

NOTICE OF MOTION	Date of Council Meeting: 17/07/24
	Mover: Councillor Baum-Dixon
	Seconder: Councillor Z Collingham
	Title of Motion: Grass Cutting and Green Spaces

Summary/Background:

The cutting of grass and maintenance of verges and public open spaces is a fundamental service provided by the Council.

Neglected and overgrown verges are a risk to public safety, obstructing motorists, limiting access for the disabled and reducing the scope for active travel.

Aside from designated parks, our community green spaces and common lands are vital public amenities. They provide areas for communities to walk dogs, to gather for picnics and games and to participate in informal sport and exercise, helping reduce social exclusion and tackle loneliness. Those attached to Local Authority and sheltered housing enhance the wellbeing of our most vulnerable residents, while well-kept cemeteries and memorials are vital in treating lost loved ones with dignity.

Effective maintenance of these areas is a public good, inspiring residents to take pride in their communities and improving the desirability of Rotherham, encouraging tourists to visit and businesses to invest. By contrast, poor maintenance risks public safety, takes away public amenities and encourages fly-tipping. It is hugely corrosive to the reputation of the Council and the good name of Rotherham Borough.

The Council is concerned that :

In 2024, there have been widespread and systemic issues in the delivery of this service, leading to complaints, concerns and frustrations that need to be taken seriously.

Certain areas have been deliberately disregarded from the outset and given over to rewilding projects. Whilst the benefits of rewilding are appreciated, the lack of local consultation or communication undermines public support and gives an appearance of an excuse for neglect.

Areas that remain to be cut are too often not being. Village focal points are left to deteriorate and public spaces become unusable. When maintenance is eventually

carried out, there are instances where it is incomplete or inadequate, with grass uncut around important signage and cuttings left behind, killing the grass beneath.

These are failures of the most basic kind that should not be accepted as satisfactory.

There has been no proactive communication with elected members or Neighbourhoods about the issues in the service, or any actions being taken to address them. This is poor partnership working and undermines residents' confidence in the Council's ability to plan and deliver the services they pay for.

We want to live in a Borough we are proud to call home and recognise the importance of maintaining our public spaces.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Acknowledge that the current situation is unacceptable.
2. Request that all Cabinet Members cascade the importance of proactive communication of service wide issues to Neighbourhoods and elected members.
3. Request that the Council's Cabinet consider additional capital funding if required to resolve issues identified in the service.
4. Request that the Improving Places Select Commission urgently considers:
 - a. A comprehensive public consultation on the maintenance of public areas across the borough.
 - b. A protocol for public consultation before rewilding areas.
 - c. A review of the effectiveness of zonal working and maintenance.
 - d. Equipment needs within the service.
 - e. Training needs within the service.
 - f. Premises, in particular issues with storing equipment undermining service delivery.
 - g. Sickness days lost per FTE within the service and opportunities to reduce this over time.
 - h. Engagement with landowners, parish and town councils, and statutory bodies to improve the coordination and cost-effectiveness of green space maintenance.
 - i. A review of any unclaimed land or land with unknown ownership to identify the owners and ensure effective maintenance.
 - j. Opportunities to engage community assistance in specific projects or empowering volunteers to participate in the maintenance of their local green spaces.