

Grass Verge and Community Funded Street Tree Planting Policies

This document sets out Sheffield City Council's policies for the following:

- 1) Rural Road and Dual Carriageway Verge Cutting (existing policy and contract provision with Amey)
- 2) Suburban Grass Verge Cutting (existing policy and contract provision with Amey)
- 3) Suburban Wildflower Verges
- 4) Resident led Verge Protection Measures
- 5) Council led Verge Protection Measures
- 6) Community Funded Street Trees

1: Rural Road and Dual Carriageway Verge Cutting

- 1.1 The Council's published policy for management of highway grassed verges in rural areas and busy dual carriageways is covered by the 2017 Leader's Decision as part of a suite of Street Scene related savings. The 2017 Leader's decision is clear that verges which are directly outside people's homes should **not** be included in this change.

(<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?Id=1887>)

This new policy document does not seek to change these existing contract requirements. In the further sections of this policy document, alternative localised solutions are offered, based on the community needs.

- 1.2 Rural verges and some grassed areas along Dual Carriageway areas are cut on a single annual cycle. Approximately 20% of all grassed verges on the public highway in Sheffield (circa 560,000m²) are managed on this basis.
- 1.3 Sight lines and visibility splays around junctions, directional signage and safety features such as chevron arrows and bollards are cut more frequently to ensure they are not impeded by longer vegetation.
- 1.4 Arisings (clippings) from cutting the grass in these areas are left in situ to naturally mulch down.
- 1.5 Species such as Yellow Rattle which can act as a natural suppressant to the grass sward are sown in selected areas to help the establishment of wildflowers.

2. Suburban Grass Verge Cutting

- 2.1 Grass verges on typical streets are cut to keep the grass within set tolerances to ensure they are an appropriate length to ensure the public highway and adjacent footpaths are useable safely.

Again this new policy document does not seek to change these existing contract requirements. In the further sections of this policy document, alternative localised solutions are offered, based on the community needs

- 2.2 Achieving these tolerances means grass verges outside people's homes on typical suburban streets are attended approximately every 4-6 weeks.
- 2.3 Indicative schedules for grass cutting are published on the Council's website for residents to be able to check whether their street is due for cutting on a particular week.
- 2.4 Approximately 75% of grass verges on the on the public highway in Sheffield (circa 2.1 million square metres) are managed on this basis.
- 2.5 Arisings (clippings) from cutting the grass in these areas are left in situ to naturally mulch down.
- 2.6 Residents or businesses wishing to cut verges outside their own homes to a higher standard than the Council's baseline service provision can do so under Section 142 of the Highways Act.
- 2.7 Between 2000 and 2010, Sheffield City Council and community groups planted around 1 million daffodil bulbs per year. There are vast areas of daffodils on the highway network, especially on suburban streets.
- 2.8 Areas of highway grassed verge containing daffodils or other spring-flowering bulbs are not cut until the flowers have died back and the nutrient has returned into the bulb to ensure flowering continues for the following year.
- 2.9 These areas of bulbs may be left as "islands" within larger grassed verges, or the entire verge may be left uncut dependant upon the constraints of the individual site.

3. Suburban Wildflower Verges:

- 3.1 Section 142 of the Highways Act 1980 permits licensing of areas of grass verge directly outside of homes for residents to maintain the area on a self-managed basis.
- 3.2 Current examples involve residents cutting the grass themselves to a high amenity standard (as per 2.6) and has extended to residents placing barrel planters with decorative bedding plants to prevent antisocial parking.
- 3.3 Although general maintenance of such highway areas is easily licensed, the complication arises when cultivating or planting physically into highway verges as the residents then legally have to take on insurance liability and demonstrate sufficient public liability cover should someone be injured.
- 3.4 This kind of insurance is simply not available to residents who are not qualified highway maintenance professionals or running a similar formal society or group with public liability insurance (for example an allotments group).
- 3.5 Due to many decades of “cut and leave” grass cutting where the arisings have been left to naturally biodegrade, highway grass verges are often very nutrient rich in Nitrogen, meaning that they are exceptionally difficult to establish wildflowers into.
- 3.6 Wildflowers require significant degradation of the soil quality as they only thrive in very poor-quality soils. The Council does not support the deliberate stripping of soil or use of pesticides such as glyphosate in residential streets.
- 3.7 A public consultation held in 2021 **67.48%** of all respondents felt that there should be more wild verges across the city.
- 3.8 Local Area Committees or Elected Members can fund wildflower verges in locations agreed with Highways Maintenance Division to be appropriate from a safety and amenity perspective - which will be installed our highway maintenance contractor by Amey.
- 3.9 Verges are not transitioned to wildflower on a “piecemeal” basis, therefore any areas proposed for wildflower verges need to be cohesive swathes of grass

