

# **Bicester Advertiser**

## **Councils to find £12k as overgrown areas cause problems**

*by Naomi Herring, Bicester Advertiser, 6 June 2015*

TWO councils have been forced to find £12,000 to fund extra cutting of the verges after residents complained about the state of Bicester.

Following recent funding reductions, Oxfordshire County Council has dropped the number of times it cuts verges from five to two a year. In response, Bicester Town Council and Cherwell District Council have had to stump up £12,000 between them to fund two extra cutting sessions. It follows anger from residents that the grass verges had become too overgrown.

Resident Terry Beckett, 65, of Sunderland Drive said: "I am quite frustrated that they [Oxfordshire County Council] will not cut the grass more than twice a year. It works really well if you keep places clean and tidy, young people seem to respect it more. I used to be proud of living in Bicester but not the way it is now they have decided to cut the grass twice a year.

"I walk my labrador and he is about two feet and I can nearly lose him in it. People are also deciding not to pick their dog waste up now because it is difficult. I can understand cuts, don't get me wrong, but it is quite sad that we are letting standards drop to quite a degree. It is nice to be proud of where you live and happy where you live. They [local government] could sort this money from somewhere."

The first of the two grass cuts is expected to be carried out by Oxfordshire County Council this week. It had previously said "priority has been made for adult and children social care service" in the face of the "ever-tightening budget".

County council environment and economy director Sue Scane said: "We appreciate this is not welcome news for residents but with budgets becoming tighter and tighter, we had to look at the best place to spend limited resources."

In light of the cuts and residents' disappointment, Bicester Town Council and Cherwell District Council have agreed to jointly fund extra cuts throughout the year.

Bicester Town Council policy committee chairman Richard Mould said: "I am aware there has been a lot of negative publicity regarding grass cutting – or lack of it – on the grass verges around Bicester. These areas are the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council and it has reduced grass cutting to twice per year because of budget constraints.

"The town council, working with Cherwell District Council, has agreed to jointly finance an additional two grass cuts to be carried out between the two county council grass cuts given us a total of four cuts this year. The town council recognise the budget constraints the county council is working under but feel that the town council taxpayers are being asked to finance work that is county council responsibility."

Ms Scane added: "I am pleased many town and parishes across the county have come forward to work with us to meet the gap in funding and will work with any parish that wants to explore this option in the future."