



DECISION TITLE: Changes to the Parks, Trees and Open Spaces service within the Amey contract following the 2015/16 budget
Councillor Elsey, Cabinet Member for Digital, Waste and Street Scene
May 2015
Deadline date: June 2015

Cabinet portfolio holder:	Councillor Elsey, Cabinet Member for Digital, Waste and Street Scene
Responsible Director:	John Harrison, Corporate Director Resources
Is this a Key Decision?	YES If yes has it been included on the Forward Plan: Yes Unique Key decision Reference from Forward Plan: Key/26JUN15/03
Is this decision eligible for call-in?	YES
Does this Public report have any annex that contains exempt information?	NO
Is this a project and if so has it been registered on Verto?	NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet Member is recommended to:

- a) Confirm that grass cutting will move from the regime detailed in the CMDN MAR15/CMDN/29 decision taken on 25 March 2015 and titled Parks, Trees and Open Space budget reductions, to an alternative regime as set out in this report. This will result in areas subject to recent investigation, namely Sugar Way, Werrington, Gunthorpe, Hampton, Stanground, Central ward, Park Farm, Orton Goldhay and Paston, moving on to the 8 cut cycle. All other sites will now be reviewed to determine the appropriate number of cuts ready for 2016. This will exclude the 7 sites already designated as biodiversity areas where grass will only be cut once a year.
- b) Where further complaints are received from residents with regards to the grass cutting schedules, and it is causing significant concern, an officer will visit the individual sites. They will ascertain if the concerns raised are valid and what the correct grass cutting regime should be. Each area will be dealt with by exception and will take into account both the impact on residents and the environmental benefits. Each complaint will be subject to investigation to make sure it is a valid complaint before any alterations are made. Any cost incurred as a result of any change will be included within the £24,000 as per Annex 1.0.

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 This report is submitted to the Cabinet Member for Digital, Waste and Street Scene to approve the service changes following budget decisions in respect of the Amey contract and the delivery of the Parks Trees and Open space function.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 2.1 This report is for Cabinet Member for Digital, Waste and Street Scene to consider exercising delegated authority under paragraph 3.4.6 of Part 3 of the constitution in accordance with the terms of their portfolio at paragraph (d).

3. TIMESCALE

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If Yes, date for relevant Cabinet Meeting	N/A
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4. DETAILS OF DECISION REQUIRED

- 4.2 This Cabinet Member Decision Notice proposes that the Cabinet Member for Digital, Waste and Street Scene approves the changes to the Amey contract as set out in this report. Subject to approval by the cabinet member, the contract will be varied to reflect the changes.
- 4.3 The decision taken on 25 March 2015 varied the grass cutting regime from 10 cuts per year to 8 cuts per year City wide, with additional open space areas being identified and

moved to 3 cuts per year and certain areas cut once per year. Following a number of resident complaints with the majority namely in Sugar Way, Werrington, Gunthorpe, Hampton, Stanground, Central ward, Park Farm, Orton Goldhay and Paston. It is proposed to move all areas where residents and Councillors have expressed concern and consider the longer grass has caused detriment, to be put on the 8 cut regime with immediate effect.

Incorporation of the following sites: -

- Staverton Road Werrington
- Open Space area behind Rowland Court Werrington
- The Pastures Werrington
- Howlands Werrington
- Mountsteven Avenue recreation ground
- Gladstone Park
- Wharf Road Fletton
- Fletton recreation ground
- Belsize recreation ground
- Derby Drive Eastfield
- Sunningdale Orton Waterville
- Chisenhale Orton Waterville
- Elstone Green Orton Waterville
- Ridgeway Stanground
- Coneygree Road Stanground
- Recreation ground behind Heltwait school
- Sugar Way all areas of grass near to residents properties
- Woodston recreation ground
- Kilham Orton Goldhay
- Tirington Park
- Orton Brimbles and Wistow area (Earlswood)
- Celta Road
- Fieldfare Drive Stanground
- Warwick Road Walton
- All Grassed sponsored roundabouts
- Northborough grass verges
- Area to the left of Lincoln road as you enter Glinton.

Any other areas that are reported by residents as causing significant issues and complaint, will be dealt with by exception, an officer will visit the site to ascertain if their concerns raised are valid before making any changes to the grass cutting cycle. Each complaint will be subject to investigation to make sure it is a valid complaint before any alterations are made.

The above areas will then be subject to a full review as with all other areas of open space at the end of the summer ready for 2016. If there are any further changes proposed they will be subject to a further CMDN. Consultation with Natural England will be undertaken to ensure this review enables us to best manage our grass lands to benefit biodiversity, reduce costs and manage public perception.