that have resident, LAC and highways backing.

- 3.10 A variety of input levels for wildflower areas have been devised for Local Area Committees and Elected Members to enable a “sliding scale” of community engagement and involvement with wildflower projects on their street. **(See table below for indicative prices)**

Option 1	High flowering, colourful wildflower mix, good for pollinators	£28.69 per metre square
Option 2	Scarify ground and sow low flower content, low colour mix, with little improvement to biodiversity	£5.06 per metre square
Option 3	Overseed with Yellow Rattle	£4.25 per metre square
Option 4	Single Annual Cut and Collect Mowing Service	£4.51 per metre square

All prices subject to annual inflation / RPIX increases.

- 3.11 Yellow Rattle is the Council’s preferred option to be used as a grass suppressant in areas of high community involvement and interest to facilitate establishment of wildflower areas.
- 3.12 Resident scattered wildflower seed on areas subject to grass suppressant planting will not be policed by the Authority and will not be subject to Section 142 licensing conditions or liabilities as it would be impossible to determine whether the seed germinated naturally from windblown seed or from that spread from a packet.
- 3.13 Taking account of feedback received from the Wildlife Trust, residents will be actively encouraged to rake off and compost grass clippings at home to provide optimal conditions for the establishment of wildflowers.



Example site that has been subject to resident involvement during 2022 trials.

4. Resident Led Verge Protection Measures

- 4.1 There are many instances around the city where residents proactively place their own items on the verge to deter parking from encroaching onto highway verges.
- 4.2 The main items used are rocks, usually painted white and stakes pushed into the soil, again usually with a white tip or reflective tape such as the images below:



Examples of resident installed verge protection measures to prevent parking

- 4.3 Section 149 of the Highways Act 1980 enables the Council to write to residents and request removal whenever complaints are received, or a safety issue is highlighted by our routine highway cyclical safety inspection programme.
- 4.4 Also under Section 149 Highways Act, the Highway Authority can remove items with **immediate effect** if they constitute a danger and the thing in question ought to be removed without delay.

- 4.5 In instances when items are deposited on the highway and cause a “nuisance” i.e. are cause for complaint from residents and the Council, having investigated, deems them a nuisance – a letter will be sent to the nearest resident who deemed to have been most likely to have deployed the stones and ask that they be removed forthwith.
- 4.6 Residents deploying dangerous items on the highway will instead be pointed towards safer alternatives such as barrel planters, licensed by the Council’s Highway Regulations Team if appropriate for the location.
- 4.7 Residents will not be entitled to compensation, or the return of dangerous items such as stones, spikes or stakes which are removed from the highway. Such items are typically collected by street cleaning teams and returned to the depot site at Olive Grove Road to be recycled. In accordance with Section 149 of the Highways Act 1980, any proceeds from the disposal of these items may be used to defray the expenses of removing them and, if there are any, to apply any further balance of the proceeds for maintenance of the public highway.
- 4.8 Although the Council and Amey have the power under Section 149 the Highways Act 1980 to act when there is “nuisance” and “danger”, it is considered that this can clearly be applied with pragmatism when residents are managing and maintaining verges in a safe way.
- 4.9 Resident-led installations of verge protection measures when done safely and not overtly detracting from the visual amenity of the street scene will be tolerated.
- 4.10 Recognising both the environmental and visual amenity benefits that verges provide to neighbourhoods, a perceived loss of parking space, or being unable to park directly outside a specific address due to verge protection measures is not considered to pass the threshold for the Council to act to remove it.
- 4.11 “Fairy gardens” (see image below) and other such small-scale bedding plant or spring bulb plating around highway trees to prevent people parking too

close to trees and potentially damaging their root systems will be tolerated.



