



# Norfolk County Council

## Your views on our proposal to save money by reducing urban and rural highway grass cutting

### Overview

Norfolk County Council is committed to making Norfolk a county where businesses, organisations, individuals and communities continue to thrive together, even as we address the impact of COVID-19. We will do this by tackling the challenges that face us, and moving forward together to create ever better places to work and live.

The business plan we launched in 2019, **Together, for Norfolk**, is now well embedded in all that we do in planning to grow our economy, manage development and achieve better futures and outcomes for everyone who lives and works here.

Despite the present challenges for us all, we continue to provide vital services to give children and young people the best start in life, support vulnerable and older people, maintain our highways and transport network, provide library, waste disposal plus fire and rescue services and work in partnership to grow the economy. We continue to press the Government for fairer funding so that we can maintain the delivery of

our services at the highest possible level. This is particularly important for our people services.

We are currently delivering these services in a financial climate of almost unprecedented risk and uncertainty, both from the perspective of people who use our services, and those who provide them. The Council must now plan for the 'triple whammy' impacts of rising budget pressures, uncertainty over Government funding, and the financial challenges associated with COVID-19.

Making decisions about how we spend your money is never easy, and many of the additional costs, lost income and undeliverable savings in the current year will have a significant impact on our 2021-22 finances. It remains critical to develop balanced, sustainable budget proposals which will enable the Council to continue to deliver the essential services which are relied on by all Norfolk's people, businesses and visitors (who help boost our economy).

There are statutory services we need to protect and a limited choice of where savings can be made. We have already saved £436m between 2011 and 2020. Even by increasing council tax by the amount we're allowed to without a local referendum, and a proposal to raise £8.5 million by increasing the Adult Social Care precept, we won't balance our budget in 2021-22 unless we make an additional £26m of savings. This savings figure may possibly be higher depending on the level of Government support received.

We are putting every effort into listening to our residents to ensure we know what services you value most. By developing our budget proposals in line with residents' priorities, coupled with our strategy of changing services to make them more efficient, we aim to make most of the savings we need by cutting running costs, and with the least possible impact on frontline services.

**To contribute to the necessary savings, in addition to our other proposals, we are proposing to reduce the frequency of grass cutting for verges in the adopted highway in urban areas, and along C and U class roads in rural areas. This proposal would save us £100,000 in 2021-22.**

We now want to hear your views on this proposal to help our elected councillors in agreeing a balanced budget for 2021-2022.

## **Why we are consulting**

We want to find out what people think about our proposal to reduce the frequency of urban and rural grass cutting and how it might affect people if it went ahead.

We are consulting through:

- This online consultation, which is also available as a paper copy
- Letter to key partners and stakeholders

We are consulting from 26 October 2020 to 14 December 2020. Please note that if we receive any consultation responses after the closing date we cannot guarantee that we will be able to take them into account.

We will feed back the findings from our consultation to our county councillors as part of the evidence they will use to help them come to a decision about our proposals.

**If you need a copy of this consultation document in a different format please email [haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk), call 0344 800 8020 or Text Relay on 18001 0344 800 8020 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.**

## **Personal information, confidentiality and data protection**

We will only use any personal information to understand how different groups of people feel about our proposals that would result in service changes, such as this proposal to reduce the frequency of grass cutting in urban and rural areas.

We will process any personal information we receive from you in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679), the Data Protection Act 2018 and Norfolk County Council's data protection policy and guidelines. This means that Norfolk County Council will hold your personal data and only use it for the purpose for which it was collected, being this consultation. You can find a copy of our privacy statement at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/privacy>

We won't identify individuals when reporting back our findings and under our record management policy we will keep this information for five years. We will also, under normal circumstances, not pass your personal data on to anyone else. However, we may be asked under access to information laws to publish or disclose some, or all, of the information you provide in response to this consultation. We will only do this where such disclosure will comply with such relevant information laws which include the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

You can choose not to take part in the consultation, to stop responding at any time, or to ignore any personal questions that you do not want to answer.

## **Background**

### **What happens now?**

Norfolk County Council has a legal duty to maintain our highways and this includes roads, footpaths and verges, making them safe for road users. We meet this duty through a wide range of maintenance activities including grass cutting, and prioritise maintenance works by looking at the strategic importance of the road and the nature of maintenance required.

We currently cut grass along all rural roads twice a year, including all visibility splays at road junctions. Grass along urban roads is currently cut 5 times per year, either by Norfolk County Council and our contractors, or under agreement with District or Borough Councils.

Under the road classification system, all roads in the UK (excluding motorways) fall into the following four categories:

- A roads – major roads intended to provide large-scale transport links within or between areas.
- B roads – roads intended to connect different areas, and to feed traffic between A roads and smaller roads on the network.
- C roads (classified unnumbered) - smaller roads connecting together unclassified roads with A and B roads, and often linking a housing estate or a village to the rest of the network.
- U roads (unclassified) – local roads intended for local traffic, noting the vast majority (60%) of roads in the UK fall within this category.

