

Director of Engineering Memorandum DEM 193/22

Title	Verge Management (Grass Cutting)
Version	1
Purpose	This memorandum provides direction on the management of grass verges along the road network. It sets out the frequency of grass cutting on the various categories of roads to promote biodiversity enhancement practices. It also provides guidance on other environmental projects associated with verge management
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All enquiries or comments to:

DfI Roads Headquarters
Traffic and Development Control Policy Unit
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB

Email: roadsengineeringsservices@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk
Phone: 028 9054 0540

Scope

This document supersedes the sections of DEM 160/21 'Road Maintenance Standards for Safety – Limited Service in 2021/22', and those included within RsPPG E019 'Road Maintenance Standards for Safety', pertaining to grass cutting.

This Memorandum applies to all DfI staff, consultants, contractors and other stakeholders involved in the design, management and maintenance of road verges, and other grass areas on the adopted road network maintained by DfI.

Background

DfI cuts roadside grass to prevent overgrowth onto footway and carriageway surfaces and obstruction of sightlines and traffic signs. Grass cutting operations are carried out by DfI for road safety reasons and not for cosmetic or amenity purposes. The work is completed under the terms of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 which places a duty on the Department to maintain the road network.

The approach to verge management set out in this DEM seeks to increase the focus on environmental benefit, without compromising on roads safety or our duties to deal with noxious weeds on DfI maintained land. In general, the amount of cutting is to be kept to a minimum to protect wildlife and promote biodiversity in accordance with the requirements of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011.

Frequency of Grass Cutting

Table 1 below outlines the frequency of grass cutting on the various categories of public road under the control of Dfl.

Table 1 – Grass cutting frequency

RURAL ROADS			
Types of Road	Element	Frequency	Area to be cut
Motorway and Dual Carriageways	Verge and median	2 cuts/year	1 swathe
	Sight lines	2 cuts/year or more if required	As required
Other Strategic roads (trunk road network)	Verge	2 cuts/year	1 swathe
	Sight lines	2 cuts/year or more if required	As required
Non-Strategic roads	Verge	2 cuts/year or 1 cut/year on lightly trafficked roads	1 swathe
	Sight lines	2 cuts/year or more if required	As required
URBAN ROADS			
Dual Carriageways	All adopted areas	2 cuts/year	1 swathe
Other roads	All adopted flat areas and small side slopes	2 cuts/year	1 swathe*
All	Sight lines	2 cuts/year or more if required	As required
Footways/Footpaths			
All	Areas adjacent to adopted footways/footpaths	2 cuts/year	1 swathe (both sides of footpaths)
<i>*Dfl as Client may instruct additional areas to be cut on specific sites.</i>			
Don't Mow Let It Grow sites			
DMLIG sites, or other relevant biodiversity enhancement sites, shall be managed in accordance with the site-specific maintenance regime.			
DBFO/PPP managed areas			
DBFO areas shall be managed in accordance with the requirements contained within the relevant Contract.			

Strategic Roads

On the Trunk Road Network cutting a single swathe (typically not less than 1.0m) of grass two times per year is justified due to the higher traffic volumes and the increased road safety risk associated with this. These higher traffic volumes and speeds also diminish the biodiversity value of the verge area immediately adjacent to the carriageway along these routes, as outlined in research conducted by [Philips et al., 2019](#), published in the Journal of Applied Ecology.

Visibility splays at road junctions are to be cut at least twice per year to enable road users to see on-coming traffic when exiting the junction.

Areas of grass and vegetation that would compromise forward visibility, such as at bends, can be cut at least twice each year to enable road users to see on-coming traffic or other hazards, although the extent of the area should be kept to a minimum. No additional cutting shall be carried out to facilitate private, commercial or other entrances / accesses onto the public road network.

The area around traffic signs and street furniture can be cut twice per year so these remain clearly visible to road users and to assist with the maintenance of these assets.

At or adjacent to central reservation crossover points grass is to be cut at least twice a year to maintain the required visibility splays.

