

BICESTER REVIEW

Bicester Town Council has been forced to spend £12,000 of its reserve funds on grass cutting following county-wide budget cuts.

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At a town council meeting on Tuesday, councillors agreed to partner with Cherwell District Council to jointly fund two new cuttings on grass verges during the summer to fill a £24,000 gap left by cuts to Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) budget for verge maintenance.

Without the funding, verges on public highways in the town would only be cut twice during the summer.

But Cllr Nick Mawer said the agreement is not a permanent solution and the council cannot afford to continue to use its reserves in this way.

He said: "As the town council gets almost no money from anything other than the council tax precept, either we raise the precept or we cut services. But one of the things I believe is that tax payers don't want to pay extra council tax. They say they pay enough and just want their grass cut. My personal view is over the next 12 months we as a council need to think deeply and consult with our residents about what they are prepared to pay for."

Residents have taken to social media to vent their frustration at the state of verges and other green spaces in the town. Nigel Poole said: "The whole town looks terrible with the grass overgrown everywhere!" Shona Wooding added: "I saw a guy, clearly just a member of the public, with a standard lawnmower cutting the verges along the ring road at one of the Bure Park entrances."

OCC is responsible for the maintenance of grass verges along all public highways.

The rest of the maintenance in the town is shared between Cherwell District Council and Bicester Town Council through their contractor Continental Landscapes. Sports pitches are maintained by council staff.

In November OCC announced it would be reducing its budget for verge maintenance on highways in the county. A funding offer was made to Bicester Town Council to take on some of the cost of verge maintenance, but this was turned down by councillors.