## **What we have considered when developing our proposals**

When developing this proposal, we have taken the following into account:

- We have reviewed the expenditure on our grass cutting operations to determine where any efficiencies and/or cost savings could be made to minimise the impact on frontline services.

- We have used a targeted, risk-based approach and have concluded that we cannot reduce the grass cutting frequency of our higher-speed A and B class roads below current standards.
- We appreciate there may be some concerns relating to road safety at specific junctions and we have developed a risk assessment that will be applied to these sites. If the grass becomes too long for drivers, pedestrians or other road users to see clearly, then we will make sure the grass is cut to a level that ensures adequate visibility for the safety of everyone.
- We have consulted with other Local Authorities who have undertaken similar money-saving proposals successfully.
- We have consulted with our contractor.
- We have ensured that this proposal supports Norfolk County Council's Pollinator Action Plan, and Environmental Action Plan.
- We have recognised that Norfolk County Council receives requests each year to reduce the cutting of highway verges in order to encourage the growth of wildflowers. In addition to required cost-savings, this proposal will also reduce the cutting of wildflowers across parts of our rural network.
- We appreciate there may be public concern about the aesthetic impacts of reduced grass cutting.
- We wish to avoid any impact on the quality of works undertaken, even if frequency is reduced.
- We have checked what services the law requires us to provide.

## Previous consultations

We have consulted on the following proposals in the recent past relating to grass cutting and associated maintenance services.

We have consulted on the following proposals in the recent past relating to grass cutting and associated maintenance services.

In 2013 we consulted on our proposal to make a one-off saving of £1m on highway maintenance.

- *We asked:* What do you think of our proposal to save £1m on highway maintenance.
- *You said:* 45 people agreed with our proposal, 169 people disagreed and 48 people neither agreed nor disagreed. Most of the people who agreed with our proposal did not explain specifically why they agreed with it. Those that did provide an explanation suggested that it was necessary, albeit for one year only, bearing in mind the scale of savings being sought by the Council.
- *We did:* Whilst the Council had regard to the consultation responses received, it did agree to implement this proposal which meant that our budget for highway maintenance for 2014-15 was reduced to £23 million.

In 2014 we consulted on our proposal to make a permanent saving of £385,000 from our highway maintenance budget.



- *We asked:* What do you think of our proposal to make a permanent saving of £385,000 from our highway maintenance budget.
- *You said:* 205 people agreed with our proposal, 149 people disagreed and 26 people didn't know.
  - Many of those agreeing with the proposal did so as long as safety was not compromised and national standards were kept to. Others agreed with the proposal because they felt the works being reduced were “non-essential” or “do not seem urgent”. Some respondents argued that this area of work was less of a priority than some other areas.
  - A large proportion of people disagreeing with the proposal did so because of concerns about safety. Others felt the current road condition to be poor and that the proposal would make the situation worse. Some respondents worried that reduced maintenance would cost the Council more in the long term. Some emphasised the importance of roads to rural accessibility and the economy.
- *We did:* Whilst the Council had regard to the consultation responses received, it did agree to implement the proposal, and we reduced our highway maintenance budget by £385,000.

In 2015 we then consulted on our proposal to spend £980,000 less on maintaining roads, maintaining bridges and winter gritting.

- *We asked:* What do you think of our proposal to spend £980,000 less on maintaining roads, maintaining bridges and winter gritting.

- *You said:* 321 people responded to our consultation about this proposal. 94 people agreed with the proposal, 193 people disagreed and 34 people neither agreed nor disagreed.
  - Of those who agreed with this proposal, a number agreed with the package of proposals but with provisos, including not making any changes to gritting and winter maintenance; and ensuring that road safety is not compromised. The proposal was also supported by people who saw this as an opportunity to protect the verges and hedgerows, and preserve or promote wildlife.
  - Of those people who disagreed with this proposal, concerns were raised about the safety of the roads and that the proposals would lead to more accidents on rural roads; the need to maintain or increase gritting and winter maintenance; the perceived existing poor state of the roads; and the impact of short term budget savings upon long term maintenance costs.
- *We did:* We noted that 16% of respondents to this proposal raised concerns about any reduction in winter gritting. Following the consultation, County Councillors had regard to the responses received and decided not to go ahead with this proposal.

In 2017 we then consulted on our proposal to make a permanent saving of £300,000 from our highway maintenance budget.