Rural Roads

Rural grass cutting of one swathe at the edge of each side of the road or footway along heavier trafficked roads is to take place twice per year. Where possible the cutting frequency for lighter trafficked roads is to be reduced to once per year, towards the end of the growing season. Additional areas of grass, outside of that routinely programmed may be cut to maintain visibility splays at junctions and around bends where forward visibility is required, however these areas should be kept to a minimum. No additional cutting shall be carried out to facilitate private, commercial or other entrances / accesses onto the public road network.

Unless prescribed by site-specific maintenance requirements, cuttings will not be collected.

Urban Roads

Urban grass cutting of one swathe at the edge of each side of the road or footway is to take place twice per year.

Additional areas of grass, outside of the normal one swathe may be cut to maintain visibility splays at junctions and around bends where forward visibility is required, however these areas should be kept as small as possible. No additional cutting shall be carried out to facilitate private, commercial or other entrances / accesses onto the public road network.

Unless prescribed by site-specific maintenance requirements, generally cuttings will not be collected.

Footways/Footpaths

Grass cutting of one swathe adjacent to footways and on both sides of a footpath is to be carried out twice per year.

Grass Cutting Operations outside of DfI Roads Control

While DfI is responsible for grass cutting of verges along the adopted road network in accordance with the policy requirements, other parties, such as local Councils, and adjacent land and property owners, often cut these areas more frequently. These parties should be encouraged to recognise the environmental benefit of roadside verges and adopt the approach set out in this document.

Management of Soft Estate

The long-term management and maintenance needs of areas of soft estate not subjected to regular scheduled grass cutting should be assessed on a site-specific basis. Maintenance intervention (manual or mechanical) of such areas may be required for the selective removal of saplings and targeted weed control.

Re-wilding

Road verges are an important habitat for many species of insects and animals. In the context of road verges, the benefits of re-wilding can be optimised

through identifying areas which are species rich, or have the potential to become so, and effectively managing the maintenance of these in order to maximise their biodiversity value, particularly during the growing season. The ‘Don’t Mow Let It Grow’ (DMLIG) project was based on this principle. DfI will liaise with representatives from local Councils and other relevant stakeholders to identify additional sites which could become DMLIG areas, with the aim of enhancing their available biodiversity resource. When possible, these areas should be managed by third parties under the terms of RsPPG_E004.

In support of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) DfI is committed to continue the promotion of pollinator-friendly management of the strategic road network in NI and to reviewing environmental policies to promote pollinator-friendly practices and to encourage their inclusion on road schemes, where practicable.

Biodiversity enhancement projects

DfI will identify areas of land on the network for the creation of wildflower meadows or tree planting with the aim of improving biodiversity. This work may involve re-soiling of areas, or not using topsoil on newly formed cuttings or embankments, and planting of wildflower seeds in soils with a low nutrient content. When possible, these areas should be managed by third parties under the terms of RsPPG_E004.

PPP and DBFO Routes

Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) contracts require the DBFO contractor to produce a Habitat Baseline Survey for the extent of the area they manage and to update this on a 5-year cycle. The survey report and subsequent reviews are required to identify recommendations to deliver biodiversity enhancement over the areas managed.

References

1. [DEM 160/21 ‘Road Maintenance Standards for Safety – Limited Service in 2021/22’](#)
2. [Road maintenance standards RsPPG E019 | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#)
3. Roads (NI) Order 1993

4. Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011
5. Wildlife (NI) Order 1985
6. Noxious Weeds (NI) Order 1977
7. [RsPPG E004 Privately funded planting of roundabouts, road verges and Dfl Car Parks](#)
8. [All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025](#)
9. [Phillips BB, Gaston KJ, Bullock JM, Osborne JL. Road verges support pollinators in agricultural landscapes, but are diminished by heavy traffic and summer cutting. Journal of Applied Ecology, 2019](#)

Equality

This policy has been considered under S75 screening process. It has been screened out and as such a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

Rural Needs

This policy has undergone Rural Needs proofing and as such a full Rural Needs Assessment is not required.

Privacy

No personal information will be gathered as a result of the application of this DEM so a Privacy Impact Assessment is not required.

David Porter BEng (Hons) MSc CEng FICE

Director of Engineer

Transport and Road Asset Management

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