

### **Briefing Note for North Yorkshire Local Access Forum – UUR & Verge Cutting on A1(M) Local Access Routes.**

1. The County Council apologises for the lack of response on this issue. There have been some staff changes in the team, most notably with the Major Projects Manager, who dealt directly with this issue, has recently retired.
2. The Public Inquiry does not appear to make any requirement regarding the grass cutting of verges on the LAR.
3. The local Area Office (Area 1 Richmond) has received maps from both Highways England and a local representative of the BHS indicating verges linking bridleways where grass is to be cut. These two maps do not correspond with each other and some work has been done by the local Area team to align them and establish which verges require additional cutting. The local area team will be responding to the BHS direct. The Local Access Road has been classed as the A6055; in NYCC A and B road verges are cut on both sides in the rural area. This is a swathe cut of up to 2.4m wide twice per year, in years with excessive growth this could be increased to three times per year by exception. The County Council apologises that the rural grass cutting has been delayed along the LAR; however, cutting of the 2.4m swathe has commenced. Additionally, at the locations on the plans rationalised by the local Area team, which connect to the bridleway network, the council will cut the full verge width, from roadside to hedge and this is also planned to be carried out during July.
4. I will take this opportunity to summarise the County Council's current practice on the rural road verges countywide, which is considered to prioritise highway safety whilst having regard for biodiversity:
  - a. We do not use herbicide on the verges except to treat invasive species where they occur.
  - b. The network of C class and unclassified rural roads is in the region of 5,800km, one of the longest in the country. The verges along this length are not routinely cut at all, except at junction areas and visibility envelopes. Of the 1250km of rural A and B roads (only 22% of the rural road network), which routinely have a swathe of grass cut (where a verge exists), many of these have narrow verges with dry-stone walls and have never been cut.
  - c. Those verges alongside the remaining A and B road network have a swathe cut of 2.4 metres wide, in many places this still leaves a good verge width remaining for wildlife. Two cuts per year are required for safety reasons, the timing for which are planned for when the vegetation is about to become long enough to obscure visibility. The precise scheduling will vary by a few weeks each year depending on the rate of growth. This can mean a cut planned for May is occasionally deferred to June if growth is slow. Similarly a year of fast growth can bring forward the date of the cut and, in extreme cases, lead to us needing to do a third cut in the year, which we try to avoid as this increases our costs significantly. The Council has in the past engaged with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, in efforts to encourage wildlife where practical, but we discovered there was little more we could do that we were not already doing, without incurring additional expense.
  - d. Our statutory duty to maintain a safe network remains our first priority and this includes ensuring appropriate visibility for road users. Further, cutting a swathe of grass allows pedestrians and horse riders a safer place to walk and ride than in

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the road. In addition to upholding our statutory duty, where the locations of important species are identified to us, we are careful not to commence cutting operations until they have finished flowering; we have over a dozen such areas in the Skipton, Selby and Kirkby Misperton areas.

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