-over verges.

**The reduced rural cutting service** reduces the frequency of grass cutting services along rural verges to:

- Only visibility cuts undertaken around May/June
- A single one metre swathe with visibility cuts in the Autumn

This change means that ESCC would not cut rural verges in the trial areas (except for visibility) during the flowering season and when it is the most beneficial time for pollinators so they can act as wildlife corridors. Flowering plants are then be able to complete their lifecycles and set seed, providing further biodiversity benefits.

### SAFETY

Please note, **the reduction will not take place on single track roads** due to increased safety risks for road users.

Please note we are currently in the process of mapping these and will be able to let you know where they are in due course.

Throughout the season safety issues will remain the priority, with any visibility or access issues being picked up and rectified through the usual reporting process or your Customer Service Manager.

### MAPS

You can now access the grass cutting maps online here, please scroll in on the map until the grass loads. This map is being continually updated and validated by our Asset Management team and they welcome any feedback through the contact us button within the link.