



Verge Cutting Trial Final Report

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1.0 Introduction

The joint eco-friendly initiative between Essex County Council and Braintree District Council saw a number of grass roadside verges in the central part of the Braintree District left uncut over spring 2020 in order to encourage the proliferation of biodiversity. The trial also aimed to encourage the creation of more natural corridors for wildlife and their movement throughout the district. The 2020 trial concluded that there was no adverse impact on road users in the trial areas compared to the non-trial areas.

There were also clear environmental benefits including a reduction of plant (tractors) and vehicle emissions for transporting litter pickers and an increased biodiversity in the trial areas. It was noted that road safety, i.e. visibility at road junctions, was the main issue raised by residents, Parish Councils and Members, rather than littering.

Following positive consultations with Parish & Town Councils and District & County Councillors, the initial trial was extended to the whole Braintree District from April 2021 for a 12 month period. The full monitoring analysis report and comprehensive feedback from the 2020 trial can be found on our website - www.braintree.gov.uk/vergecutting.

The purpose of this document is to outline feedback from the 2021 trial and results from the second consultation with Parish & Town Councils and District & County Councillors which took place from September to November 2021. Depending on the results of this consultation, a recommendation will be made to Essex County Council to decide if a single cut should become the 'norm' from Spring 2022, whether two cuts per year should continue, or if further analysis is required for a decision to be made.

2.0 Requests for Safety Cuts

Braintree District Council, who will be referred to as the Council, received a number of requests for safety cuts of the roadside verges. When requests were received, the verges were inspected to ensure that there was a real safety issue which restricted visibility for pedestrians and drivers. This applied to areas around junctions and did not generally apply to straight lines of the verges where the grass did not present a safety issue to road users.

The Council received a total of fifty-five requests for safety cuts, of which forty requests were approved, eight requests were denied and seven requests were not acted upon due to the autumn cut being imminent.

One of these safety cut requests was made by a Halstead in Bloom volunteer who noted that at Mount Hill in Halstead there was growth obstructing the footpath on the left hand side going towards the garage. The verge was inspected and a safety cut was approved. The photo on the left was taken during the site inspection, and the photo on the right was taken after the verge was cut.



Mount Hill, Halstead (Inspection)



Mount, Hill Halstead (After Cut)

A number of requests were received to cut hedges from residents and they were notified that hedges are the responsibility of Essex Highways to maintain. Rayne Parish Council noted that “some road signage, for example in Queenborough Lane, Braintree Green, is becoming obscured by vegetation” and were informed that Essex Highways are responsible for maintaining road signs, which includes repairing damaged signs and ensuring their visibility.

3.0 Feedback Received During The Trial

The Council received both positive and negative feedback during the trial, and most comments from residents were requests for safety cuts of the verges. The full list of enquiries, bouquets and complaints received in 2021 is included in [Appendix 1](#).

3.1 Reduced Visibility

The Council received both positive and negative feedback during the trial, and most comments from residents were requests for safety cuts. Residents requested safety cuts in locations where visibility was poor for road users and where vegetation was rubbing along and damaging vehicles whilst driving along the road. It was noted that motorcyclists were more at risk with reduced visibility from overgrown verges.

Cllr Diana Garrod (District Councillor) -

“Whilst I can see the benefits of this trial, I thought I should inform you that several people have mentioned reduced visibility whilst driving (and cycling) around some of our small and winding country roads where the plants, in particular Cow Parsley, has grown beyond one metre in height. Difficulties are compounded by the navigation of some deep potholes which some residents feel have a lower priority on the country lanes and are not repaired until they become very large. There have also been several road diversions, which have therefore increased traffic on some lanes and several near-misses conveyed to me in general discussions this weekend. I felt I should therefore convey this to you, so that this can be considered.”

Comment from Stisted Resident -

"Whilst I think this is an admirable objective, I think you need to look more closely at the dangers it poses in certain areas. I live in Stisted and both myself and visitors have commented on how visibility is significantly reduced around corners because of the height and width of the verge greenery. Our lanes are narrow enough without the competing wild flowers and grasses. Has any kind of risk assessment been undertaken? I think it is only a matter of time before there is a major incident."

3.2 Pedestrians and Cyclists

Residents highlighted that pedestrians were unable to step off roads without pavements as the verges were overgrown. There were particular concerns regarding locations where families had to walk in the road, as the overgrown verges were encroaching onto the footpaths. Concerns were also raised for cyclists who were at greater risk of not being seen by road users due to reduced visibility.

Comment from Resident -

"Cycle routes and paths are suffering adversely from allowing the verges unrestricted growth, from overhanging branches to narrowing of the paths because of encroaching growth. Further, when these have been cut (by Essex CC along the A12) the mess that has been left behind has been dangerous to any user of the cycle paths. I see little point in expanding the cycle network in the District when the existing ones are deteriorating because of encroaching plant / weed growth. As a keen walker around Feering I have noticed that the country roads are suffering similarly to the cycle paths, becoming narrower because of plant growth from the verges. This causes problems when encountering vehicles, causing pedestrians to have to step onto the excessive overgrowth. What damage is being done to the edges of these roads by excessive plant growth may only be seen in future years. The growth also restricts the view from the road across fields etc. I'm sure a compromise could be reached whereby the verges could be cut / treated for a foot or so either side of the roads / cycle paths and thus improving the lot of the cyclists and walker and protecting the integrity of the road."

3.3 Uncontrolled Weed and Woody Vegetation Growth

The Council received comments from residents who noted that leaving the verges uncut would encourage weeds to suffocate wildflowers. Mike Barnes from Philip Liverton Ltd, who are responsible for cutting roadside verges on behalf of the Council, highlighted this issue in the 2020 Verge Cutting Trial Report.

Mike Liverton from Philip Liverton Ltd. -

"Leaving out the spring cut did increase the vegetation level for the Autumn cut, but it may take a year or two to notice how bramble and hardwood suckers will colonise the verge as each year they become a little more established and difficult to cut cleanly. My main concern would be the establishment of aggressive and invasive suckers within sight splays. A lot of these suckers quickly spread when given the opportunity to make strong root growth. They will quickly outgrow and smother the natural grasses, leaving only woody vegetation and brambles."

Comment from Resident -

“Leaving the verges uncut until the autumn will also encourage aggressive and toxic weeds to spread along the hedge rows which will suffocate rarer and more sensitive wild flowers. Allowing railway cuttings to go wild was responsible for spreading Oxford Ragwort across the country with the dispersion of the seeds accelerated by the wind from passing trains. Because we have introduced so many large and exotic species, it is no longer viable to leave them to go wild on verges where they have plenty of light, are not eaten by animals and have their seed effectively spread down man made conduits across the country. Weeds like cow parsley and hogweed are tall and dominant and grow well in most conditions. They will out compete smaller and less hardy flowers if they are allowed to become ubiquitous. The unchecked spread of poisonous plants such as ragwort, giant hogweed, deadly nightshade, bitter sweet, hemlock etc. makes organic farming more difficult and encourages farmers to use herbicides to control them. The use of herbicides is the principal reason for the destruction of British wild flowers. Cutting the verges in late spring to a height of 1 foot above the ground so that tall, dominant weeds are cut down and do not seed, but smaller wild flowers are undisturbed and get more light, encourages wild flowers in rural hedgerows. It also improves visibility and makes rural roads safe for motorised traffic. Failing to cut the verges in spring is a cost cutting exercise which will accelerate the decline of wild flowers and should not be promoted as preserving them.”

