

Area North Committee – 22 May 2013

9. Performance of the Streetscene Service

Strategic Director: Vega Sturgess, Operations and Customer Focus
Assistant Director: Laurence Willis, Environment
Service Manager: Chris Cooper, Streetscene Manager
Lead Officer: As above
Contact Details: chris.cooper@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462840

Purpose of the Report

To update and inform the Area North Committee on the performance of the Streetscene Service in Area North for the period November 2012 and May 2013.

Recommendation

Members are invited to comment on the report

Report

The major focuses of the service so far for this period that affect Area North are listed below:

- Rural road litter picking
- Completion of the horticultural winter work programs
- Lean Thinking process for Street cleaning and Environmental Enforcement
- Starting the spring / summer work schedules

Operational Works

A very wet and cold winter has made the last six months operational works an interesting challenge at times and has resulted in the service having to be flexible in order to get the best results from its resources. The ground conditions have resulted in us making changes such as cancelling our winter grass cut - instead we have carried out winter hedge cutting and additional re-mulching of shrub beds. However, due to the poor weather we haven't experienced much vegetation growth and subsequently the works that have been carried out not only look good, but have also prepared us for the coming season.

Street Cleaning works

Our street cleaning teams continue to clean the Area on a daily basis, and we have delivered a work schedule of litter picking along the district's rural roads. We had to wait to start this work schedule until the grass on the verges had died back, which allowed our teams to spot the litter more easily. It is fair to say that we found considerable amounts of litter, as well as flytips that have been covered in foliage all summer. It brought us great satisfaction to address these issues and see the results of this program of work.

In Area North we cleared litter from the A378, A358, A372, B3165, B3168, B3151 and B3153.

By litter picking these roads we have cleaned all of the major routes through the Area. It is a disappointment that in many cases it appears that no sooner have we cleaned these, that they are once again littered from passing vehicles.

The team continues to focus on managing the number of flytips found and reported across the district, and this number has continued to rise slightly, however in Area North from April 2012 to March 2013 we have had 344 flytips reported. The bulk of these were recovered from Martock, Langport, Kingsbury Episcopi, Somerton, South Petherton and Tinitinhull, with the highest percentage of these consisting of household waste. These figures do not include calls for missed refuse or side waste, but is household waste which has been moved and dumped. Our response to the problem has been to divert more enforcement time to tackling this issue, and we are seeing a decline in the number of cases; this is very encouraging but also very time demanding.

We have continued our work with Martock Parish Council, sharing equipment that continues to deliver a higher standard of cleansing, and from this we have delivered a deep clean of the industrial estate and shopping precinct that was funded by the local businesses.

We continue to support the work done by local groups who litter pick their own parishes and offer a full set of picking equipment, protective clothing as well as removal of any rubbish collected. These groups make a fantastic contribution to the look of the district and their work is greatly appreciated by the team.

The team has also purchased a quad bike with full spraying equipment attached, as we believe that this will make the highway weed spraying operation much more efficient and effective. To operate this, we recently put some of our staff through the required spraying qualifications, and we were pleased to be accompanied on this course by a couple of members of Curry Mallet's volunteer group who will now be able to carry out weed control within their own area.

The service has also been awarded a capital bid to replace the last of our 'older' road sweepers which will not only be more reliable than the current one, requiring less maintenance costs, but also offering better operational and environmental performance. We will be 'trailing' various machines and are considering the purchase of a slightly smaller machine to enable us to access some of the lanes and streets that have restricted access. We expect to take delivery of the replacement later in the autumn.

The team has developed a program of village clean ups across the district, which will be rolled out over the spring and summer months. This work is designed to give the villages a deep clean, targeting not only the litter but also allows us to do hand sweeping, control of unwanted vegetation and moss, with hand sweeping / digging out where necessary. We appreciate that we are unable to manage these works on a routine basis but believe that this will improve the look of our more rural areas which are so important to the look of our district.

Horticultural works

Our horticultural teams completed the winter maintenance of ditches, hedge cutting & shrub bed maintenance. This has been a challenge throughout the year due to weather conditions; however the teams persevered and delivered services in spite of these difficulties.

The open space at Abbey Fields in Curry Rivel will be targeted as a park that we will develop along a largely environmental theme. We have recently started working with a local ecologist to assess the current ecological value of specified sites across the district and from here site specific management plans will be produced to encourage and maximise the environmental potential of each site.

The service recently designated a team to focus solely on weed control throughout the year, and this has provided a notable improvement in service delivery as a result. With regards to weed control, we are currently trialling a new herbicide that is for use on non productive porous surfaces, such as gravel paths, around obstacles, etc, and we are hopeful that this will perform successfully and be an additional 'tool' for us when maintaining the district. If so, we will carry out a financial review to decide if the additional cost of the chemical makes enough savings in labour to make it a viable option for us.

