

Subject:	Ticknell Piece Road: Mowing schedule	
From:	Claire Wilding	
Date:	26/06/22	
For information and decision		
<p><b>Summary of decisions or actions requested:</b>  We held a meeting with residents of Ticknell Piece Road following complaints about the new mowing schedule. Councillors are asked to agree the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Try to bring the July cut forward, and if WODC cannot do this, agree that the Town Council should pay a contractor to cut the areas that residents have complained about.</li> <li>● Keep the situation under review in case a further cut is needed in August/September.</li> <li>● Agree to make some changes to the mowing plan to address residents' concerns</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Financial implications:</b> We may incur costs of cutting the mound and cherry tree areas in July if WODC are not able to do this early on.</p>		
<p><b>Communications:</b> We agreed we would keep residents updated through charlbury.info</p>		

On 22nd June, representatives of the Town Council and Land and Nature group met Ticknell Piece residents. This was following complaints about the new mowing schedule. Present were Cllr Claire Wilding, Cllr Frances Mortimer, Christine Elliot (local volunteer/ Land and Nature Group), and 14 residents of Ticknell Piece Road. Two residents who could not attend had been in contact to share their views ahead of the meeting.

The Town Council and Land and Nature Group explained the situation:

- The Town Council had developed a new mowing plan to encourage more wildflowers and help biodiversity. This applies to the area under the walnut trees by the Slade and the next two grass areas – the mound and the patch with the cherry tree.
- WODC cuts these areas, and according to the agreed plan should have done a cut in March/April. For some reason this didn't happen, so the grass has grown longer than was intended.
- The aim was to see what sorts of wildflowers would grow up naturally with less frequent mowing. But because the grass is so long, this will have stopped many wildflowers from seeding and growing.
- There should have been consultation with residents at an earlier stage so that all understood what was happening and had a chance to comment.

Residents made the following comments:

- Residents were annoyed that the Town Council had not communicated the changes to the mowing on Ticknell.
- The length of the grass prevented residents from using the grass as they had previously, in particular it stopped picnics and children playing. The Town Council needed to recognise the important amenity value of these areas.
- The long grass cut off views from neighbouring houses, this was particularly a problem for houses down hill of the mound and cherry tree area.
- Some residents felt the grass looked messy and unkempt, though others did not mind the appearance.
- Some residents wanted management of the area to be as it was before but others wanted a compromise that encouraged wildflowers but allowed other uses too.

Most of the complaints related to the mound. One resident who neighboured the cherry tree patch also had concerns. No complaints were raised regarding the walnut tree area.

Claire summed up the next steps as follows.

- A small area of the mound could be scythed straight away to create some shorter areas.
- All the grass areas were due to be cut short in July. However the Town Council would get in touch with WODC to see if this could be done early in July. If not, the Town Council would discuss other options for getting the grass cut sooner.
- Claire would send a report of the meeting to the Town Council, and the Council would need to agree what to do longer term about the mowing plan. This would be on the agenda for the 29 June meeting. Town Council meetings were open to the public and residents were welcome to attend.
- The Town Council would keep residents updated via Charlbury.info

We then visited the mound, where we agreed the best areas to scythe. Christine Elliot then cut a path and a short area on top. Christine also looked at the plants present, there were no nettles or invasive weeds and there were some wildflowers, including ox eye daisies and yarrow.

### **Recommendation to the Town Council**

There's strong feeling about the new mowing pattern, as shown by the numbers that attended the meeting and got in touch separately. If the weather is dry over summer, the grass should not grow very long after the July cut. If it is wet, there may be requests from residents to arrange another cut. I suggest we keep the situation under review over the summer. Longer term, there are three options for the mowing plan next year:

1. Stick to the same mowing pattern, but make sure the March/April cut takes place. This will mean the grass doesn't get so long.
2. As above but with areas cut short to create paths/picnic areas and to reduce impact on views.
3. Revert to the original mowing plan, perhaps leaving smaller swards for wildflowers.

I'd suggest we do the following:

- For the walnut tree area (along the Slade) - option 1.
- For the cherry tree area - either 2 or 3, suggest we have further consultation with neighbours as we have only spoken to one neighbour.
- For the mound: option 3. There has been a proposal to cut the north half of the mound (nearest the houses) and leave the southern half (nearest the road) for wildflowers. One resident has said this option would not be acceptable to them. I suggest we speak to residents again to find a variation of option 3 that they are content with.