



Fact Sheet • April 2021

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 landowner.

If growth is causing a safety concern the Council has the power to serve notice on the landowner 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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The review has resulted in some changes, namely:

- A **Safety Cut** on our main (predominantly 'A' and 'B') road network 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** on our main roads 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.
- Throughout the year localised safety cuts are also carried out on our minor rural road network as and when required following inspections or as part of work undertaken by our local rural maintenance gangs.

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.