

**CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY SERVICES AND ASSETS COMMITTEE
OFFICER REPORT- OPEN SPACES**

Date: 30 July 2026

Purpose

This report provides Members with an update on the work currently being undertaken by the Open Spaces Team, together with ongoing maintenance activities, service pressures and areas requiring attention.

Grass Cutting and Grounds Maintenance

The published grass-cutting schedule is continuing across the Parish. Most sites receive a monthly cut between May and September, subject to weather conditions and operational priorities.

Station Green and the Cemetery continue to receive additional attention throughout the year due to their higher public use and visibility.

The prolonged period of dry weather has created challenges this year. Whilst grass growth has reduced in many locations, weed growth has increased significantly, particularly on hard surfaces.

Members will recall that Full Council approved the use of weed treatment on hard surfaces. This is already making a noticeable difference. Previously, weeds were strimmed but would often regrow within days. The treatment programme should reduce repeat visits and improve the appearance of key locations. Areas around Victory Hall and the Community Hub have already benefited from this work.

The team also must balance routine grounds maintenance with cemetery operations, including burials and grave preparation, which remain a priority and can occasionally affect scheduled maintenance elsewhere.

The Paddocks

Members will be aware of the recent issues at The Paddocks where residents cut areas of grass themselves.

Following discussions with those involved, it became apparent that there was some confusion regarding the purpose of the site and how it is managed.

The Paddocks is intended to remain a natural habitat area and is managed using a pathway-cutting approach rather than being maintained as a traditional open grass space.

To help avoid future misunderstandings, officers have spoken with nearby residents, and new signage is being arranged. This will explain:

- The Council's ownership of the site.
- Its purpose as a natural habitat area.
- That grass pathways are maintained by the Council.
- That unauthorised grass cutting is not permitted.
- That activities such as barbecues, gazebos and amplified music are not permitted.

The signage is expected to be installed in the coming weeks.

Maypole Area

Members may be aware that questions have previously been raised regarding maintenance responsibilities around the Maypole area.

Following clarification of ownership and maintenance responsibilities, Essex County Council has now incorporated this location within its highways grass-cutting programme.

This resolves a long-standing issue and provides certainty regarding future maintenance arrangements.

Courtland Drive

Some concerns continue to be raised regarding vegetation and habitat management at Courtland Drive.

Officers are continuing to engage with residents and will seek to strike an appropriate balance between resident expectations and the Council's biodiversity and habitat obligations.

Litter and Cleanliness

Litter continues to be one of the biggest challenges for the team, particularly at Station Green and some surrounding areas.

Regular litter picking is carried out; however, officers continue to encounter overflowing bins and general littering.

Several options are currently being explored, including:

- Additional signage.
- Different bin arrangements.
- Engagement with local food outlets.
- Community-led initiatives.

Issues continue to arise from larger takeaway packaging, which often exceeds the capacity of existing litter bins.

Staffing and Vehicle Challenges

The team continues to work through a busy summer period whilst managing annual leave and reduced staffing levels.

There will be periods where only one of us is available to undertake open spaces duties. Members may therefore notice that some lower-priority work takes longer to complete during these periods.

The lack of an operational vehicle has also had an impact on service delivery. A temporary larger hire vehicle is now in use and has proved extremely beneficial.

The increased carrying capacity allows larger quantities of green waste, vegetation cuttings, litter and materials to be moved in a single trip. This has reduced travel time and improved productivity significantly.

The experience has also highlighted some of the limitations of the Council's existing electric vehicle, particularly when undertaking vegetation clearance and waste collection. The team can complete more work with fewer journeys using the larger vehicle.

Future vehicle requirements will form part of the wider review of Cemetery and Open Spaces operations later this year.

Current Priorities

The team continues to focus on:

- Cemetery support and burial activities.
- Grass cutting and grounds maintenance.
- Weed control.
- Litter management.
- Vegetation management.
- Safety inspections.
- Responding to resident reports and complaints.

Daily discussions take place to prioritise work and ensure resources are focused on the areas of greatest need.

Projects and Additional Works

Members should be aware that team capacity was further impacted during the reporting period due to completion of the new fire escape pathway project at Victory Hall. This project required a significant commitment of officer time and resources, with the Open

Spaces Team dedicating most of a working week, together with weekend working where necessary, to ensure the project was completed safely and within the agreed timescales.

To minimise disruption to frontline services, annual leave and rest days were managed around the programme of works. Whilst this project was planned and scheduled, it coincided with what is traditionally one of the busiest periods of the year for the Open Spaces Team, particularly given seasonal grounds maintenance demands and cemetery commitments.

In addition to the fire escape pathway project, the team has also undertaken improvement works to areas surrounding Victory Hall and the Community Hub. This has included carrying out repairs to sections of the car park surface, removing substantial weed growth, and improving the general appearance of the site.

These works were considered particularly important ahead of the forthcoming installation of the parcel locker outside Victory Hall, helping ensure the area remains safe, accessible and presents a positive appearance for residents using both facilities.

Despite the additional workload associated with these projects, the team has continued to maintain routine operational duties across the Parish and support cemetery operations where required.

Conclusion

Despite challenges associated with staffing levels, weather conditions and vehicle availability, the Open Spaces Team continues to deliver services across the Parish and respond to issues as they arise.

Current efforts remain focused on maintaining key public spaces, improving site appearance, managing litter, supporting cemetery operations and adopting a more proactive approach to maintenance wherever resources allow.

Recommendation

That the Community Services and Assets Committee notes the contents of this report.

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