3.4 Proliferation of Wildflowers

The Council received a number of bouquets regarding the trial and the amount of wildflowers growing on the roadside verges.

Cllr Stevie Hicks (District Councillor and Town Councillor) -

“During my everyday journeys nights evenings, mornings and sometimes actually during the day I have the absolute pleasure of enjoying many, many, open roads throughout Essex and in particular The Braintree District. Despite my use of various types of vehicles in delivering my service to the community I am really happy with all that I have seen in the trial areas of this scheme, of which I can honestly say I have seen them all, it is an absolute joy to see so much colour springing up on our roadsides this year, banks of mixed blue, white, yellow flowering wild flowers on wavy banks of green grass. "NO MOW MAY" is in my opinion a great success.”

3.5 Collecting Grass Arisings

Cllr Jenny Sandum (District Councillor) noted that “the problem is that if the cuttings are left, it will have a very negative impact on the diversity of wildflowers and mean that grasses become more dominant.” The issue was also raised that long grass cuttings left in the road may block road gulleys and cause flooding. There is currently no provision for collecting the grass after a cut takes place and the feasibility of this is being considered by Essex County Council.

3.6 Reduction of Traffic Speed

Residents highlighted that overgrown verges caused vehicles to slow down along roads with reduced visibility.

Comment from Resident -

"I would like to congratulate Braintree District Council on taking the initiative to reduce the mowing of road verges and some public grass areas. Not only is it a joy to see so many wild flowers and grasses appearing, therefore providing corridors of wildlife habitat, but also it reduces the speed of the traffic in the country lanes. As we are all too aware plants are an integral part of combating climate change and providing biodiversity."

4.0 Consultation with District and County Councillors

The second consultation with District & County Councillors and Parish & Town Councils took place from September to November 2021. A total of eleven Councillors and nineteen Parish & Town Councils took part in the consultation. Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group were also invited to complete the questionnaire to give their comments on this initiative.

Q1 - Do you support the aims and objectives of the trial? (Which are to protect and support wildlife and improve biodiversity at a local level).

Cllr Peter Schwier, Cllr Paul Thorogood, Cllr Alan Manning, Cllr. Richard van Dulken, Cllr James Abbott, Cllr Jenny Sandum, Cllr William Rose, Cllr Colin Undrill and Cllr Iona Parker noted that they support the aims of the trial.

Cllr Wendy Scattergood and Cllr Melanie Hicks noted that they did not support the aims of the trial.

Q2 - Have you noticed any difference in the levels of littering of the verges across the District?

The following Councillors noted that there was less litter:

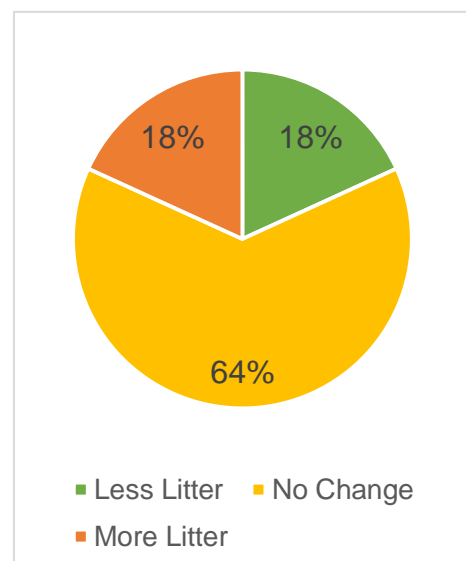
Cllr Peter Schwier and Cllr Jenny Sandum.

The following Councillors found there was no change to the levels of littering:

Cllr Wendy Scattergood, Cllr Paul Thorogood, Cllr Alan Manning, Cllr. Richard van Dulken, Cllr James Abbott, Cllr Colin Undrill and Cllr Iona Parker.

The following Councillors noted that there was more litter:

Cllr William Rose and Cllr Melanie Hicks.



Q3 - Are you aware of any specific road safety (visibility) issues? (If so, state locations below).

Cllr Peter Schwier (District and County Councillor) -

"Yes several rural villages had safety issues, which needed cutting. These should be recorded/noted and cut automatically in the spring (1st Cut) in a planned logical way to reduce the cost of calling out contractors. Safety is paramount."

Cllr Wendy Scattergood (District Councillor) -

"Yes. Access onto A131 from Gt Henny was dangerous. The single tract lanes in my ward Stour Valley South were dangerous as unable to see oncoming traffic. Many complaints received from residents."

Cllr Paul Thorogood (District and County Councillor) -

"The only issues that were brought to my attention in my Braintree Eastern division were: 1. The central island on the A120 at Colne Road, Coggeshall, did make visibility an issue. 2. The hedging between 9 Kelvedon Road, Coggeshall, and the allotments in Coggeshall Hamlet did become overgrown and forced pedestrians to walk in the road, especially parents with prams and pushchairs and people in mobility scooters/wheelchairs as the pavement is quite narrow along that section of road."

Cllr Alan Manning (Parish Councillor) -

"Yes. Leaving the verges to grow at junctions and particularly roundabouts is unnecessarily dangerous due to the reduced visibility this causes."

Cllr. Richard van Dulken (District Councillor) -

"No specific visibility issues that I can recall but in many more cases there is an annoying narrowing of visible roadway in rural areas because of uncut verges on both sides. We are not always sure what potholes or other road degradation there might be at the edges of some of the roads which never get any Essex Highways attention, and with overgrown verges, pulling into the side to let another car pass can lead to unfortunate results for tyres/axles/bodywork."

Cllr James Abbott (District Councillor) -

"Only at 2 road junctions in Cressing and that was due to hedges, not verge growth. ECC were very slow to act on these when I reported the issue to them, which was a safety issue (near Cressing Temple B1018/Temple Lane junction and in old Cressing village at Ashes Road/The Street junction). Church Road Rivenhall was cut in the summer and I asked why - BDC said a request had been made, but I was not aware there was an issue there and asked to be kept informed next year of such requests. I also asked about private cutting of verges where there is no reason to do so on any grounds. A stretch of Park Road Rivenhall (I declare I live on that road) is cut every week by a landscape company who ECC tell me have no permission to do so."

Cllr William Rose (District Councillor and Town Councillor) -

"Grass height in places obscure sight line on bends etc. Blunts Hall Road Witham is an example."

