
Report To:	Planning, Leisure & Environment Committee	Date:	02 October 2023
Contact Officer:	Paula Harrison		
Subject:	Grass Cutting & Planting		

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Planning, Leisure & Environment Committee with information to consider for future grass cutting and Autumn planting.

2. DETAIL

- 2.1 The West Swindon Parish team have been cutting at a higher height for the last two years with grass being cut throughout the season at around 2 inches high. This practice has found that there is a regrowth of daisies and buttercups as a result.
- 2.2 The Parish Council has previously adopted a range of approaches to managing grassed areas including low mow, no mow, routine mow and wildflower/meadow land – cut and bale. A meadow area on Shaw Ridge Linear Park and the rear of Edgehill (Freshbrook) have been managed by volunteers to promote wildflowers. The meadow area in Toothill was managed by the Parish Council as cut and bale mowing. A summary of diversity recorded at Edgehill Haven is attached as **Appendix A**.
- 2.3 Research is indicating that it would be timely for the approach to grass cutting to be reviewed. Oregon State University's Turf Management Program researchers are currently determining the optimum lawn management practices to have lawns be at least a "net carbon sink." This means having more carbon stored in the grass plants and the soil than is released by soil microbe decay.

Here are suggestions based on research so far:

Lawns managed at a higher mowing height have greater shoot biomass. However, a lower mowing height produces greater lawn density by stimulating lateral growth. Recent research at OSU in Corvallis suggests that a 2-inch mowing height is optimum for lawn health, broadleaf weed prevention and carbon sequestration (Braithwaite et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

- 2.4 In previous years, the Parish team have had low mow spaces on a rotation so that grass can recover. It is difficult to accurately assess the beneficial trade off between low mow with the reduced use of mowing machinery verses the benefit of broadleaf weed prevention.
- 2.5 It is proposed that returning to a year of routine mowing across the Parish would enable improved grass health that should contribute better to low mow the following cutting season. There are some spaces that work well as low mow such as part of Saltway field and parts of Shaw Forest so these would continue as low mow.

Planting:

- 2.5 All of the Parish Council pots and containers will be moving over to Autumn/Winter planting. The Parish Council uses a main supplier who grows in peat-free compost and all containers are returned to the supplier for recycling. Bulbs dried out from the previous year are returned to the containers with seasonal plants.
- 2.6 Depending on the Autumn/Winter delivery, improved planting should be added at Freshbrook and Shaw village centres with refreshed planters at Toothill Village Centre.
- 2.7 Councillors were invited to nominate sites for Autumn bulb planting. The list of sites is as follows and bulbs have been ordered to support either community or team-based planting in these locations:
 - Rear of Beaulieu Close
 - Mead Way roundabouts
 - Peatmoor, Nine Elms and Sparcells roundabouts/adjacent verges
 - Eastleaze Road
 - Cartwright Drive verge
 - The Holbeins entrance

3. RECOMMENDATION:

- 3.1 It is recommended that with the exception of Shaw Linear Park (West Swindon Fab) and the wildflower planting at Edgehill (Edgehill Haven), and low mow zones that work well, that routine grass cutting be resumed across the Parish with a review to take place in Autumn 2024.

Edgehill Haven is a small piece of land next to a footpath that we started rewilding in June of 2020 with clearing areas of grass and planting with wildflowers. We also created a Hibernaculum and several mini ponds. The area is enhanced by two adjoining gardens that have fruit trees and a further 4 medium ponds and one large one.

<p>Birds Nesting: Sparrows Starling Robins Bluetits Pidgeons Magpies Coaltits Wren</p> <p>Seen: Great tits Swifts Red kytes Crows Dunnock Long tail tits</p> <p>Frogs and roads now breeding Slowworm</p> <p>Dragonflies and damselflies laying eggs Emperor Blue chasers Blue and red damselflies</p> <p>12 different species of Bee including: Leaf cutter Mason Miner Honeybee White tailed bumble Orange tail bumble</p> <p>Field mice Ladybirds Grasshoppers Numerous spiders Ant hills Hedgehogs Foxes Bats recorded.</p>	<p>Butterflies Peacock Comma Orange Tip Red Admiral Large white Painted Lady Meadow brown Common blue Gatekeeper Small copper Brimstone And others that move too fast to identify!</p> <p>Moths Elephant Hawkmoth Hummingbird Hawkmoth Swallowtail moth Scarlet tiger moth Common plume Scalloped Oak moth White Ermin Boxwood moths</p>
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