

Maintaining public open spaces

Grass cutting

The majority of our grass cutting operations are carried out between March and October each year, depending on the weather and ground conditions.

Who is responsible

Cornwall Council is responsible for the maintenance and management of council owned land. This ranges from footpaths, playgrounds, communal areas, shrub and flower beds, grassed areas, verges, and so on.

Across Cornwall there are currently 855 amenity sites totalling 416 hectares. Of those, 540 sites are public open spaces (parks, recreation and sports facilities) and 142 are play facilities.

Cormac's Environment Service cut and maintain these areas in line with the council's environment service standards, to make sure they provide an appropriate level of amenity within defined urban areas and are safe and free from obstructions.

Amenity and open spaces

Over the **spring and autumn**, on average the grass is cut every **four weeks**.

During the **summer, this can be every six weeks**, particularly during long periods of dry weather, or after the grass has set seed and loses its vigour.

Over the **winter cutting is usually not necessary**. Grass growth slows and sometimes stops over winter due to the low temperatures and mowing is not advisable, particularly when the ground is very soft and sometimes frozen.

During prolonged periods of wet weather, mowing operations will be suspended because this can damage the turf and compact the soil. In these conditions we will postpone mowing to another day.

As well as the programmed cutting, we also undertake reactive cutting where inspections or reports indicate safety or access issues.

Urban verges

The cutting of urban verges has been reviewed this year to support biodiversity improvements. This means we will cut verges in **urban areas** a little later in the season to allow nature to flourish. It doesn't mean that we won't continue to programme and prioritise any additional cuts in areas where growth is identified as a potential hazard.

How we plan our works

To help us to establish the maintenance standards we look at how each site is used. We do this for:

- Play grounds
- Formal parks and gardens
- Outdoor sports facilities
- Public open spaces
- Recreational spaces
- Urban amenity spaces
- Cemeteries
- Closed cemeteries and churchyards
- Country parks

This then determines the maintenance programme and standards we need to meet.

Grass clippings

Grass clippings unfortunately can't be removed when amenity grass is cut, due to the sheer volume. However, we supply our teams with blowers to keep footpaths clear of mown grass.

Making space for nature

Cornwall Council's approach to making space for nature is changing the way we manage some sites. While will continue to maintain areas for sports, play and recreation, we will also leave spaces to increase habitats and biodiversity.

Where wildflowers are flourishing, an early March cut to 'top' the grass is scheduled. With a second cut following after the native flora has flowered and set seed. This is usually in late summer, depending on the species and growing season.

As Cornwall Council trials new techniques our regime of inspections and assessments will be regularly reviewed and adapted in collaboration with them. This will enable us to continue to respond to their 'Environmental Growth Strategy' and call to create the space and conditions for more abundant, productive and healthier habitats.

Working with our local communities

Our environment teams work closely with a number of friends and volunteer groups in some areas, to keep our parks and facilities in good condition so that everyone can enjoy them.

This is helping to add value to the maintenance of Cornwall's local green spaces and benefits the wider health and wellbeing of our local communities.

Get in touch

We have a long-established culture of working together - or area-based working - across public services, with partners, with communities, and with individuals.

Our delivery of environmental services combined with years of experience operating at a local level has seen us adopt a wide-ranging collaborative approach to our work.

If you wish to enhance the level of service currently provided in your area to meet local needs and priorities, we would be happy to work with you to tailor our services. We also provide maintenance and landscaping services to many schools and private businesses.

We are always on hand to provide advice and guidance to enable a seamless transfer of environmental maintenance responsibilities.

You can get in touch by emailing us at: customerrelations@cormacltd.co.uk

Report it

If you have a query in relation to an overgrown area of land or footpath, please report it online on the Cornwall Council website:

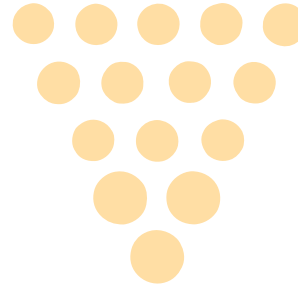
<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/reportroad>

But please do not use this for grass cutting requests. Please email us at the address above.

And finally...