Cllr Colin Undrill (Parish Councillor) -

"S bends as one exits Greenstead Green on road towards Earls Colne."

Cllr Melanie Hicks (Parish Councillor) -

"Yes. I live on The Street in Faulkbourne, along the road that connects Witham to White Notley and on to Black Notley and Braintree. This is a fast and very busy road with many areas where visibility is bad. The local farmer has cut some of these areas, but not all of them, for example the corner by our Village Hall where there are 12 houses in a row. Several of us have difficulty pulling out of our drives because the visibility has been limited by the height of the vegetation in the verge. In addition it is impossible to walk along our road (there is no pavement) without having to jump into the verge to avoid fast cars and this is now very difficult because of the growth of the vegetation which includes many areas of nettles. Furthermore, the cars continue to drop litter all along the road which is now hidden by the long vegetation, however, as soon as the verge is cut this will become visible and extremely unsightly. We will then have difficulty persuading Braintree Council to litter pick BECAUSE the road is so fast and dangerous. This is not an acceptable situation, simply adding unsightliness and more danger in particular to pedestrians."

Cllr Iona Parker (District Councillor) -

"All single track roads, especially near bends. Also all junctions on all roads. If the grass is no cut in these areas it is difficult to see if there is any oncoming traffic (including bicycles). It is also difficult to exit or enter junctions safely."

Q4 - What are your thoughts about a reduction in verge cutting from twice to once a year?

Cllr Peter Schwier (District and County Councillor) -

"Where safety/sight lines is not an issue its good, but have concerns as with a wet summer and abundant growth it causes increased safety concerns. People are 'used' to seeing and expecting two cuts, so reduction may take time to become more acceptable. Need to increase communication and the reasons and benefits of doing this."

Cllr Wendy Scattergood (District Councillor) -

"Not suitable for rural lanes."

Cllr Paul Thorogood (District and County Councillor) -

"Yes a good idea, but if an area becomes overgrown and causes a problem, such as the two I mentioned in the section before, the hedgerows or verges need to be cut on a pragmatic basis."

Cllr Alan Manning (Parish Councillor) -

"As previous. It causes the verges to become overgrown thus becoming dangerous at junctions, particularly roundabouts, due to the reduced visibility."

Cllr. Richard van Dulken (District Councillor) -

"On balance OK."

Cllr James Abbott (District Councillor) -
"I support, subject to safety at junctions."

Cllr Jenny Sandum (District Councillor) -
"I think it's a brilliant idea and it has been wonderful to see areas left more natural this year. I do think that sharing some pretty photos of the wildflowers in the verges, and also putting up signs explaining the reasons verges are being left, would be really helpful - 'grass left unsown to encourage wildflowers' types of signs. It is a change for people and education as to the reasons and advantages of this approach would be really helpful."

Cllr William Rose (District Councillor and Town Councillor) -
"Would prefer Twice yearly cut for Road safety purposes."

Cllr Colin Undrill (Parish Councillor) -
"Support this 100% as it is good for wildlife."

Cllr Melanie Hicks (Parish Councillor) -
"I think this is simply a cost cutting exercise which has not been reflected in any reduction in the Council Tax we pay. We are surrounded by fields in our village and enjoy rural scenes and wildlife. We don't need untidy verges to increase such wildlife."

Cllr Iona Parker (District Councillor) -
"In my view, single track roads and all roads near junctions should cut twice a year. A one metre cut would be sufficient as this would allow sufficient visibility and prevent long grasses from drooping over the road and reducing the apparent width of the road."

Q5 - Have you received any feedback from local residents about the reduced frequency of verge cutting across the District? (If yes, state below)

Cllr Peter Schwier (District and County Councillor) -
"Yes - its been safety issues, sight lines on rural roads."

Cllr Wendy Scattergood (District Councillor) -
"Yes. Just complaints about danger to drivers walkers and horse riders as unable to see around corners or at junctions."

Cllr Paul Thorogood (District and County Councillor) -
"Only the two examples given earlier on the A120 at Colne Road and Kelvedon Road, Coggeshall."

Cllr Alan Manning (Parish Councillor) -
"Have heard a few people mention the reduced visibility."

Cllr. Richard van Dulken (District Councillor) -
"Only one of my three villages (Great Yeldham) gets cuts from Essex, and the Parish Council will be responding to your consultation themselves."

Cllr James Abbott (District Councillor) -

"Most residents are very happy to see more wildflowers and in Rivenhall we would like to have some enhanced areas for wildflowers by planned seeding of selected areas of verge. The parish council has identified 6 such areas."

Cllr Jenny Sandum (District Councillor) -

"Yes very positive feedback about how lovely it is to see the beautiful wildflowers and how good it is for wildlife."

Cllr William Rose (District Councillor and Town Councillor) -

"General comments from Constituents who travel along routes."

Cllr Colin Undrill (Parish Councillor) -

"Those I know are generally supportive except on a couple of dangerous blind bends."

Cllr Melanie Hicks (Parish Councillor) -

"Yes, we all discuss the untidy, unsightly and dangerous road and its verges."

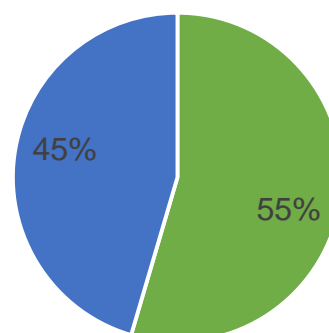
Cllr Iona Parker (District Councillor) -

"Yes, concerns about road safety but also some residents are pleased that wildflowers have appeared in places."

Q6 - Would you support a single cut of the verges in the autumn becoming a permanent arrangement in the District?

Cllr Peter Schwier, Cllr Paul Thorogood, Cllr Richard van Dulken, Cllr James Abbott, Cllr Jenny Sandum, and Cllr Colin Undrill are in support of a single cut.

Cllr Wendy Scattergood, Cllr Alan Manning, Cllr William Rose, Cllr Melanie Hicks and Cllr Iona Parker are not in support of a single cut.



■ In Support of Single Cut
■ Against Single Cut

Q7 - If you have answered No to Question 6, state why.

Cllr Wendy Scattergood (District Councillor) -

"It might be suitable in urban areas but not in rural areas where roads are single track."

Cllr Alan Manning (Parish Councillor) -

"As previous, it causes a dangerous obstruction to visibility. Also, it is, in my opinion, a cost cutting exercise to assist in subsidising wasteful practices."

Cllr William Rose (District Councillor and Town Councillor) -

"Some verges are quite overgrown. May expose litter when cut."

Cllr Melanie Hicks (Parish Councillor) -

"For the reasons previously stated - it is unsightly, does not contribute to increase in wildlife. It is also dangerous as the sightlines are compromised when driving along the road. When walking along the road, one has to jump into the verge to avoid fast travelling cars, which is difficult with long grass and tall stinging nettles."

