

FULL COUNCIL – 8 JULY 2015

Written question from Councillor Bob Seely to Councillor Phil Jordan, Executive Member for Public Protection and PFI

Written question re verges and wildflowers

- a. Could the Council please make a statement on verge cutting? I am very aware that this is not the most important issue facing the Council, but every year around this time I receive complaints about the verge cutting throughout the Island.
- b. When this Independent Administration came in it declared its intent to change the verge cutting regime. Cutting was to be done more sensitively to support the idea of using verges as biodiversity corridors. Cutting was to mirror best practised as pioneered by County Councils such as Devon. I personally contacted Devon County Council, was sent, and passed to the Council, documents from Devon about verge cutting, as well as the points of contacts.
- c. When I met with Councillors and Council Officials in the first year of this Council we discussed increasing the number of 'no cut' corridors, cutting **more** around visibility splays to improve safety, but cutting **less** along other parts of the road, where appropriate, to allowing flowering, and identifying areas which we could use to re-seed rare species. There was a clear signal from the Council that improving verge cutting was not about either safety/or promotion of wildflowers, but, with a bit of thought, could be both.
- d. Other Councils manage it, and have extensive verge management policies. Hants CC has 224 verges under special management due to their ecological importance. Dorset CC has a 13-page guide to verges. Devon CC has pioneered intelligent verge cutting to combine safety and environmental care.
- e. On the Isle of Wight, it appears that not only are verges being cut as before, but open spaces along the road are also now being cut back to the hedge line rather than being allowed to grow. Rubbish does not appear to be being cleared.
- f. Can you explain if the administration's 'green' agenda is happening? Can you state please whether this 'Independent' Administration believes that verges should be used as biodiversity corridors? Can you tell me how you intend to improve the quality of verge cutting to live up to the agenda you intended to pursue? If there is a lack of capability in the Council or Island Roads to undertake this task, will you consider taking advice from other County Councils

Response

I can advise that the council does have a rural grass cutting policy that reflects the balance between safety matters and the need to conserve and where possible enhance biodiversity. The council has 25 stretches of verge which have been identified where the cutting regime is managed to reduce impact upon the biological impact. I fully concur with Councillor Seely that a grass cutting policy can reflect both aims and as part of the ongoing discussions with Island Roads this has been identified as an area for review where in addition the council will look to achieve contract savings.