

**COUNTY COUNCIL – 17 MARCH 2020
WRITTEN QUESTION UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 9.2**

1. Question from Councillor Susan van de Ven

Unchecked vegetation growth encroaches over and gradually erodes pavements, which are a valuable public asset and not easily replaced. Local Highways Officers can if their budgets allow deploy limited resource to the most serious instances but this minimal patchwork approach does not take the place of comprehensive cyclical siding out. In some cases Community Highways Volunteers are able to help side out pavements manually, but this isn't always physically realistic or possible.

Given the importance of maintaining these valuable assets, for all the obvious reasons of public safety and the opportunity for active travel within local communities, and where pavements are situated entirely on County Council owned land, what can the Chair of Highways and Infrastructure Committee suggest as a solution going forward?

Response from Councillor Mathew Shuter, Chairman of Highways and Infrastructure Committee

It is important that pavements are kept free of vegetation to ensure that they provide a safe and pleasant environment for the public, whether being used for business or leisure.

In order to ensure that they remain safe and useable all footways and cycle ways receive regular inspections carried out by Highway Inspectors. The frequency of inspection depends on the category of the Highway. Typically A roads are inspected more often (monthly) than unclassified (annually). Vegetation growth will be identified at these inspections as well as through reports from the public.

Siding out is the cutting back of the grass verge where it has grown over the footway, resulting in a reduced footway width by narrowing the space available for pedestrians. It predominantly takes place in rural areas.

Vegetation growth is risk assessed and attended to when deemed necessary. This vegetation clearance is carried out via one of three ways; by volunteers (siding out of footways is identified in the highway volunteer pack as one of a list of tasks suitable for volunteers), through Community pay back teams or through planned work raised by the Local Highway Officer via our partner Skanska and their supply chain. The first of these is particularly important and local officers can assist any Parish Councils in undertaking this work to maintain standards in their area.

How the work is carried out will depend on the location and extent of the vegetation growth encountered. For example lower speed roads in villages are suitable for volunteers and Community pay back. Whilst high speed roads or longer stretches of footpaths between villages will be cleared by Skanska's contractors using appropriate machinery.