Cllr Iona Parker (District Councillor) -

"Please see previous answers regarding road safety on single track roads and near junctions."

Q8 - Do you have any other comments on verge cutting?

Cllr Peter Schwier (District and County Councillor) -

"Its not just the verge cutting - we need to monitor this and prove that this will increase wildflowers/insects and wildlife use so that it is understood and appreciated."

Cllr Wendy Scattergood (District Councillor) -

"Yes we should consider two cuts per year on certain roads cannot list them as many in my ward do not have names."

Cllr Paul Thorogood (District and County Councillor) -

"I support a one-cut strategy where practicable; wild flowers along the verges can look very pretty and they help support pollinators."

Cllr. Richard van Dulken (District Councillor) -

"The previous question does not give any option other than Yes or No to making a single Autumn cut permanent. Nor could I leave it unanswered. My complete response is that I would support a single Autumn cut as long as Essex Highways commits to giving additional cuts where requested by a Parish Council with good reason."

Cllr James Abbott (District Councillor) -

"Overall the trial has been a success. There are bound to be issues as the new regime beds in but I hope the scheme carries on."

Cllr Jenny Sandum (District Councillor) -

"Will the grass cuttings be removed after the Autumn cut as this encourages more wildflower regrowth? I think that if this approach is taken the wildflowers will just get more and more beautiful as time goes on."

Cllr William Rose (District Councillor and Town Councillor) -

"If verges are cut, would expect grass cuttings not to be left on carriageway."

Cllr Melanie Hicks (Parish Councillor) -

"Yes, please restore the verge cutting to twice a year with accompanying litter picking once it is done."

Cllr Iona Parker (District Councillor) -

"I did report a junction which needed cutting but was told they verge belonged to a housing association (which was most unlikely). I do not think relying on residents to report dangerous junctions is adequate."

5.0 Consultation with Parish and Town Councils

Nineteen Parish & Town Councils took part in the consultation as well as Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group who were invited to give their feedback and comments.

Q1 - Does your Council support the aims and objectives of the trial? (Which are to protect and support wildlife and improve biodiversity at a local level).

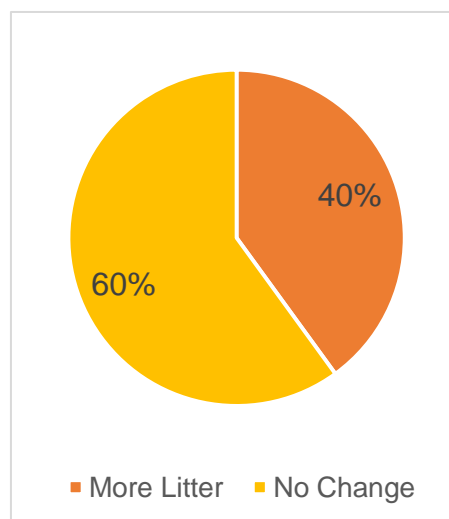
Witham Town Council, Rivenhall Great Notley, Cressing, Castle Hedingham, Bulmer, Hennys Middleton & Twinstead, Wickham St Pauls, Ashen, Pentlow, Rayne, Hatfield Peverel, Belchamp St Paul and Belchamp Otten, White Colne, Feering, Terling and Fairstead Parish Councils and Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group support the aims of the trial.

Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington, Twinstead, Faulkbourne and White Notley Parish Councils do not support the aims of the trial.

Q2 - Has your Council noticed any difference in the levels of littering of the verges across the District?

Witham Town Council, Great Notley, Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington, Castle Hedingham, Bulmer, Hennys Middleton & Twinstead, Wickham St Pauls, Ashen, Rayne, Faulkbourne and White Notley, and White Colne Parish Councils, as well as Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group noted that there was no change in the levels of littering.

Rivenhall, Twinstead, Cressing, Pentlow, Hatfield Peverel, Belchamp St Paul and Belchamp Otten, Feering, Terling and Fairstead Parish Councils noted that there was more litter.



Q3 - What are your Council's thoughts about a reduction in verge cutting (from twice to once a year)?

Witham Town Council -

"It is an excellent and necessary thing to happen. With climate change, loss of pollinators and general insect life allowing the wildflowers to bloom is vital. We have seen an increase in butterflies, bees of all types but still a shortage of wasps. The colour in the verges has been beautiful and much appreciated by most people. Once a year is enough on major routes at junctions only, there is no need to cut back road side verges with hoards of wildflowers giving nature its food source and helping in a small way in soaking up harmful exhaust fumes, as for housing estates only twice a year in the spring and summer, not every month like has been happening in Witham on housing estates all year, instead of sending out mowers, send out litter pickers instead of chopping the litter up into even smaller pieces of litter with over zealous mowing."

Rivenhall Parish Council -

"Given that strategic points can be cut at other intervals there is no problem."

Great Notley Parish Council -

"The Council is supportive of the initiative in that it promoted biodiversity and is beneficial for the environment. The Parish Council would like to underline the point that it is vital that the visibility splays adjacent to junctions and roundabout are maintained for safety reasons and that any reported obscuring of road signs is dealt with promptly."

Twinstead Parish Council -

"Disagree."

Cressing Parish Council -

"Cressing Parish Council supports this to increase bio-diversity, providing the growth and encouragement of wild flowers is controlled and invasive, dangerous and poisonous weeds are removed. There also needs to be assurance that if there are concerns with any particular locations, reports will be acted upon quickly."

Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington Parish Council -

"We would like twice yearly verge cutting to be reinstated. (this was unanimous at our last PC meeting)."

Castle Hedingham Parish Council -

"Castle Hedingham supports an autumn only cut but only if road safety for vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders is taken into full consideration and is not compromised. It is noted that the recent autumn cut in the Castle Hedingham area has left long grass at edge of the verges, presumably because it is more difficult to cut an overgrown verge. This needs to be addressed. Weeds in the roadside gutters are also prolific across the parish due to the lack of a spring cut, so consideration should be given to regular roadside channel sweeping to ensure drainage systems do not become blocked. An autumn only cut is better for promoting species diversity provided it is carried out at the beginning of September."

Bulmer Parish Council -

"Of 7 Parish Councillors, 3 are firmly in opposition to an autumn only cut. The remaining 4 Councillors support an autumn only cut as long as adequate and prompt cutting is carried out at junctions where there are visibility issues and along narrow roads - one Councillor suggests there could be a minimum road width requirement for dispensing of the spring cut. The Parish Clerk would like to add that there was inadequate information for Parish Councils and the public for reporting and getting prompt action for urgent safety cuts. County Councillors and District Councillors also did not seem aware of the reporting mechanism for urgent cuts. The lines of communication for the public to report problems directly to BDC for urgent safety cuts needs to be addressed if the scheme is carried forward for future years."

Hennys, Middleton and Twinstead Parish Council -

"This council does not agree with reducing the verge cutting in the local area to once per year on single track roads."

