



Winchester Council August 2021



Sun Hill

Meetings with the Developers continue. The excellent comments regarding biodiversity have been well received and we are assured there will be improvements. Most recent discussion are around the open space, maintenance costs after the land is handed over are a source of concern, and the extra number of houses paying Council tax may not quickly be able to support those costs.

Concern has also been raised on the nature of leases/sales of plots in the commercial area. Ideally, we would like to see a range of plots where new businesses can start up, creating new jobs and bringing worthwhile employment and economic benefits to the town. We would like these new businesses to suit the future economic strategy for the district, creative industries, green technology, and the knowledge economy.

Verges

The reduction in the cutting frequency of grass along verges and in other green areas has had approval from many, but also complaints.

The reduction in the frequency of cutting verges has several advantages, reducing cuts saves money, but more importantly helps to create a far better habitat for wildlife. Taken overall, road verges in the UK amount to some 279,900 hectares or about 1.2% of the total land area. (More than is owned by the National Trust.) More importantly, verges form green corridors connecting separate habitats. Linking separate habitats greatly increases the overall value of such areas. Grass cutting can be managed to encourage a wider diversity of wildflowers, removing grass cuttings reduces soil fertility in time, allowing wildflowers to compete against the more vigorous grasses. 'Cut and collect' is slightly more expensive than ordinary cutting, but the cost is offset by the reduced cuts.

The two pilot studies have been run by WCC in Alresford and Badger Farm have highlighted some of the problems. (Pilot studies generally do!) Care has to be taken to maintain correct sight lines at road junctions and to avoid obscuring road signs. It is also apparent that communication from the city to local parishes needs to be improved, as town and parish clerks have had to answer complaints by residents, without being well enough informed by the WCC.

The new cutting regime suffered from communication breakdown between Council officers and contractors. This resulted in no cuts in the period of greatest growth which caused footpaths to become difficult to use and some sight lines to be a challenge. The subsequent discussion with officers did prove very useful however in gaining acceptance that parishes should be advised, as routine, of the maps and schedules for all the areas cut by Winchester City Council. This will make it a great deal easier to plan lengthsman work plans. There is no reason, that we could see, why this should not be in the public domain and hopefully this information can be shown on the website. Grass cutting programmes need to respond to the vagaries of British weather and there has to be some flexibility. This summer has been a case in point, hot periods followed by heavy rain, lead to very rapid plant growth. Heavy rain makes mowing impossible. By contrast long hot spells slow growth considerably.

It is pity that the views on the wildflower verges, of the other residents of the area, the small mammals, insects and birds cannot be ascertained. We suspect they would be much in favour!

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