- 4.4 It is recognised that a one size fits all approach cannot be adopted, all other areas that have moved to a 3 or one cut will be reviewed to determine an appropriate cutting regime.
- 4.5 Residents felt that areas in front of their homes and in recreational spaces should not be left to grow long and unmaintained between cuts. The complainants raised matters such as an increase in anti-social behaviour which included resident reports of an increase in

graffiti, dog fouling and litter, due to the grass being left long giving the perception of an unkempt area.

Particular concerns included the following:

That local children do not have amenity spaces for play which has resulted in them having to use other areas that may not be as safe, visible or in an appropriate location.

Dog fouling left due to the long grass could pose health risks to children who play in these areas and also other residents who may wish to walk within this area. The long grass would also inhibit the visual inspection for sharp objects and other hazards that may have been discarded such as broken glass, etc. amongst the areas where children play.

Dog walkers have expressed concerns regarding the long grass as it provides environments for ticks to breed, which can be both dangerous to animals and humans through Limes disease.

Health concerns have been raised with regards increased hay fever and that the reduced amount of amenity space has a detrimental effect on residents' social and mental wellbeing. Residents felt 'Health issues of many types: mental, physical, general wellbeing are at risk by these measures. It is not acceptable.'

Finally, residents also stated that grass cutting of public open spaces should be provided for by the Council.

- 4.6 The above changes in grass cutting will not impact the 7 areas already designated as Biodiversity. We will continue to cut these once per year and monitor them for increased wildlife and flowers. Regeneration will also be recognised and areas under trees or in low shade that do not need to be cut will be left.
- 4.7 The capital investment set aside for the grass cutting changes, is still required to enable Amey to cut grass that is left longer City wide, the reduced cutting of highway verges and also to achieve the reduction in shrub cutting e.g. moving to bi-annual.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The change to the grass cutting regime has not been subject of separate consultation but is being proposed following direct feedback from residents and discussions with ward councillors in the affected areas.
- 5.2 The proposals contained in the report have been subject to consultation with Group Leaders and their comments and feedback are attached as per annex 1.0

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- 6.1 Applying this change to the Parks Trees and Open Space contract will reduce resident dissatisfaction and increase pride in the local area. It will also increase the number of recreational areas for play.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS & ANY RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 7.1 It is recommended that in order to respond to the issues and complaints made by residents, grass cutting will need to move to an 8 cut regime in areas of concern within the

City. The majority of complaints have been received from Wards that have greater areas of open space and open space areas in front of residential properties. Residents that have raised concerns have spoken to officers who explained why areas are being left longer between cuts. Many of the affected residents and ward councillors consider that this service cannot be subject to further savings.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 Do nothing - Maintaining the current frequency, this would result in further resident dissatisfaction and an increase in litter, dog fouling etc. in these areas.
- 8.2 It could be considered that areas having 3 cuts are moved to 4 cuts per year, offering an earlier cut during the growing season. This would still mean that areas close to residents' houses would be left to grow for longer between cuts and could still result in resident dissatisfaction and increased litter.

9. IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The increase in grass cutting will leave a £24,000 shortfall in the £242,000 saved from the Parks, Trees and Open Space budget.
- 9.2 Grass will still be cut less frequently and will be left to grow longer between cuts.
- 9.5 Financial
 - 9.5.1 The original saving for grass cutting reductions was £39,000. There will still be a saving of £15,000 through moving general amenity grass cutting from 10 cuts to 8. The proposal to implement the increase in grass cutting will leave a shortfall of £24,000 in the Park Trees and Open Space budget.

The shortfall of £24,000 will be found this year through performance penalties imposed on Amey, particularly around achievement of recycling rates. This money has previously been invested in recycling initiatives. However the Council has received a grant of £165,000 from CLG that will be used for this purpose. The savings as a result of these initiatives e.g. reduced landfill tax, will be sufficient for funding the shortfall from 2016/17 onwards

- 9.6 Legal
 - 9.6.1 The provision of parks and open spaces is not a statutory function, however the Local Government Act 1999, provides local authorities with the powers to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their communities. The provision of good quality parks and open spaces can make a huge contribution to all aspects of well-being. Whilst the Council has a statutory duty to cut grass for safety reasons, the majority of grass cutting is undertaken for amenity or aesthetic reasons and is therefore a discretionary service rather than a statutory duty. The change in the grass cutting regime proposed will not affect the statutory requirement to cut grass for safety reasons.
 - 9.6.2 The Environmental Protection Act 1990, as amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, imposes a duty on local authorities to keep specified land and public highways clear of litter and refuse so far as is practicable. A Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse is issued under section 89(7) of the 1990 Act. The Code defines standards of cleanliness and sets how quickly differing types of land should be returned to a set cleanliness standard. The increased cutting regime will make it easier for the cleansing

teams to ensure the full area is left to a grade A standard e.g. litter free. Currently some litter is being left behind as it is not visible amongst the long grass

10. DECLARATIONS / CONFLICTS OF INTEREST & DISPENSATIONS GRANTED

None.

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

MAR15/CMDN/29