Wickham St. Pauls Parish Council -

"We agree it is good for wildlife, but can be a issue for traffic visibility. If this is not a cost cutting exercise, why cannot the second verge cut be done in the winter?"

Ashen Parish Council -

"The verges should continue to be cut at least twice a year at junctions and at any other point where there is a safety issue as a result of the reduced visibility. Subject to the above we would support reducing verge cutting generally to once per year."

Pentlow Parish Council -

"Our thoughts are that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work. There are some verges where the once a year cut works and others where a more frequent cut would be preferable for safety reasons. The reduced visibility could be seen as an inconvenience that we have to put up with for the wider cost and environmental benefits. But we would also question the beneficial botanical aspects of a once a year cut. Obviously some plant species will do better with a once a year cut, others would benefit from quarterly cuts. To the untrained eye it did look like grass was the main benefactor of the trial. We're not sure it's the grass that needs the help! What is the true driver of this trial? Is it cost, presented with an environmental badge or is it CO2 emissions? We're not convinced it's biodiversity. And nor are a number of parishioners. In summary we think a more considered targeted once a year cut, with some areas still getting more would work best."

Rayne Parish Council -

"As long as the money saved is reinvested elsewhere and this is accounted for to residents."

Faulkbourne and White Notley Parish Council -

"The verge should be cut regularly and frequently. The traffic drives too quickly as has been recorded by PCC submissions. The lack of verge clearance brings food litter and animals to the side of the road where neither animals nor cats have a chance to see each to avoid collision. The road kill of Muntjack, rabbits, foxes has dramatically increased this year."

Hatfield Peverel Parish Council -

"An annual cut would be the minimum expectation, but two would be the preference of residents who have put in complaints about the state of the verges."

Belchamp St. Paul and Belchamp Otten Parish Council -

"The Parish Council do not support the proposed reduction in verge cutting from twice to once a year. Those living in rural areas will be particularly affected by the proposal, as already narrow 'back roads' will have a further reduction of the available width to pass oncoming traffic and this creates a safety hazard."

White Colne Parish Council -

"Agreed but previous comments apply. Some areas become dangerous if not regularly cut."

Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group -

"From a Wildlife Group perspective, we would like to see verge cutting once a year, but at a time when small mammals such as hedgehogs are hibernating in hedgerows. There are a number of cases reported each year around the country of hedgehogs being killed by council verge mowing and once yearly cutting in late autumn, winter may reduce this. We note from the trial report that nearly all flowers are summer flowing meaning that late cutting is suitable."

Feering Parish Council -

"Whilst Feering Parish Council backs Plantlife.org.uk's 'Managing Grassland Road Verges' publication which BDC could follow, thought needs to be given to amphibians and mammals that use the road verges, such as slow worms and dormice, not just flowers and pollinators to provide maximum biodiversity benefit, and cutting time should be carefully considered. This is why it is good to see BDC cutting Feering's verges in October when slow worms go into hibernation. However, hedgehogs can hide in long grass during the day and thought should be given on how to protect such mammals from cutting machinery. That is where conversing with the likes of the Royal Prevention Society for Hedgehogs and local groups like EssexWildlife Group is important. The reason we raise such things is that Feering and Kelvedon are a hot spot for hedgehogs and Great Crested Newts so understand their needs is just as important as the flowers and bees so that they do not come to any harm when the cut takes place. Removing the grass cuttings is important to allow establishment of seedlings and not make the area too fertile if wildflowers are the main aim of the exercise."

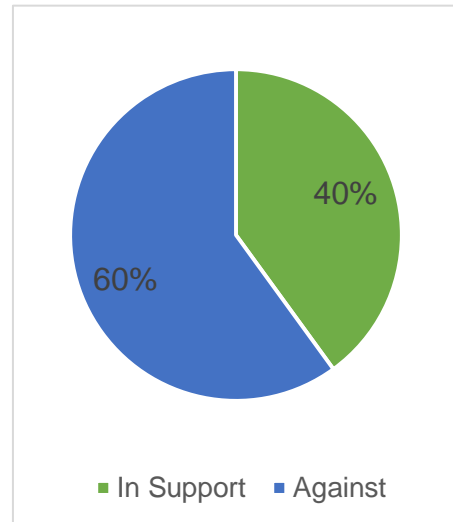
Terling and Fairstead Parish Council -

"NOT A GOOD IDEA."

Q4 - Would your Council support a single cut of the verges in the autumn becoming a permanent arrangement in the District?

Twinstead, Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington, Bulmer, Hennys, Middleton and Twinstead, Wickham St. Pauls, Ashen, Pentlow, Faulkbourne and White Notley, Hatfield Peverel, Belchamp St. Paul and Belchamp Otten, Feering, Terling and Fairstead Parish Councils are against a single cut.

Rivenhall, Great Notley, Cressing, Castle Hedingham, Rayne and White Colne Parish Councils, as well as Witham Town Council and the Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group are in support of a single cut.



Q5 - If you have answered No to Question 5, state why

Twinstead Parish Council -
"Hazards, endangering life."

Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington Parish Council -
"As stated previously, lack of visibility making driving, walking, riding, cycling extremely hazardous. Smothering of smaller, bee friendly roadside plants. Inability to recognise safe places to pull over."

Bulmer Parish Council -
"Bulmer Parish Council could not reach an agreement. 3 Councillors are firmly against an autumn only cut for safety reasons, also commenting that it looked awful and unkempt. Although litter is not noticeably increased, it is pointed out that for pedestrians and horseriders who have to step onto the verge to avoid passing traffic the litter is less visible and therefore difficult to avoid, which might cause injury to people or animals. 4 in favour as long as safety is not compromised. This includes visibility at junctions and safety along narrow roads for pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and vehicles."

Hennys, Middleton and Twinstead Parish Council -
"As described previously, the reduced cutting of the verges of the single track roads in this area has caused accidents, near misses and presents as a danger to all road users."

Wickham St. Pauls Parish Council -
"No the timing of the cutting needs to be better!"

Ashen Parish Council -
"As explained above, we consider that there should be verge cutting at least twice a year at junctions and elsewhere to address the safety issues that arise from the reduced visibility where verge cutting has only been once per year."

Pentlow Parish Council -

"See earlier answer. One size does not fit all."

Faulkbourne and White Notley Parish Council -

"It increases danger to human life and animal life. The public have to walk on the roads as the verges are too long. The roads run through the Faulkbourne Estate which is 3000 acres of mixed arable and woodland with 300 acres of countryside stewardship. The roadside verge cutting offers only marginal gain (if any)."

Hatfield Peverel Parish Council -

"On behalf of residents, who have requested two cuts per year."

Belchamp St. Paul and Belchamp Otten Parish Council -

"Whilst it is accepted that the proposal has advantages for the environment and biodiversity, the Parish Council consider that the increased safety issues for drivers outweighs these benefits."