- *We asked:* What do you think of our proposal to make a permanent saving of £300,000 from our highway maintenance budget by reducing how much we spend on non-safety critical highways maintenance.
- *You said:* 102 people responded, with a minority expressing overall support, and a majority disagreeing with the proposal.
  - A minority of people expressed their overall support, and some with the caveat that safety must not be compromised as a result of the actions taken. It was suggested that cosmetic or low-level maintenance could possibly be managed by parish councils or community groups.
  - A majority disagreed with the proposal fearing it would increase risks for road users (observing that road, signage and verge maintenance was an important feature of road safety). Some expressed the opinion that this proposal might lead to greater maintenance problems and/or higher costs in the future, notably where poor road conditions already exist. Some expressed concern that those living in villages and rural communities would be more affected than those living in urban areas.
- *We did:* Whilst the Council had regard to the consultation responses, it did agree to implement the proposal and we reduced our budget by £300,000 for non-safety critical highways maintenance.

## **Our proposal**

We are proposing to save money by reducing grass cutting in urban areas from 5 cuts per year down to 4 cuts per year along verges in the adopted highway; and reducing grass cutting along C and U class roads in rural areas from 2 cuts per year down to 1 cut per year. The frequency of grass cutting on our higher-speed A and B class roads will remain unchanged.

We will continue to cut the grass at high-risk junctions to ensure appropriate safety and visibility. Residents will continue to be able to report any concerns to the Council in relation to safety and visibility at any specific location for assessment and action as required. We will monitor the level of requests received concerning the impacts of changed grass cutting frequency during 2021-22.

This proposal would save us £100,000 in 2021-22.

## **Who would be affected by our proposal and how**

Reducing the frequency of grass-cutting in urban areas and on C and U class roads in rural areas, may be observed by residents, the travelling public and highway users across the county.

We do not anticipate a reduction in grass cutting having any adverse safety or aesthetic impacts for communities.

We appreciate there may be some concerns amongst the general public relating to road safety at specific junctions. We will continue to cut the grass at high-risk junctions when necessary. Any concerns with grass cutting at a specific location can be reported to Norfolk County Council for assessment and action as required.

# Your views on our proposal and the impact it might have on you

Have your say

1. What do you think of our proposal to reduce the frequency of urban and rural grass cutting? How, if at all, do you think our proposal might affect you? Please write in below:

2. How far do you agree or disagree with our proposal to reduce the frequency of urban and rural grass cutting? Please tick (✓) one answer only:

<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>

**3. Why do you say that?** Please briefly write in below, including how the proposal might affect you:

## About you

**4. Are you responding as...?** Please tick (✓) one answer only:

- An individual / member of the public
- A family
- On behalf of a voluntary or community group
- On behalf of a statutory organisation
- On behalf of a business
- A Norfolk County Councillor
- A district or borough councillor
- A town or parish councillor
- A Norfolk County Council employee

**5. If you are responding on behalf of another organisation, what is the name of the organisation, group or business?**

Please write your answer in the box:

**6. Are you...? Please tick (✓) one answer only:**

Male

Female

Prefer to self-describe (please specify below)

Prefer not to say

If you prefer to self-describe please specify here:

**7. How old are you? Please tick (✓) one answer only:**

Under 18

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65-74

75-84

85 or older

Prefer not to say



**8. Do you have any long-term illness, disability or health problem that limits your daily activities or the work you can do?** Please tick (✓) one answer only:

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

**9. How would you describe your ethnic background?**  
Please tick (✓) one answer only:

White British

White Irish

White other

Mixed / multiple ethnic group

Asian or Asian British

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

Prefer not to say

Other ethnic background - please describe below

**10. What is your first language?**

Please write your answer in the box:

**11. What is the first part of your postcode? (e.g. NR4)**

Please write your answer in the box:

## **How we will make our decision and report back to you**

We will take a report on the findings of this consultation to our Cabinet on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 and we will make final decision about our budget on 22 February 2021. The report will feed back what people have told us about the potential impact of our proposals.

Our county councillors will consider the consultation responses we receive very carefully. In particular, they will take into account:

- The impact of any proposal on individuals, groups or communities and in particular on people identified as having 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010. The protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. As well as this equality impact assessment, councillors will consider the impact of proposals on rural areas

- The views of people and stakeholders consulted
- The evidence of need and what is proven to work effectively and well
- The financial and legal positions and any constraints at the time
- Any potential alternative options, models or ideas for making the savings.

**Your opinions are valuable to us. Thank you for taking the time to read this and respond.**

**You can fill in our online feedback form at:**

**[www.norfolk.gov.uk/budget](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/budget)**

**You can send back a paper feedback form to:**

Freepost Plus RTCL-XSTT-JZSK, Norfolk County Council,  
Ground floor - south wing, County Hall, Martineau Lane,  
Norwich NR1 2DH.

However, if you want to help the council save money please use a stamp and send to this address: Stakeholder and Consultation Team, Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing, County Hall, Martineau Lane, NR1 2DH.

You may wish to keep a copy of your response to our consultation for your own records.



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please email us at [haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk) or contact Customer Services on 0344 800 8020 or Text Relay on 18001 0344 800 8020 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.