

Note re verges June 2021

Introduction

1. Verges offer vital support for wildlife and pollination, provided the vegetation is controlled, so as to encourage wildflowers and their seeds.
2. Websites such as Plantlife and Buglife offer useful guidance on best practice, which embodies:
 - a. An early cut before the early flowers grow, blossom and seed.
 - b. A late cut after the late flowers have grown, flowered and seeded.
 - c. For areas not cut on a regular basis, cutting right back every 2 – 3 years to discourage thuggish plants (such as nettles, docks and thistles) which would otherwise stifle the desirable flowers.
3. This fits in with the recent letter to DPC from Friends of the Dales, except that we do not follow their advice to dig out the thuggish plants in the presently unmown areas going back to the walls/fences every 2 years or so. We presently do not clear these areas at all.

What currently happens at Draughton

4. DPC currently has one ride-on mower, well-used but with some life left in it if used carefully. We also have two lightweight battery trimmers and one much heavier (weight and duty) petrol trimmer, recently overhauled by one of the vergers. For twigs and small branches we use a sturdy set of long handled trimmers.
5. The mower is currently housed on a temporary basis in a local farmer's barn.
6. DPC has an updated risk assessment for Vergers and insurance is covered by the DPC policy.
7. DPC Vergers cut a narrow border at the road edge every 2 – 3 weeks in order to:
 - a. Provide a safe refuge for pedestrians, which can also be used as a path,
 - b. Make for smart entrances to the village at both A65 access roads.
 - c. Provide a safe route for small animals such as hedgehogs to travel along the verge, without having to go out onto the road.
8. DPC currently cuts the larger areas at the A65 junctions with same frequency as verge edges. Ideally, DPC should revert to just two cuts per year for these areas, to comply with environmental best practice. However, DPC mower will not cope with the heavy autumn cut which this would involve. As an alternative, DPC leaves areas with flowers in them until the next cut, which ensures at least some pollination and seed formation.
9. DPC currently does not cut the wide swathe of verge between the current cut of 1 - 2 swathe widths and the fence or wall. As a result, we have plenty of thuggish plants choking off many smaller flowers and looking generally unsightly, more like scrub. This affects the appearance of the verges along the entire length of the top road, both the Skipton end and the Ilkley end.
10. The verges along Low Lane and School Lane are maintained by local residents. The verges around the Village Hall/Church/Carpark are particularly well cared for.
11. DPC has considered the possibility of getting a sub-contractor with heavier equipment to cut back, every 2 years, those areas which are at present left uncut, in order to promote desirable wildflowers, rather than the nettles and thistles and similar which dominate at present. This would improve our environmental performance and also the appearance of the verges. The cost of sub-contracting it would be around £200 for labour plus at least as much again for disposal of the rough cuttings, based on doing this in late autumn rather than early spring.

12. The Friends of the Dales letter recommends digging out the thuggish plants, which makes sound sense, because just cutting these back every 2 years is unlikely to get rid of them. This has not been costed in.
13. Some residents have also raised the issue of sight obstruction at the Ilkley end, looking for oncoming traffic from the Skipton direction, caused by higher growth on the A65 verge itself from June to September. DPC do not cut this at present.

Proposals

14. We will continue to cut one swathe width at Ilkley end of the access road, every 2 – 3 weeks.
15. We will cut 1 - 2 swathe widths on the verge at the Skipton end, which is much wider and which is used more frequently by pedestrians.
16. We will continue to cut the larger areas at the junctions with the A65, with the same frequency, but leaving flowering areas temporarily where appropriate.
17. Other vegetation (trees and shrubs) will be trimmed back only where necessary for safety purposes for mowers and pedestrians and to preserve lines of sight for motorists and cyclists.
18. One of the Vergers has suggested that we could cut back the unmown areas this autumn (in line with best practice) in-house using our heavy petrol trimmer. If we did this it would make sense to first dig out the thuggish plants as a first step to getting rid of these. We would probably need a separate team for this. We would still have the cost and logistics of disposal of the rough cuttings to sort out.
19. We have also received a suggestion that DPC purchase a quantity of mixed wild flower seeds and spread these over the full width of the verges in early spring. This would only be worthwhile if we removed the thuggish plants and trimmed the unmown areas the previous autumn.
20. We would need additional volunteers in order to put all of these good ideas into practice, but hope these will be forthcoming, either on a regular or a one-off basis. I will be in touch!

Richard Neale

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