If there is an issue which is a threat to public safety, please telephone **0300 1234 222** (24 hour service) giving details of the location.





Rural verge maintenance

Cutting operations start in May and run through to October each year. Cornwall Council's Highway Maintenance Manual sets out how Cormac delivers this service.

Who is responsible

As the highway authority, Cornwall Council is responsible for the management of growth from the highway verge (excluding the A30 and A38 Trunk Roads, which are the responsibility of Highways England).

Growth into the highway from features such as Cornish hedges or trees on property boundaries is the responsibility of the adjacent land owner.

If growth is causing a safety concern the Council has the power to serve notice on the land owner if an informal approach is not successful. In the event it is deemed a hazard, then the council has the right to remove the growth without notice.

What we cut

There are 2672 km (nearly 1660 miles) of rural roadside cutting routes that receive treatment, with the overriding objective being to keep the roads safe for users.

In order to maintain safety for road users, we typically cut:

- Visibility splays and approaches to highway junctions
- Approaches to warning signs and hazard markers
- The inside of some tight bends
- Verges with high pedestrian usage

Any additional cuts are dependent on the extent of seasonal growth and where inspections identify safety is being compromised.

When we cut and how often

The timing of the cuts are planned to help protect the wildflowers on the verge wherever possible.

There is increasing demand for Councils to manage their land to benefit flora and fauna. As a result of this, and because of concerns from residents, a comprehensive review of the Council's cutting frequencies has recently been carried out.

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More information about Verge Maintenance

More about Making Space for Nature

The review has resulted in some changes, namely:

- A **Safety Cut** will be carried out in the **spring to early summer** (May -July) to reduce growth obstructing visibility at junctions and signs or verges with high pedestrian usage. For example, instead of cutting along the whole corridor, we will only cut the optimal areas needed for visibility and safety.
- In the **autumn** we carry out a **Serviceability Cut** to meet local requirements, sustainability and maintain or improve the assets. This means cutting more of the highway corridor and will usually include a one metre 'swathe' cut to help reduce verge encroachment. Again, these cuts will be minimised, where appropriate, to reduce the impact on the natural environment.

Cormac works with the Council and its supporting services (including litter collection and sweeping etc.) to coordinate works where possible. For instance, where road closures are required for cutting, minimising disruption to road users.

The importance of verges

Verges are important for a number of reasons.

Depending on their location, they perform a range of functions, for example:

- Providing a safe place for pedestrians away from the carriageway
- Preventing flooding of the road or surrounding areas, where they contain roadside drainage features e.g. drainage ditches
- Screening the road or traffic from residential areas or sensitive landscapes
- Providing habitats which support wildlife and biodiversity
- Preserving historic features such as milestones and waymarkers

Additional considerations

Cornwall has some of the most exceptional scenery in the UK, and our roadside verges play a part in this.

The Council, in collaboration with the Cornwall Wildlife Trust has identified sites requiring special treatment due to their ecological importance, which includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

These areas are recorded and mapped alongside known Orchid colonies and such like to enable treatment to be modified, where it is appropriate to do so. Equally, invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed is also mapped to avoid cutting.

Cormac have an established regime of inspection, assessment and monitoring and will continue to work with the Council to respond to its ambitions to address climate change. This will include reviewing areas to identify whether non-mechanical or different operational methods can be used to reduce CO2 emissions from cutting, transporting and treatment.

How you can help

Avoid driving on verges. This kills plants and damages the soil structure.

Although it might seem like a public-spirited thing to do, please don't plant bulbs or other cultivated plants on verges - save them for your garden.

Report an issue

You can report an issue with overgrown hedges or overgrown or fallen trees in the highway on the Cornwall Council website:

<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/reportroad>

Please do not use this for grass cutting requests.

And finally...

If there is an issue which is a threat to public safety, please telephone **0300 1234 222** (24 hour service) giving details of the location.

If you suspect an instance of Ash Dieback disease you can check whether there have been any other incidences in your area by visiting the Forestry Commission website:

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/chalaramap>

Please **only** report diseased ash trees to Cornwall Council where the land they are growing on is owned by the Council; where they pose a threat to the highway, or to users of land or building within the control of Cornwall Council using the online reporting system.