

Parks & Grounds Feedback on the Potential Four categories of work Identified by Grounds Maintenance Task Group

At a meeting in October 2025, the Grounds Maintenance Task Group met with the Head of Parks & Grounds and Housing Officers to consider what a new specification should include.

Recognising that it may not be financially sustainable to apply the current Harrogate Standard across the whole county, the Task Group chose to breakdown that Standard into four categories of work and to seek new costings for each of those categories as follows:

- i. Ground Maintenance Works - based on all of the information gathered, the Task Group identified a range of potential policy decision points (PDPs), and their preferred options for each of those PDPs, as detailed in paragraph 4.21 of the Review final report
- ii. Winter Maintenance i.e. gritting and snow clearance
- iii. Annual Investment Fund for tree planting and bulbs etc
- iv. Assisted Grounds Maintenance Works i.e. for individual properties where the tenant is unable to maintain their own garden

Developing a Cost Model

It was recognised early on that given the breadth of housing types and the spread of those properties across various locations in the county, it would not be possible for the Parks & Countryside Service to go out and measure all sites. Instead a cost model was developed from measuring work at a sample of nine sites across each of the three housing areas. A follow up desktop exercise used key data to identify proxy unit costs informed by the team's data collection, expertise and experience, then cross referenced that with industry standards. Those nine sites were:

<u>Harrogate</u>	<u>Selby</u>	<u>Richmond</u>
Dene Park, Harrogate	Apple & Cherry Tree Walk, Tadcaster	Noel's Court, Catterick
Alder Road, Harrogate	Ash Tree Walk & Windmill Rise, Tadcaster	Woodside, Leyburn
Albany Avenue, Harrogate	Wilfred's Close & Crescent, Brayton	St. Edmunds Close, Brompton-on-Swale
(464 properties)	(160 properties)	(94 properties)

A series of measurements for the following were taken across the nine sites above and collated into a spreadsheet:

- Grass cutting metres²
- Hedging linear metres (the higher the hedge the more costly to manage)
- Footpaths linear metres
- Shrubs/plants metres²
- Weed control/management

Data was also gathered on the following, and cross referenced with SPON'S (Standard Price Other Non-Specific) - a cost estimate tool used in the landscaping/construction industry used to help identify typical costs for labour, machinery and materials for a range of services, and the equipment used e.g.

- Mechanical / hand tools and cutting width (e.g. '3 gang' ride on mower),
- Labour time / cost for tasks
- Leave or removal of arisings (e.g. grass and hedge clippings)
- Frequency of tasks, e.g. cyclical grass cutting, annual leaf fall

Consideration was also given to the following:

i. Benefits:

- Sample of sites from each of the three housing localities
- Measured in person by local teams
- Allows tailoring of frequency / specification to see £ impact
- Develops a cost 'per unit' (property)
- Provides basis for further work / expansion of model
- Additional services / ad-hoc work can be layered on top
- Precursor to further work to map and digitise the service

ii. Assumptions:

- Tree & Woodland services –added as a fixed cost
- Complex data sets with many variables i.e.:
 - Quality of historical records
 - Variable service levels in each locality
 - Range of machinery used in each locality (not yet harmonised)
 - Size of workforce
 - Styles of properties, distances to site, local environment.
- No service management software available to assess data
- Will be an iterative process over time, this is a first step

iii. Exclusions and Risks:

- Estimates as at Nov 2025, exposed to further inflation
- 'Assisted grounds maintenance' not calculated
- No regular tree survey data available in Selby or Richmond
- Limited corporate data or mapping available of outdoor spaces
- Sample size can be skewed by outliers

Noting the assumptions and risks referenced above, the cost model produced a baseline figure for the average cost per property which was less than the current cost per property in Harrogate of £148.80, as originally presented to the Task Group (see paragraph 3.4 of the review final report).

The cost model used showed that based on the four categories identified by the Task Group and the specific policy decision points identified for Category (i) – Ground Maintenance Works, the annual cost implication of applying the Harrogate Model would be as follows:

Projected cost base of £1,061k

Average cost per property £125

Cost for pro-active tree care £128k (fixed cost)

Working annual total **£1.189m***

*The above excludes variable extras i.e. winter gritting, one off jobs and an annual investment fund

Tree Care

Good data was available for the Harrogate area from the legacy Borough Council, but the data for Richmond and Selby was very limited. In Harrogate the majority of tree works was undertaken by an in-house tree surgery team, with only exceptional items being undertaken by a Framework Contractor. There was also a well-established pro-active survey of trees based on risk in the Harrogate locality.

For the Richmond and Selby areas, only reactive works were undertaken by the legacy District Councils. There were no charges for contract management which will need addressing, and no pro-active care. Further info and advice can be viewed at: trees@northyorks.gov.uk

Category (i) – Grounds Maintenance Works

PDP 1 – Hedge Maintenance:

- Harrogate legacy standard is up to 2 cuts pa
- Task Group suggested the frequency of hedge maintenance should be a minimum of once a year (Option c), with the addition of a responsive service for urgent cases e.g. entrances, rapid growth (Option b)
- For costing purposes, applied formula of 1.3 cuts in calculations
- Assumed hedges 2m, max height 4m
- Factored in the removal of clippings / arisings
- Model is sensitive to changes due to labour costs

PDP 2 – Weed and Moss Control:

- Task Group suggested the current Harrogate approach should be maintained of twice yearly applications of glyphosate chemical control (Option a).
- They also suggested the removal of sprayed weeds (Option f). The cost of weed removal was **not** included in the cost model.
- Chemical control will result in full eradication of growth, so must be applied with care
- Modern 'No-mix' product applied via a lance preventing drift onto surrounding area
- All staff fully trained with spray certificates and PPE
- Relatively modest cost compared to other elements
- Moss control within grass not included in model.
- 'Edging-off' of grassed areas alongside paths included in cost model.

