

Grass Maintenance Petition- Buckle Ave Cleator Moor

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Peter Kane

LEAD OFFICER: Keith Parker, Head of Neighbourhood Services

REPORT AUTHOR: John Davis ,Parks Manager

WHAT BENEFITS WILL THESE PROPOSALS BRING TO COPELAND RESIDENTS?

The report is presented as a requirement of the Council's constitution, supporting public engagement in the democratic process.

WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE EXECUTIVE?

(eg Key Decision, Policy recommendation for Full Council, at request of Council,etc.)

To follow the Councils Constitution Rule 19 which specifies at 19.1 All petitions addressed to the Council shall be considered by the Executive or relevant committee at its next meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Executive note the points raised in the on-line petition submitted regarding the standard of grass maintenance at Buckle Ave, Cleator Moor, and confirms no change to the Council's policy in relation to grounds maintenance of such areas.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 As Executive will be acutely aware as a result of public sector spending constraints the Council is having to reduce its expenditure significantly from some £15 million a few years ago to a likely £9 million next year. Cuts of this magnitude mean that the Council has, and will have to continue to, consider very carefully what services it provides and especially for non-statutory services, to what standard. This budget reduction means the Council no longer can afford to provide services our citizens have come to expect and we will have to increasingly focus expenditure on those services we are obliged to provide by law, such as refuse collection and environmental health. One of the more visible manifestations of the Council's difficult policy decisions in discretionary services

is the reduction in grass cutting standards. Our parks department has reduced its summer staffing level by 8 people and the equipment previously used by the team is no longer with us. Areas which were formerly being cut once a fortnight can now only be cut once or twice a year. The cost of grass cutting was removed from the current year budget as part of the £1.7m savings identified by members to allow a balanced budget to be set. Re instating these costs will require an additional, sustainable saving of equivalent value to be found.

1.2 An on-line petition is being promoted regarding the standard of Grass maintenance at Buckle Ave, Cleator Moor. The petition is asking that the Council “...*maintain grass surrounding area of park on buckle avenue cleator moor Generations of Children have enjoyed playing here now for decades they are now being forced to play on dangerous roads as the grass is so long. Dog owners are having to leave dog mess behind as they are unable to pick it up and people are using the long grass to dump rubbish in. What was once a haven for children playing is now no more than an overgrown dumping ground and dog toilet due to council neglect. It is only a matter of time until a child is blinded or knocked down*”.

1.3 Buckle Ave is one of the many areas affected by the policy led reduction in grass cutting regime from 14 cuts per year to the present standard of one cut per year following.

1.4 The petition refers to this area as a park area, this area is open space amenity ground rather than a formal park, there is no play equipment or other formal sports facilities within the site which would have resulted in a higher maintenance standard if there had been.

1.5 The petition has currently attracted approx. 150 submissions, appended to this report. (number to be updated prior to Exec).

2. PROPOSALS

2.1 The Council has received related concerns of a similar nature as this area for other areas throughout the Borough. Following the budget reductions agreed by Council in February this year the team have reduced in both full time and seasonal staff and the grass cutting machinery that supported the former maintenance standards has been returned to our fleet provider. Therefore we are not in a position to re-instate any of the former grass cutting frequencies, unless a long term commitment can be agreed to enable us to source replacement grass cutting equipment and other resources. As a non-statutory function the Council has made the policy decision to reduce grounds maintenance standards against an extremely challenging financial climate and at a time when the governmental agenda is to reduce the public sector to the bare minimum whilst ‘encouraging’ residents and businesses step into the gap left by public sector cuts.

Accordingly the proposal is that the Council's policy towards grass cutting remains unchanged.

2.2 At the time of writing it is understood that Cleator Moor Town Council is seeking to put in place arrangements to put in a number of grass cuts in areas formerly managed to a higher standard by this Council. We understand that a limited area at Buckle Avenue is likely to be part of this arrangement.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

3.1 The revenue budget to be increased to maintain all these areas to previous standards, a requirement of some £80,000 p.a

5. STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS

- 5.1 The Monitoring Officer's comments are: Council Procedure Rules require petitions to be reported to next available meeting of Executive or relevant committee. No other comments.
- 5.2 The Section 151 Officer's comments are: The cost of grass cutting was removed from the current year budget as part of the £1.7m savings identified by members to allow a balanced budget to be set.
Re instating these costs will require an additional, sustainable saving of equivalent value to be found.
The spending review announced on 26 June 2013, indicated a further cut of 10% to our funding which has resulted in a funding gap of circa £1m for 2014/15. The council is having to make hard choices in order to deliver its statutory duties within the available resources.
- 5.3 EIA Comments - A Full EIA was carried out prior to the policy decision being agreed as part of wider budget proposals.
- 5.4 Policy Framework Comments - As referred to in the report at section 2. The proposal supports the Council's Policy Framework.
- 5.5 Other consultee comments, if any: None

6. WHAT MEASURABLE OUTCOMES OR OUTPUTS WILL ARISE FROM THIS REPORT?

7.1 If the recommendation is accepted the Council's saving requirement of the Parks Department remains on target.

List of Appendices: None

List of Background Documents: On-line petition – a hard copy is tabled for this Executive meeting.