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## **GRASS: CUT OR NOT TO CUT**

Grass cutting of highway verges and amenity areas such as green spaces, children's play areas and parks always sparks debate within communities. People either want things to be cut and appear tidy or they want it left for wildlife to thrive.

Pembrokeshire County Council therefore has a difficult balance to strike as some cutting is essential for safety purposes, yet it is very keen to see wildlife thrive wherever possible.

Contrary to popular belief many highway verges are only cut once each year, commencing at the beginning of July and lasting six to eight weeks with the only extra being the more limited safety cuts.

But does the cut have to take place at all? The Council can face problems if no cut takes place including:

- damage to the road and drainage from saplings and woody weeds
- hazards from overgrown or collapsed vegetation leading to narrowing the useable width for cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders (in particular); slippery surfaces, and localised flooding. Verge growth may cause damage to vehicles or hide hazards (for example large stones, roadside ditches).

The County Council positively supports 'active travel'. As noted above, some cutting back of verges improves safety for pedestrians and cyclists as overgrown vegetation can push people further out into the road to avoid vegetation such as brambles and stinging nettles.

In order for road surfacing to take place it is important that this is done after a cut so that the full width of the road can be resurfaced. The single cut also enables drainage ditches to be properly maintained.

Before and after the single main cut, safety cuts are carried out at junctions and other locations where growth affects visibility for road users.

These safety cuts commenced earlier this week - on 12<sup>th</sup> May - and generally do not include hedges which are maintained by landowners.

More details of the Council's approach to highway verge mowing can be found on the Council's website:

<https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/road-maintenance/highway-verge-mowing>

Confusion can arise because some major roads in Pembrokeshire are trunk roads under the control of Welsh Government, managed on its behalf by the South Wales Trunk Roads Agency (SWTRA).

Any queries about trunk road maintenance should be addressed to SWTRA at: <https://traffic.wales/south-wales-trunk-road-agent-swtra>

Cris Tomos, the Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, Public Protection and Welsh Language, explained: "The Authority works as part of the Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership which recognises that nature has an important part to play in our quality of life.

"This has included the establishment of Roadside Nature Reserves in some areas where alternative approaches are taken to encourage wildlife and protect scarce species."

If groups would like to discuss potential changes to the management of amenity areas in their communities, or different options for managing road verges in their areas, they can contact: [biodiversity@pembrokeshire.gov.uk](mailto:biodiversity@pembrokeshire.gov.uk) to start a conversation.

Phil Baker, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Licensing and Major Events said: "We are keen to encourage wildlife wherever we can but it is also important safety is maintained.

"If there are areas that community groups feel could be managed differently, then we would very much welcome a dialogue. An excellent local example is the management of the London Road cemetery in Pembroke Dock which has areas where wildlife thrives."

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