The Task Group also requested feedback on the 'eco-friendly' weed removal pilot being undertaken in the Skipton area. However the pilot had yet to be fully progressed and therefore there was insufficient data feedback available.

PDP 3 – Leaf Clearance:

- Costings based on current approach i.e. removal of leaf fall each autumn (around November)
- Task Group suggested removal once a year (Option a) and reactive clearance where necessary (Option d)
- For costing purposes, applied formula of 1.3 collections in calculations

In response to the Task Group's queries around the potential provision of compost heaps on social housing estates for leaf fall to produce leaf mould, there are a number of things to consider e.g.:

- Smell
- Fire hazard (recent example in Harrogate)
- Visual appearance
- Unintended uses e.g. the addition of food scraps and other types of waste that could attract vermin.

PDP 4 – Grass Cutting Frequency:

- Harrogate standard is 14 cuts per year (mid Mar –mid Oct)
- Task Group suggested the Policy should state a minimum of 10 cuts per year
- Clippings left where they fall
- Paths / hard surfaces cleared with blower / sweeping
- For costing purposes, applied formula of 14 cuts per year (April – end Oct)
- Cost modelling is sensitive to changes due to labour / machinery

PDP 5 – Resident Communication:

As part of developing a new SLA for Housing, Parks and Countryside can support the Task Group's preference to publish grounds maintenance schedules online on the council's website, and to include them in tenant newsletters, and in the welcome pack for new tenants (Options b & c).

PDP 6 – Biodiversity and Wildflowers:

There are opportunities for delivering this in the right places e.g. around tree bases (under the canopy of trees is ideal) and quieter corners at the edge of open spaces adjacent to natural areas. However, there are a number of things to consider e.g.:

- Must look purposeful and well managed, rather than 'unloved'
- Larger machinery required for cut
- Signage and increased communication with tenants to secure buy-in

The preparation of wildflower spaces involves chemical controls, and those spaces still require careful maintenance. Consideration should also be given to their year-round appearance.

PDP 7 – Community Involvement:

This can be resource intensive and require planning. There have been recent successful examples of community clear ups in Selby (arising from the site visit undertaken in support of this review). To be successful it requires joint working with staff, councillors and tenants preferably building on existing planned work to undertake:

- Hedge trimming
- Pruning
- Autumn tidy up / litter picking
- Edging and weeding of paths / shrub beds

There are possible funding streams that could be accessed to enable more resident-led projects but there would be some cost to the council for administering/supporting them. The one-off costs per project would be different in each case and therefore were not included in the cost model.

Category (ii) – Winter Maintenance

Based on a prioritised list of properties across all three localities provided by Housing Services. This included:

- Community centres
- Hostels
- Sheltered housing schemes
- Common rooms

The Task Group requested costings for two options – winter gritting and provision of grit boxes.

The sites were measured up and costed 'per treatment' at £0.25 per m2. The cost for re-filling grit boxes would be £70 per grit box.

Locality	Area m2	Gritting Cost per treatment £	No. grit boxes	Cost per refill @ £70 per grit box £
Selby	2,475	619	12	840
Richmond	3,567	892	16	1,120
Harrogate	3,575	894	5	350
Totals		2,405	33	2,310

The current cost of additional grit is £44 per ton (not included in the costs above). The annual cost for additional grit and the refilling of grit boxes is subject to the number of refills required, which would be dependent on weather conditions.

Category iii – Annual Investment Fund

Investment fund to enhance environmental quality.

A detailed programme could be developed, with indicative costs - The items below are illustrative costs:

Item	Cost	£ Illustrative budget
Bulbs planted through grass and backfilled. 25 bulbs per m2	£1,675 per 100m2	£ 15,000 [895m2]
Standard tree – single stem, 8-10cm girth, height 2.5-3.0m. Includes tree selection, supply, sundries, labour and aftercare / watering for first 3 years	£800 per tree	£ 20,000 [25 trees]
Wildflower meadow i.e. Removal of topsoil and replace bed with roll of wildflower turf	£5,000 per 100m2	£ 15,000 [300m2]
Proposed Annual Investment Fund		£ 50,000

Category iv – Assisted Maintenance

It was not possible to review the data due to key staff leaving NYC since October 2025.

To understand the number of properties recharged to Housing since LGR?

The recharge rate had risen since LGR in line with inflation.

There may be future opportunities for Parks & Countryside to undertake other re-chargeable activities whilst on-site. This would be subject to having the appropriate labour and other resources.

Future Service Development

Parks & Grounds and the council's Countryside Access Service had recently merged to form the new Parks & Countryside Service creating opportunities for synergies across areas of work. new service management software and to improve performance through closer monitoring of activity.