Example “Fairy Garden”

- 4.12 Barrel Planters, filled with decorative bedding plants or other floral decorations will be actively encouraged to protect verges from parking (whether funded by residents, Elected Members or Local Area Committees) subject to licensing and approval under Section 142 of Highways Act 1980 to ensure they are deployed on appropriate sites.



Example Barrel Planters placed by residents to prevent verge parking

5. Council Led Verge Protection Measures

- 5.1 The Council's default approach to reports of verge damage is a soil and seed repair, typically undertaken within 3 months of a complaint being received.
- 5.2 Consideration may be given to preventative parking measures at the worst of sites where the frequency of repairs become unsustainable. Measures which will be considered include:
- Bollards
 - Domed Concrete Bollards
 - Tree Planting

- Other more bespoke measures such as traffic regulation orders or enforceable lining schemes (i.e. double yellows or parking restrictions where funding is available).



Example of preventative tree planting



Example of Domed Concrete “Mushroom” bollards

- 5.3 Preventative measures are only considered where they will not have an adverse effect of displacing cars to the extent that they may block a street to the point that it is not accessible by emergency vehicles and gritters.
- 5.4 This policy does not affect Blue Badge holders meeting the Council’s criteria for provision of a disabled parking bay marked on the highway outside their home at <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/parking/request-disabled-parking-bay>
- 5.5 There are a number of streets across the city where preventative measures therefore cannot be applied safely, and residents may need to tolerate a poorer quality aesthetic of damaged or overrun verges in these instances.
- 5.6 Local Area Committees or Elected Members may recognise sites which they deem to require verge protection. Where sufficient funding can be identified for the installation of verge protection schemes, where safe, proportionate and appropriate to do so, this shall be facilitated via the Council’s New Works team.

(See table below for indicative prices)

Black and White or Plain Steel Bollard	Each	£594.60
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Green Oak Bollard with 100mm mowing strip	Each	£1492.47
Green Oak Bollard with 100mm mowing strip and reflective bandings	Each	£1732.28
Billy / Belinda Bollards (appearance of school children)	Each	£969.34
Tree (Verge Planted, Excluding ornamental guards or grilles)	Each	£1334.07
Galvanised Steel Pedestrian Guardrail Fence	Per Linear Metre	£152.37 plus utility search charges.
Concrete Domed Bollard	Each	TBC

All prices subject to annual inflation / RPIX increases.

- 5.7 For illegal vehicle crossings, where possible, the Council will actively engage with residents to formalise the construction through Highways Development Control and an appropriate contractor.



