



Parish and Town council briefing note: Grass Cutting

From the beginning of March, the grass cutting season begins in East Sussex. In this brief, you can find information on the options currently available to Town and Parish Councils, along with other important information to support you through the summer season.

Why do we need to cut grass in public areas?

Grass cutting on highways is primarily about safety. Key aims are to:

- Maintain visibility at junctions and bends
- Keep footways and sightlines clear
- Reduce risks to road users and pedestrians
- Maintain overall height and stop the encroachment of invasive and persistent weeds

Who is responsible for what?

Grass cutting is one of the most visible local services and often generates questions and complaints. Confusion usually arises because different organisations are responsible for different areas of grass, so cutting may take place at different times within the same area.

Responsibility depends on who owns or manages the land. Understanding and clearly explaining these boundaries helps manage expectations.

The Parish or Town Council is responsible for grass cutting on land it owns or manages, such as:

- Village greens
- Cemeteries and churchyards (where applicable)
- Play areas and recreation grounds
- Allotments

Verges maintained by ESCC fall into four categories:

- Urban Verges – fall within areas where the speed limit is 40mph or below
- Rural Verges – those in areas where the speed limit is above 40mph. Some rural verges do appear in urban speed limit zones, but these are limited to where urban cutting equipment cannot be safely used.
- Wildlife Verges – contain notable species or an abundance of species thereby dictating a specific habitat. Cuttings are removed.
- Meadow Verges – these tend to link or be placed near to areas of higher biodiversity value such as Wildlife Verges, or where the species present or habitat dictates that this status is most suitable. Cuttings are not removed.

Urban Verges

Some open spaces are owned and maintained by the District or Borough Council, and some are privately owned and are not maintained by any council, such as grass around some housing association properties or along private roads.

Typically, highway verges are the responsibility of the County Council. However, Parish and Town Councils are asked each year to choose how grass in their area will be managed. There are three main options available for urban verge cutting:

Option 1: Standard service (no cost to the Parish Council)

- ESCC funds and carries out **two grass cuts per year**.
- Grass is managed primarily for road safety.

- This is the default option if no alternative is chosen.

Option 2: Extra cuts funded by the Parish or Town Council

- ESCC delivers the standard service, but the Parish or Town Council **pay for additional cuts** (the only option is four extra cuts, giving six in total), carried out by ESCC.
- Costs are charged to the Parish/Town Council, based on the area of grass cut (per m²).

Option 3: Self-delivery (Parish/Town-led grass cutting)

- The Parish or Town Council takes responsibility for **all urban verge cutting** in its area.
- A formal agreement with ESCC is required.
- ESCC contributes funding equivalent to two standard cuts.
- The Parish or Town Council **must** carry out a minimum of the two standard cuts on all urban verges.
- The Parish or Town Council appoints and manages its own contractor.
- Contractors must meet requirements, including:
 - Minimum public liability insurance (e.g. £10m).
 - Correct training and qualifications in traffic management and use of machinery.
- Compliance with highways safety standards and provide risk assessments and method statements. This option gives the most local control and allows the use of local contractors.

Rural Verges

The rural verge cutting schedule is split into two cuts across the county. This consists of a 1m swathe adjacent to the carriageway being cut firstly in the spring and then again in the autumn. During both cuts, visibility splays are also cut for safety purposes. There are two options that Parish and Town Councils have been given regarding rural verge cutting:

Option 1 (Standard service)

- Two 1m swathe cuts (including visibility splays) are carried out in the spring and autumn adjacent to the carriageway.

Option 2 (Environmental Enhancement service)

- No 1m cut is carried out in the spring, but visibility splays are cut.
- The standard second cut is carried out in the autumn (including visibility splays).

Wildlife Verges

ESCC offer the chance for the public and Parish and Town Councils to apply for certain verges to become managed to maintain and enhance the species present. Where the species or habitat dictate, the cutting on these verges is reduced to one autumn cut and the cuttings are collected. Some species or habitats do not thrive with cuttings removed, in which case they might be categorised as Meadow Verges.

Meadow Verges

Usually these are selected where species numbers or diversity do not justify Wildlife Verge status, or where the species determine that removal of the cuttings is not necessary or would be antagonistic to the species present.

Both Wildlife and Meadow verges can be applied for [online](#) between the 1st of June and 31st of August. Applications need to be approved by the Parish or Town Council.

Important things to be aware of

1. Road safety cuts still happen - We will always cut grass where it presents a safety risk (e.g. at junctions), regardless of the chosen option or verge status.
2. Not all grass is highway adopted land - Some grass areas are privately owned or maintained by others and are not included in the highways grass-cutting programme.
3. Grass cutting usually takes place between March/April and October/November each year.

4. Cuttings are not collected – They're left to mulch naturally to reduce cost and environmental impact, except where Wildlife Verges are present.

Safety concerns and reporting

Where grass growth causes a specific safety issue, such as obstructed visibility at a junction or a trip hazard on a footway, these should be reported via the East Sussex Highways website, so they can be assessed and prioritised.

Funding additional cutting is not required for safety-critical issues to be addressed.

Managing resident expectations

You can help by explaining that:

- The service prioritises safety rather than appearance.
- Not all grassed areas will be cut at the same time or frequency.
- Clear, consistent messaging can significantly reduce complaints and confusion.

Weed control

Weed growth can create a trip hazard, trap litter and debris, block drainage, and cause damage to paved surfaces making maintenance more difficult and costly. Weed spraying is carried out once a year on pavements and along the edge of the road, usually during the summer months and only in suitable weather conditions.

Depending on the location, weeds are treated using either a mini tractor with an adapted sprayer or a handheld lance. Spraying only takes place where weeds are present - if no weeds are found, no spraying is carried out.

We use a herbicide which has been nationally approved as safe for use.

Hedges and trees

Many roadside hedges and trees are privately owned, especially if they form part of a boundary feature. If a private tree or vegetation is overgrown and causing a problem to the highway, our Highway Steward will inspect and assess the impact being caused. We can take a range of actions from issuing a responsibilities letter, a tree cutting notice, formal notice, or arranging for emergency works to be carried out.

Unfortunately, we cannot assist with private trees overhanging other private properties.

Highway trees only receive maintenance at County Council expense for reasons of health and safety, access and visibility on the highway or where they are causing damage to property. We will carry out routine maintenance such as pollarding and reductions where necessary for the tree's health or for the reasons above. We do not fell or reduce trees because they block light or cause issues with TV reception. We do not fell trees if they are healthy and pose no risk to highway users.

Siding

In rural areas only the minimum amount of siding (trimming of verges along the pavement) should be carried out on carriageways, e.g. when needed before surface dressing and the renewal of edge markings, since in most cases the traffic keeps the carriageway clear.

On footways, only the minimum amount of siding should be carried out to preserve an adequate width of footway for all types of pedestrian traffic where this is considered necessary on an ad-hoc basis

Support and further information

Grass cutting information and schedules: <https://live.eastsussexhighways.com/services/services-vegetation/7>

Report a highway vegetation issue: <https://live.eastsussexhighways.com/homepage/35/location-of-grass>