Feering Parish Council -

"Whilst the Parish Council supports the single cut per year a high cut should be carried out in late July/August with the cut vegetation removed. The cut must include bramble and scrub along the carriageway margin to ensure that the carriageway does not become narrowed and the verges must be monitored for invasive species such as Hogweed. The Parish Council believes that it would also be good to follow the same strategy for urban verges and green spaces and leave these areas uncut. A high cut in late July/August ensures that many flowers complete their life cycles uninterrupted before cutting. It also means that verge vegetation heights should be less of a safety issue in the summer growing months when people are more likely to be out and about and there is also other vegetation around to provide food and shelter for wildlife. Longer verge vegetation over the autumn / winter will provide shelter for wildlife."

Terling and Fairstead Parish Council -

"BECAUSE IT IS NOT ENOUGH, THE ROADS ARE TOO NARROW AND VISIBILITY IS NOT GOOD GENERALLY."

Q6 - Do you have any other comments on verge cutting?

Witham Town Council -

"Cut back where vital but please leave the rest. Let nature take its course and let wildlife regenerate, County Council and District Council are far too eager to send out mowers instead of sending out litter pickers, litter is the problem and littering is made even more of an eyesore with huge mowers just chopping up litter into even smaller parts all over our green spaces."

Great Notley Parish Council -

"It would seem that whereas there is broad support for less verge cutting it will be important for safety issues and in particular visibility at junctions to be kept under review."

Twinstead Parish Council -

"Funding is given to bdc by ecc, please use for intended purpose, cutting edges twice a year."

Cressing Parish Council -

"We support once a year cutting, subject to the comments previously included on this form."

Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington Parish Council -

"Please recommence bi annual cutting."

Castle Hedingham Parish Council -

"Comment from the Hedinghams Heritage Society in response to this consultation: Special verges, like the one in Castle Hedingham along Delvyn's Lane, are species rich and benefit from the one-cut policy providing that this is in September after all seeds have set, and cuttings are promptly lifted and removed from the verge. Local authorities such as Lincolnshire are investing in machinery that can cut and lift cuttings. This will help with public perception. Not only does the verge look less neglected, litter picking is aided and soil fertility is reduced so helping wild flowers to thrive at the expense of fast growing, nutrient loving grasses. There is a network of "special verges" throughout the County, contractors that can cut and lift the vegetation on these verges could be jointly funded by the County and the parishes concerned or the parish could be paid to do their own cutting and lifting. Monies saved by adopting the one-cut policy could be used for this and help preserve many unique, species rich environments of flora and fauna that can be found on our special verges."

Bulmer Parish Council -

"It is noticeable that the recent autumn cutting is leaving long grass at the verge edges. This is not acceptable and will mean longer verges next summer. If an autumn only cut is adopted, it must be ensured that the autumn cut is short and tidy. Attention to roadside channel sweeping is also needed as the weed growth is encouraged by an autumn only cut and could cause more drainage problems in Bulmer, where drain blockages are already a major problem due to lack of attention by Essex Highways."

Hennys, Middleton and Twinstead Parish Council –

"This Parish Council supports the idea behind the reduced cutting and supports it on roads with two lanes where the width and visibility for road users is not impaired."

Wickham St. Pauls Parish Council -

"Why not do a second cut from the road in winter this will slow down the development of grasses in summer? We feel the timing of the cuts could be better. Could the District Council consider to make use of those undertaking Community Service for the cutting and litter picking?"

Rayne Parish Council -

"Ensure litter picking is carried out following the cut. We are concerned that road signage is obscured by vegetation when limited cutting takes place. Particularly speed and warning signs including HGV weight limit signage."

Faulkbourne and White Notley Parish Council -

"The abandonment of verge cutting is clearly a cost saving measure as it reduces calls for litter picking and labour. The rural villages have very little call on public services. They need this work done."

Belchamp St. Paul and Belchamp Otten Parish Council -

"The Parish Council would like to suggest a compromise proposal of a single cut in both the Spring and Autumn. Prior to the trial the specification was a single cut in the Spring and a double width cut in the Autumn. Changing to a single width cut each time would reduce the amount of growth overhanging the carriageway during the Spring/Summer period and so significantly improve conditions for drivers, but it would also leave areas of wider verges uncut to provide some benefit to wildlife and the environment."

White Colne Parish Council -

"Please ensure dangerous areas are considered and that it is easy to report areas that need cutting. Please appreciate the local knowledge of the Council and residents."

Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group -

"1. As a Wildlife Group we have concerns about encouraging bees to areas where neonicotinoids may be sprayed. I understand that the particular neonico harmful to bees has to receive permission from the government to use so is there a way to communicate where they are being used and those verges next to the field cut regularly. As farmers grow sugar beet locally it is something we should be concerned about. 2. As previously mentioned we are concerned about hedgehogs during verge cutting. Hedgehogs do not have a flight response and simply freeze and curl up in a ball at times of danger. They will not run from loud heavy machinery. Cases of hedgehogs being mowed down, mainly mums with babies, as they are sleeping in long grass are reported around the country every year. The trial has identified summer meadow flowers that can be cut in late autumn/winter. Cutting later may help hedgehogs as they would have moved from long grass to hedgerows for winter. Also, please consider the cutting height, cutting higher to avoid small mammals. Checking areas before trimming or using ride-on mowers. A not cut where a season doesn't need cutting. I watched mowing the other day and some sections of the verge did not need cutting. Where possible keeping uncut margins along hedgerows can be very beneficial to wildlife. 3. Perhaps some verges can be mini nature reserves like they do in Norfolk. Perhaps local groups can get involved with this. 4. Use only natural biodegradable pesticides on verges as Norfolk and Dorset do."

Feering Parish Council -

"Aims: We do support the objectives, however thought needs to be given to amphibians and mammals that use the road verges such as slow worms and dormice, not just flowers and pollinators to provide maximum benefit. Littering: There is more litter but that may have co-insided with lockdown restrictions on fast food restaurants and coffee chains being allowed to open when other eateries were not."

Q7 - Is the Parish Council aware of any specific road safety (visibility) issues? If so, state locations below.

Witham Town Council -

"No and as Witham has powers to deal with this, anything minor was expertly dealt with. Verge and Grass cutting only needs to be done at road junctions, cutting down plants / grass through the whole central crash barriers of dual carriageways is total nonsense, causes major problems on these supposed fast links between towns and villages with all the rows of safety cones scattered along the whole length of roadways with no sign of people working in central areas of crash barriers sometimes covering 2 days of disruption on any one stretch of dual carriageway for no benefit to motorists at all."

Rivenhall Parish Council -

"Along Rickstones Road at the bottom of Stoverns Hill where the footpath ends and walkers must cross the road to continue. BDC cut the sightlines upon request from RPC. Also at the exit of Footpath 49 onto Oak Road where walkers have difficulty observing on-coming vehicles. RPC's maintenance contractor cut this sightline."