Example illegal driveway crossing

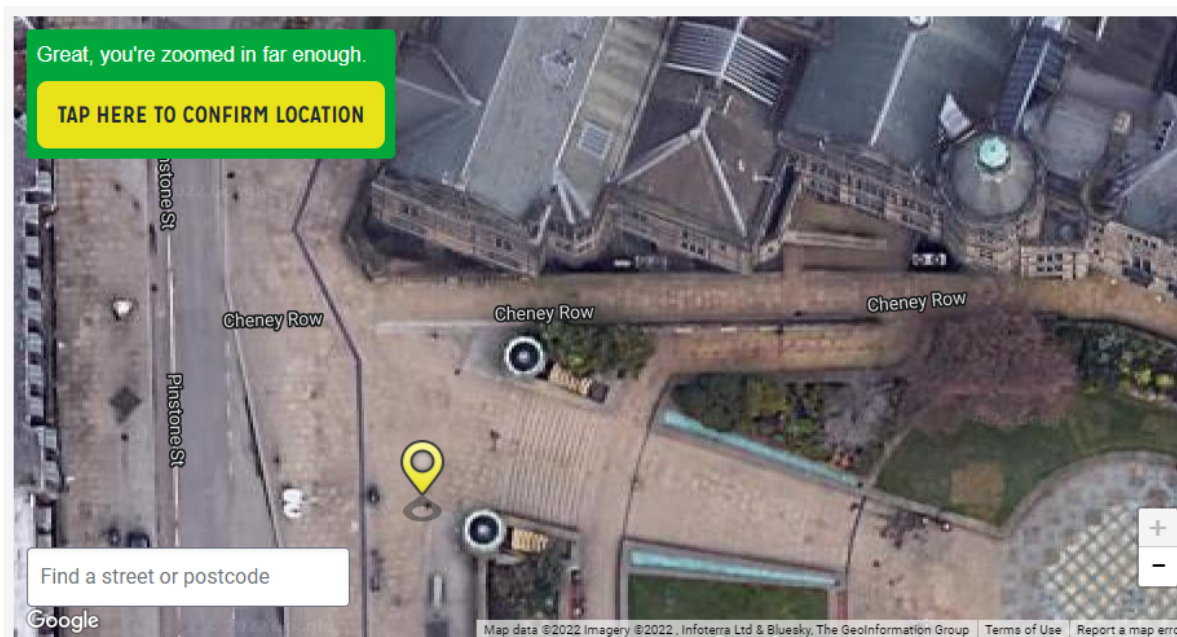
- 5.8 Wild flowers or “wilding” of areas of highway grassed verge subject to repeated vehicle overrun, especially by illegal off road motorcycles or quad bikes may be considered as a physical means of deterring such damage from occurring to highway verges. This is not deemed to be effective on normal residential streets.

6. Community Funded Street Trees

- 6.1 Outcome 6 of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy commits the Council to creating a means of residents funding additional street trees being planted in their community.
- 6.2 For 2021 and 2022, the Council delivered this in-house utilising significant officer resource and time.

- 6.3 From 2023 the Council will implement an online platform via Trees for Streets, enabling communities to coordinate crowdfunding, as well as physically drop a pin on an interactive map to request trees in specific locations.
- 6.4 Location suitability screening, payment and species choice will all be coordinated on one accessible online platform.

Tap anywhere on the map to place the marker in the exact location you'd like your tree planted



Example of “pin drop” system on the Trees for Streets portal.

- 6.5 Residents are offered a selection of species which meet the objectives of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy which are proven to be resilient to the challenges of the highway environment as well as being tolerant to climate change.
- 6.6 Residents can also request a fruit tree if it is to be planted a soft verge.
- 6.7 Streets seeking to plant a number of fruit bearing trees will be encouraged to consider socially responsible means of distributing any excess fruit each year to reduce food waste, and home composting of spoiled fruit which has fallen onto the highway verges.
- 6.8 All sites are subject to a site suitability assessment from a qualified highway and tree specialist prior to being approved. In the event that a tree cannot be planted, the sponsor will be contacted to discuss alternatives.

- 6.9 All works are coordinated and delivered by our highways contractor, Amey. Residents should not dig into the public highway or verges as the risk of striking cables and causing significant injury or disruption to essential utilities from digging holes is very high.
- 6.10 Businesses and Community Groups can also fund street tree planting through this scheme. Similar examples adopted in London Boroughs have included Estate Agents planting a new tree outside every house they sell.
- 6.11 In accordance with Outcome 4 of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy, to ensure that the benefit of this project is not solely benefitting affluent communities, additional tree planting projects and corporate sponsorship of trees by businesses will actively encourage participants to consider additional trees in areas with the Lowest Indices of Multiple Deprivation rankings, Poorest Air Quality and Lowest Canopy Cover of existing trees to rebalance the city's distribution of highway trees in a more equitable way.
- 6.12 Trees which are vandalised, or do not successfully establish during the first three years are not replaced.
- 6.13 After three years, trees are inspected, plotted by the Council's tree inspectors and will then be inspected for safety every 5 years and maintained in perpetuity for the rest of the tree's life at the Council's expense, so there is no ongoing maintenance liability to residents, nor new householders if they choose to move house.
- 6.14 Community engagement is actively encouraged for establishment of any new tree planting – from being there on the first day of planting, to watering and watching them establish.
- 6.15 The platform will also include the option to sponsor trees in parks and on Council housing land.