

Central Swindon South Parish Council

Grounds Maintenance Update and Review – October 2017

Introduction

The Borough Council's Grounds Maintenance team undertake the following work on behalf of the Parish Council:

- Amenity grass cutting and gang mowing
- Shrub bed maintenance
- Hedge cutting & maintenance (to include tractor and side arm work)
- Tree maintenance (using hand tools only from the ground) – as required;
- Inspection, maintenance and repairs to play areas
- Allotment maintenance

The Parish Council has agreed to fund an enhanced level of service provision from the 1st April 2017. This now included an increase in grass cutting frequency (3 weekly) as well as provision of a seasonal maintenance team from May to September to undertake flexible and targeted shrub / hedge maintenance work as required (e.g. adjacent to footpaths / cycle ways).

Swindon Borough Council will continue to maintain designated major routes and gateways into the town. Within Central Swindon South, these areas include Queens Drive and Drakes Way. Please note that these gateways are not maintained in accordance with the enhanced schedule funded by the Parish Council.

Report Details

Grass Maintenance – End of season review

Streetsmart provides a 3 weekly grass cutting service between April and October subject to the prevailing weather and ground conditions.

The mowing season started early in March and was followed throughout April and May with a pro-longed spell of dry weather resulting in grass growth being slow and ideal for the mowing operation. Indeed this was the best start to a mowing season, weather-wise, that staff could remember.

However, this period was followed with a pro-longed period of cooler and wetter weather which caused grass growth to continue throughout much of the summer period. The enhanced grass cutting service now funded by the Parish Council coped well with this unseasonal weather pattern and overall the grass cutting programme was maintained throughout this period.

The cool, wet weather persisted in the autumn and as a consequence caused some issues towards the end of season with poor ground conditions, some minor damage to the grass surface and wet grass deposits falling off of machinery. By the end of October, ground conditions were really too wet to continue mowing and therefore the mowing season ended at the end of the month as scheduled.

Our current grounds maintenance equipment is around 5 years old and therefore to continue to offer a good and reliable service to the Parish Council, the grounds team are currently undertaking a major procurement exercise to completely replace the mowing fleet along with tractors and flails ready for the start of the next financial year.

Shrub and Hedge Maintenance

Over the autumn / winter period, shrubs and hedges will be maintained wherever possible in the following sequence:

October / November	December / January	February / March
Town Centre	Lawn	Park North
Rushey Platt	Walcot West	Park South
Wichelstowe	Walcot East	
Old Town		

Please note that where work needs to be carried out by the tractor side-arm machinery from grass areas, we aim to complete this work early on in the programme to limit damage caused by wet ground conditions.

As part of the enhanced maintenance programme agreed with the Parish Council, we were able to undertake a number of small, targeted projects around the parish, principally concentrating on areas where overgrown shrubs and hedges are known to cause problems. Photographic examples of the work undertaken at some of these sites are included at the end of this report.

Formal Parks

There are 3 formal parks within the Parish – Town Gardens, Queens Park and the GWR Park. Within the parks, a number of works have recently been carried out:

Town Gardens

- Using modern techniques to reseed large areas of grass under the tree canopy, this involved selecting a low light grass species new to the park. This has been a great success with previous bare areas now looking green and lush.

Queens Park

- Completely rebuilding the water pumps and circulation system from the bottom lake to the top lake allowing timing of the pumps to run during the day and cascade via the ornamental stream into the lower lake. This has helped improve the water air quality for aquatic life.

Play Areas

There are 20 formal play areas within the Parish which are inspected once a week every Monday from November to March. The inspection schedule for the spring/summer period is shown below.

Broad Green, County Ground, Euclid St Rec, Huntley Close, Lord Smith Green, Cavendish Sq., Buckhurst Crescent, Eastern Ave, Dudmore Rd, Hesketh Crescent, Quarry Road, Royal Mead, Angel Ridge, Savernake St, Cambria Bridge, GWR Park, Westcott Rec, Rushey Platt, Fernacre and Will Ave.

In addition to the inspection and routine repairs to the above play areas, we also aim to undertake other maintenance tasks as resources permit

Outdoor Sports Facilities

In addition to the more routine work of maintaining grass verges and shrub / hedge maintenance, we also maintain a number of sports facilities within the Parish. These include football pitches (Shrewsbury Road, Walcot) and 2 public bowling greens (Town Gardens and Westcott Recreation Ground). Work recently carried out include:

- Commencement of the end of season maintenance work on both bowling greens to include, spiking and thatch removal, reseeding, top dressing and winter fungicide treatment. Dew brushing, leaf clearance and further chemical treatments will take place over the coming months.
- Works on the bowling green at the Town Gardens to address issues with part of the playing surface caused by the close proximity of several large conifer trees. These trees draw moisture from one end of the green, cast shadow and needle fall onto the edge of the green causing acidic conditions that weaken the grass sward. To help improve the green, we have used the tree team to reduce the canopy and are carrying out specialist repairs to the edge of the green to hopefully improve the green for next season.
- Over the winter months we will continue to carry out essential winter maintenance tasks on the football pitches at Shrewsbury Road as weather and ground conditions permit.

Non-Parish funded work

The following works are included for information purposes only to advise the Parish on other works funded by the Borough Council which have been undertaken or are planned to be carried out within the area.

- Unfortunately it was necessary to fell a large beech tree near the bandstand in the Town Gardens due to internal decay.

- We have now completed both highway weed control treatments as off the 31st October. Again as with the grass growth, the unusual weather at the start of the growing season year delayed the first application by around six weeks with the 2nd application following on shortly afterwards. Although we did experience a number of complaints over the spring/summer period, this operation is very much determined by plant growth and weather conditions.

Land Transfers

As the town continues to grow and develop, there remains a number of land transfers from Developers over to the Borough Council. The Parish Council will be responsible for taking on the grounds maintenance element of this work in accordance with the Deed agreement. The transfer process can take a long period of time to complete.

New open space transfers may come with a Commuted Sum payment which will be passed over to the Parish Council for those elements of work that the Parish are responsible for. These may be areas of public open space or verges included as part of the public highway. Below are the current transfers we are aware of within the Parish:

- Royal Mead Open Space & Play Area (transfer completed in June)
- Culverhouse Road Open Space & Play Area (In Progress – Legal)

Example of work carried out at Angel Ridge



Before



After

Example of work carried out at Dunsford Close



Before



After

Example of work carried out at Kemerton Close



Before



After

Example of work carried out at Park Lane / Faringdon Road



Before



After