Great Notley Parish Council -

"It has been noticed that on the A131 Great Notley bypass some of the road signs have become obscured as the vegetation has grown so high. In particular the signage to Gridserve charging station can not be seen and on the opposite carriageway directional signage for the roundabout is obscured. Comments have also been made about the importance of making sure that visibility at junctions and roundabouts should remain clear for safety reasons although at present no specific problem has been observed."

Twinstead Parish Council -

"Single track lanes, become more difficult to pass another vehicle, cyclists, walkers, horse riders all experience difficulty passing vehicles or each other. Junctions difficult to view oncoming vehicles of all types. Sign posts being put up in silly places not helping. It's a major hazard leaving the hedges to grow so high, especially when they contain mainly thistles."

Cressing Parish Council -

"There have been issues with visibility splays at some road junctions, both on minor roads as well as the B1018. In the latter case, the reduction in verge cutting between Millennium Way and Galleys Corner has caused concern as sight line is much reduced by vegetation, although this has now been cut."

Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington Parish Council -

"The Parish Council is strongly of the opinion that all our small, narrow country roads had their visibility severely impaired. Not only this, when meeting oncoming vehicles it was impossible to tell where it was safe to pull over without hitting rocks or landing in ditches. Whilst we support the idea of supporting wild life, very few mammals/birds nest close to the road side where they can be reached by dogs (even on leads) and smaller, pollen plants such as clover were completely smothered by brambles, long grass and nettles."

Castle Hedingham Parish Council -

"Sudbury Road/ Maplestead Road junction, and the whole length of Maplestead Road along blind bends to Great Maplestead. Sudbury Road/ Rosemary Lane junction. Sudbury Road / Wickham St Paul junction."

Bulmer Parish Council -

"Crossroads of Bulmer Street, Sudbury Road, Church Road and Smeetham Hall Lane. Junction Church Road with A131 Sudbury Road. Finch Hill junction with Sudbury Road. Upper Houses Lane (known as Green Lane locally) whole length of this narrow lane. Sandy Lane. All narrow roads, particularly those with blind bends."

Hennys, Middleton and Twinstead Parish Council -

"There have been countless complaints from road users (cars, vans, horses, bicycles and walkers) of the incredible danger that the increased size of verges on single track roads with only a few passing places has caused. There have been many near misses and indeed some accidents due to decreased visibility. The council appreciates that the verges remaining uncut is a great idea, but in practice, this works on roads with two lanes and potentially space at the sides, but on roads that are very narrow to begin with this is a hazard to all road users."

Wickham St. Pauls Parish Council -

"The vegetation at the junctions at Church Road, Old Road (A131) and Catley Cross restricts the view of vehicles entering and exiting the village is a hazard."

Ashen Parish Council -

"The Council is concerned that visibility has been reduced at junctions on roads in the area and has concluded that the verges should continue to be cut at least twice a year at junctions and at any other point where there is a safety issue as a result of the reduced visibility. Subject to the above we would support reducing verge cutting generally to once per year."

Pentlow Parish Council -

"Yes. On Pentlow Street (a narrow lane) it was not possible to see oncoming traffic until the last moment on bends. Visibility at junctions was also reduced. On the narrow lanes that run south of Buntings farm (no names on the map) visibility was also greatly reduced at bends and junctions. One of these is Mill Road."

Rayne Parish Council -

"Queenborough Lane, Braintree Green/Rayne. Felsted junction with Dunmow Road."

Faulkbourne and White Notley Parish Council -

"Junctions on Faulkbourne Road from (a) Home Farm Road (b) Troy's Farm track (c) Grove Track (d) Pink Lane have very badly affected sight lines which have led to numerous skids and one crash."

Hatfield Peverel Parish Council -

"There are numerous blind bends and junctions where it is physically impossible to see oncoming traffic because the view is obscured by tall grass and overgrown trees and bushes. It is recommended to clear a section of every corner and road junction to give motorists a clear view of the adjacent highway - a prime example is the junction of Jenkins Lane and Ulting Road in Nounsley where it is totally impossible to see if anything is approaching from Ulting without being halfway across Ulting Road."

Belchamp St. Paul and Belchamp Otten Parish Council -

"Many of the local inter village roads in this area are narrow (less than standard double width carriageway), which frequently requires vehicles to pull onto the verges to pass oncoming traffic. Not cutting the verges until the autumn means that the grass along the roadside verges grows tall and hangs over the carriageway. This in itself narrows the available road width but it also deters drivers from pulling onto the verge because they cannot see the surface they are pulling onto."

White Colne Parish Council -

"The Council supports the trial in principle but some areas became dangerous where growth obstructed traffic and pedestrian vision, such as at bell mouths and road junctions. It is felt that it is not easy to report urgent issues to get a quick solution."

Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group -

"I believe areas of concern were highlighted and resolved."

Feering Parish Council -

"There are instances where there have been issues with sight lines on smaller roads, for example the exit junction from Scrip's Road onto the B1024 where lines of sight was an issues. However, after reporting the issue, it was dealt with promptly and a report informing what the verge team found was sent over. If it is well publicised how people can raise concerns that is very useful. Verges serve as refuges for walkers on country lanes to step out of the way of vehicular traffic. When verge vegetation becomes long, it is not possible to see what someone would be stepping onto and into (stinging nettles, brambles) so this safety feature is lost. BDC / Parish Councils could arrive at a cutting plan which would ensure that there are safe sight lines on bends and junctions with higher vegetation and country lanes used by pedestrians which have no footway."

Q8 - Has your Council received any feedback from parishioners about the reduced frequency of verge cutting across the District? (If yes, state below)

Witham Town Council -

"Via FaceBook most people loved the change but as always some didn't. Overall the reaction of residents was positive and we look forward to future years of twice a year cutting. No Feedback from public other than 'here we go again the litter choppers are out again'".

Rivenhall Parish Council -

"Only as previously shown."

Great Notley Parish Council -

"Yes there has been a discussion on the Parish Council's Facebook page. A number of residents welcomed the fact that there is less cutting of the verges citing the benefit to the environment and providing habitats for insects, bees and wildlife. Those people also liked the wilder appearance of the verges. Other people were not happy and did not like the appearance saying it looked scruffy and unkept and should be cut right back. Comments were also made on visibility with some people saying that it is not possible to see over the central reservation, other complaining that signs are obscured and also complaints that visibility at the roundabouts is not good enough. Overall subject to safety issues being addressed the majority of those who commented on the thread were broadly in favour of leaving the verges to grow and be cut less often."

Twinstead Parish Council -

"Yes all unhappy views noted previous question."

Cressing Parish Council -

"A number of residents have complained that vegetation has caused problems on some roads, such as Polecat Road, where the verge has grown across the footpath causing pedestrians, many of whom are taking children to Cressing Primary School, to walk in the path of oncoming traffic. Parish Councils should be requested to provide details of roads and verges that need cutting more than once a year for safety reasons."

Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington Parish Council -

"There has been considerable grumbling about lack of visibility. We have not heard from anyone in favour of reduced cutting."

Castle Hedingham Parish Council -

"Yes, some positive comments have been received about the environmental benefit. Concerns were expressed about road safety, in particular cyclists feeling more vulnerable due to the overgrown verges effectively shrinking the space available at the roadside. Poor visibility at junctions was reported. Comments have been received suggesting that money saved by not carrying out a spring verge cut should be diverted into Highway repair programmes, including keeping drains clear."

Bulmer Parish Council -

"Yes and this was very time consuming and stressful for the clerk who was inundated with complaints from members of the public which were initially impossible to resolve. Poor visibility at junctions and danger to pedestrians and horse riders plus damage to vehicles along uncut narrow roads were the principle complaints."

Hennys, Middleton and Twinstead Parish Council -

"Yes - many parishioners have contacted the Parish Council following accidents, near misses and to report how dangerous the single track roads in the area have become due to the reduced cutting of verges."

Wickham St. Pauls Parish Council -

"We have received several parishioners raising concerns/complaints about visibility and local farmers and volunteers have been out to cut back the vegetation before a accident happens."

Ashen Parish Council -

"While there has been favourable comment about the effect on the flora along the roads in the area, concerns have also been expressed about the safety issues to which we have referred above."

Pentlow Parish Council -

"Yes. We have received anecdotal feedback from a number of parishioners about the reduced visibility, particularly in narrower roads, at bends and at junctions. We have also received some 'complaints' from walkers about overgrown areas on footpaths."

Rayne Parish Council -

"Yes:- Starting from Perkins Garage in Rayne and walking towards the centre of Braintree. 1) For several months at the start of the year water was flooding across the pavement that eventually led to a growth of slippery green slime thus it was safer to walk in the road than on the pavement. 2) A section of pavement has grass on both sides that due to lack of verge cutting covered the path. 3) Near Honeycomb Storage (see picture in June) the hedge and verge expanded so much that we had to walk in the road. 4) A further section of pavement has grass on both sides (roadside nature reserve) that due to lack of verge cutting covered the path. I have seen other people walking on the road in wet weather rather than use this piece of pavement. 5) The crossroads with traffic lights in Rayne. Due to an abysmal design half of the population of Rayne has to cross the road 3 times to access the pavement to Braintree. 6) Going downhill just out of Rayne and then up a slight slope we come to a section of pavement (see picture in June) where the verge and hedge expanded so much that the road has to be crossed. 7) The path on the south side of the road is now not much better as the verge is in severe need of trimming. 8) The roundabout is then another example of ignoring the needs of walkers. In order to cross the B1256 coming from the right you have to walk into the road to see if anything is coming (there are bushes cunningly placed so that you cannot see traffic from the pavement and traffic cannot see you). Having crossed half way to the traffic island you cannot see what is approaching (often fast) from Springwood Drive due to the bushes on the centre of the roundabout."

Faulkbourne and White Notley Parish Council -
"Yes frequent complaints."

Hatfield Peverel Parish Council -
"Yes, many complaints received regarding the state of the verges in Spring in particular, when there was excessive growth. Residents felt it looked untidy, as well as causing visibility issues at some junctions (for example one mentioned was Willow Crescent into Church Road)."

Belchamp St. Paul and Belchamp Otten Parish Council -
"Many residents have informed us that they do not support this proposal because it makes driving on rural roads more difficult and more dangerous."

White Colne Parish Council -
"Yes - mostly concerns about dangerous areas and verges being overgrown where there are not path ways. When the verges are over grown, the children, elderly and physically challenged cannot walk on them."

Feering & Kelvedon Wildlife Group -
"As a Wildlife Group we have had some comments on an article we posted on Nextdoor. There were mixed feelings about the trial. Some people loved the verges because they could see the benefits to wildlife and reported seeing more butterflies than in previous years. Some people were concerned about safety but with no details as to why they did, and a few people thought the verges looked untidy."

Feering Parish Council -
"We have had comments from residents that feel it looks untidy and unkept. When we have explained the reasons behind it they understand it but feel that signage or information would be really useful to deter from people thinking we live in an unloved and run-down area."

Terling and Fairstead Parish Council -
"MOST ARE NOT HAPPY AS THEY THINK IT IS DANGEROUS, OUR ROADS ARE TOO NARROW TO SUSTAIN THIS."

6.0 Results

Unlike the feedback received from the Year 1 trial which had clear and consistent support for a single autumn cut; the Year 2 trial received mixed views.

The response to the consultation questionnaire was low and this is summarised in the table below.

Total Responses	No. of Replies	In favour of Single cut in Autumn	Prefer 2 cuts a year
Year 1 2020	21	18 (86%)	3 (14%)
Year 2 2021	31	14 (45%)	17 (55%)

The Year 2 results may be attributed to the excellent growing weather in 2021 which resulted in significant growth in vegetation along roadside verges, exacerbating issues with visibility and prompting complaints about safety for road users.

There was no noticeable increase in litter. However, litter picking was more difficult in the uncut verges and led to street cleansing operatives raising concerns of trips and falls on undulating ground with rabbit holes which could not be seen.

Some verges showed evidence of thriving flora and fauna.

7.0 Conclusion

There was greater support for a single autumn cut in Year 1 than in Year 2.

The growing season (wet or dry) has an impact on road users' perception of safety and this was particularly apparent in wet seasons like the one in Year 2, especially in rural areas with narrow, winding roads.

Uncut verges did not attract greater litter from passing traffic. However, from a practical perspective, litter picking was more difficult in the longer vegetation, raising trip hazard concerns from some of the street cleansing operatives.

Roadside verges are generally perceived to be the same, however, each of them are unique in their own ways with different soils and varying factors as to what grows and how they react to being cut. Without two cuts per year, more dominant species will increase over the years, reducing opportunities for flowering species to grow.

The majority of Parish and Town Councils noted that their parishioners complained about the increased risks to road users caused by reduced visibility from overgrown verges. It is clear that there is an expectation from residents that the Council maintains the verges as it has been doing so for a great number of years.

Residents are keen to support environmentally beneficial projects, however, we did not carry out any empirical assessment of the actual impact on the environment or biodiversity so any conclusions in this regard are subjective.

There is a case to investigate the actual ecological benefits/dis-benefits of a single or two cut maintenance regime on the rural verges, taking into account the different types of verges e.g. soil structures and biodiversity. A data led trial on the biodiversity of rural verges in the District would provide an informed and more scientific basis for policy makers to decide on any new long term maintenance regime changes.

Taking into account the slight majority of consultation respondents being against a single cut, it is suggested that further consideration is given for detailed analysis to be undertaken of the environmental benefits of a single autumn cut per year.