

Mr Mark Corner
Chair - Friends of the Dales
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Barrie Mason
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Your ref:

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Date: 22 February 2018

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Dear Mr Corner,

RE: 2018 cutting dates for verges

Thank you for your letter dated the 29 January 2018.

I ought to begin by confirming that most highway verges do not receive any grass cutting by the highway authority. Our actions are limited to the verges alongside main roads and junction areas and visibility splays on minor roads. For these areas we need to carry out two cuts a year for safety reasons, the timing of these cuts coinciding with the point at which the vegetation is about to become long enough to obscure visibility. The timing of these cuts will vary by a few weeks each year depending on the rate of growth which 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 our actions and, in extreme cases, lead to us needing to do an additional cut. The area covered by the Yorkshire Dales National Park covers two of our local highway delivery areas and I have sought to provide feedback below on our activities last year.

According to records kept at the Skipton Area Office the first cut commenced 5 June and finished 21 June 2017 and the second cut commenced 18 September and finished 7 October 2017. The first cut had been programmed to start on 29 May but was delayed by staff sickness and we had requested the second cut to start early September but this was subsequently delayed by bad weather.

From experience of trials, a few years ago, where we were asked to complete the first cut in May, we found that there was hardly any growth to cut in May and we were criticised for cutting when spring flowers were still in bloom. It also led to further problems later on as we had to bring the second cut forward to mid-July as the grass was getting dangerously long. According to records kept at the Richmond Area Office the first cut commenced 30 May and was completed 15 June 2017 and the second cut commenced 24 July and was completed 11 August 2017.

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I am advised that Richmond Area Office have previously attended meetings with representatives from the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Matthew Millington (Biodiversity Officer NYCC) and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. One of the purposes of the meeting was to see if NYCC may manage to alter their cutting regime / times to suit the natural environment. The area in the YDNP is generally higher ground which means that the grass does not actually get growing until later in the season and therefore to do an early cut would have been both pointless and costly. Cutting of the higher ground in the Richmondshire area of the Dales would have been towards the end of the above dates as we tend to cut low ground first where it grows much more quickly.

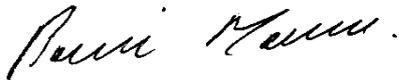
The general cut width on "A" and "B" roads is 2.4 metres which in many places still leaves a good verge width untouched. In addition many of our rural roads do have narrow verges with dry-stone walls and historically these have not been cut back because of the danger of falling stones damage and potential claims.

Highway safety is of paramount importance as we need to ensure that the road user can use the network safely.

Clearly our aspiration and commitment is to time our cuts for the May and July-September periods but if there are safety issues then we must act to deal with them. In such circumstances I'm afraid that cutting the grass is the only realistic option.

I hope that this response has clarified our approach. If you feel a meeting would still be useful please let me know and I will ask representatives from the local teams to attend.

Yours sincerely



BARRIE MASON
Assistant Director
Highways and Transportation