

GRASS VERGES NEWTON-IN-CARTMEL

It has recently been brought to the Parish Council's attention that local residents are concerned about the appearance of the grass verges which were planted when the new by-pass was completed.

Background

Cumbria Highways does carry out a 1.2m 'safety cut' of verges on roads where there are safety or visibility issues. The road through Newton no longer falls within this category and so the County Council will not be responsible for cutting the grass verges.

Before de-trunking, the Parish Council was asked informally if we would consider taking on responsibility for maintaining the verges. Discussions about how this might be done did take place, and the possibility of including the work in the summer cuts carried out by a contractor was raised. However it was made clear that the Parish Council could not consider the matter formally without full details of the landscaping because any additional work by the contractor would need to be fully costed.

2008/09 budgeting took place in October/November 2007 when the details of the proposed landscaping were still not agreed. This meant that the Parish Council were unable to make any budget provision for cutting the verges for 2008/09.

When the Finance Meeting was held in November 2008 to agree a budget on which our share of Council Tax (i.e. the precept) would be based, the Parish Council had to make some very difficult decisions in order to be able to keep any increase in the precept to a minimum. Among other cost-cutting measures, we decided to reduce the cycle of grass-cutting for parish owned areas to a monthly cycle instead of every three weeks from March to October.

These difficult decisions were made when the effects of the economic downturn were becoming apparent. Any increase in spending by the Parish Council has to be passed on to local residents and Members agreed that this would be inappropriate in the current economic climate. We all agreed that in planning for 2009/10 we needed to be as prudent as possible.

We appreciate that some local residents have made some effort to cut parts of the new verges and applaud their community spirit, however an *ad hoc* approach does not achieve the most visually pleasing result.

Suggested Action

It has been suggested that in view of the financial constraints of both CCC and the Parish Council, local residents might consider forming a community group to take on voluntary maintenance of the verges. This could be approached in a number of ways; there could be some community fundraising to purchase some equipment and a working party or rota arrangement could be set up. This project might be very positive for local community engagement and would provide a chance for residents to be actively involved in influencing the visual appearance of their village, e.g. planting of bulbs etc.

Of course the Parish Council is keen for all areas of the parish to be as attractive as possible; however the only way in which we could maintain land which is neither owned by the parish nor the responsibility of the Parish Council would be to fund this by increasing the precept and adding the cost to local residents' council tax bills.

Budget planning for 2010/11 will take place in November 2009. Before this, the Parish Council proposes consulting all local residents of Lindale and High and Low Newton to ask about priorities for spending and the possible increased council tax which might result. We plan to consider several projects as well as more general maintenance and running costs so that our decisions can be based on consultation with the local community about these and the potential costs of the various options.

Meantime, if you would be interested in forming a community group to take responsibility for the maintenance of the new grass verges in Newton please contact Clerk to the Parish Council Debbie Cowperthwaite on 015395 33091 or by email clerk@allithwaiteupperpc.net by 30 September 2009.

Parish Council Vacancy

The Parish Council currently has a Vacancy for Newton Ward. Please contact Mrs D Cowperthwaite Clerk for further details if interested on 015395 33091 or email clerk@allithwaiteupperpc.net