Our teams also planted spring bulbs with parish councils, with sites at Curry Rivel and Mallet, Fivehead, Hambridge and Westport, High ham, Huish Episcopi, Langport, Long Load, Martock, Montacute, Norton, Somerton, Shepton Beauchamp, South Petherton, Tintinhull and The Seavingtons receiving between 1,000 and 2,000 bulbs planted in each of these locations. So far we have focussed on planting Narcissi species with notable success, however in the coming years we will be moving our focus to plant a wider variety of bulbs at various locations, so Bluebells, Wild Garlic and Snowdrops will soon be on display at a location near you!

Recently we have been discussing working with the Councils Arboricultural Officer to extend the parish planting works to include tree planting schemes where possible across the parishes of the district. This scheme will not only increase the volume of tree cover in the district, but will also help us to meet targets in the open space strategy.

The tree risk assessment process continues to be carried out, works identified and addressed so we maintain a safe and healthy tree stock. The service and other associated services are currently ensuring that we are consciously checking for any traces of the 'new' fungus which has devastated Ash tree species across parts of the continent in order to minimise the chances of this contaminating our tree stock.

Following the development of the Open Space Strategy, we have identified the need to develop open spaces for three main specific uses; these are sport, ecology and quiet reflection. When coupled alongside the development of Green Corridors across the towns for both wildlife and transportation purposes we could develop a program of works which would result in a network of open spaces which offer both choice and a great experience when either visiting or passing through them. In Area North this approach would require the cooperation of the town and parish councils who manage their open spaces independently, however we are very interested in talking with any groups who manage public open spaces regarding this approach. As part of this program we have appointed an Ecologist who will be assessing the wildlife content in the Abbey Fields open space at Curry Rivel will produce a management plan which will be aimed at both increasing the bio-diversity of the site and enhance the look and usability of the open space.

As mentioned in my previous report, the team has also started work with a new apprentice who joined us in December 2012 and is working with the Sports Grounds team in Yeovil. Unfortunately the second apprentice dropped out of the scheme, and I believe that we need to review what is offered to these apprentices in the future if we are to deliver a sustainable training arrangement. In addition to the apprentice scheme, Streetscene has worked with schools to offer work experience for school leavers and we

have had placements in our workshops, enforcement team and on landscaping. This provides young people an opportunity to gain an insight into working life and helps them decide on what they would like their future to look like.

We also work with the County Training scheme; this helps the long term unemployed to return to work. Here we work with the organisation to offer 13 weeks of work experience (the cost to us is clothing and protective equipment) with the aim of getting people used to being in a work environment again as this can be a cause of concern which prevents people from returning to work. We informally interview all applicants from the scheme to make sure that we are receiving people who are truly interested in working, and this scheme has led to a number of these people getting employment through the agencies that we use as a consequence of their efforts. Through our most recent recruitment in horticultural services, Darren, who came to us through this scheme was appointed into a full time permanent post and is proving to be a great addition to the service. A real good news story.

Parish Ranger Scheme

For some time now, we have operated a Parish Ranger Scheme in both Brympton parish and at Montacute. The scheme is similar to the Parish Lengthsman scheme used at South Petherton but with some key differences. Fundamentally, these are that the ranger is managed by Streetscene and any parish can 'buy into' this scheme as there is no requirement for a 'cluster' of parishes to jointly find enough work for a Lengthsman, instead our service simply works with the Parish Councils creating work schedules to suit the individual needs of the local area.

We suggest that a minimum time allocation of a day per month is set although the service can accommodate the requirements of any individual town or parish. Recently in Area South, following enquiries from East Coker Parish Council representatives, we met and discussed the option of securing operational works around the parish through the Parish Ranger scheme and have subsequently taken over the works which were delivered through the Parish Lengthsman who has retired.

We would very much like to work with other parishes who wish to secure services and we believe that the scheme offers good quality simple solutions to everyday issues. Again if the committee would like to hear more details of this scheme, I would be happy to present the scheme in more detail for consideration.

What's coming next?

- Delivery of the village cleansing program
- Spring and summer maintenance operations
- Delivery of highway weed control operations
- The introduction of the Parish tree planting scheme
- Focussing on developing targeted areas for ecological development

Financial Implications

All of the matters highlighted in the report have been achieved within service budgets.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

- Continue to deliver schemes with local communities that enhance the appearance of their local areas.
- Continue to support communities to minimise floodwater risks.
- Maintain street cleaning high performance across the district.

Background Papers

Progress report to Area Committees on the Performance of the Streetscene service
