

# Natural Environment Services



Frequently asked questions



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# Natural Environment Services



# WHO AND WHAT IS NATURAL ENVIRONMENT SERVICES...

**We have the responsibility for the management and maintenance of Parks and Open Spaces, Playgrounds and Leisure areas, Sports Facilities, Public Rights of Way, Highways Verges, Facilities Management, and Tree and Woodland Management.**

Torbay Council is firmly committed to maintaining and enhancing Torbay's areas of natural beauty and interest for our residents and visitors alike. Torbay is one of the UK's richest areas in terms of biological diversity, and as such, the council seeks to ensure that its commitment to the environment is followed through with actions.

## **The benefits of parks to Torbay**

- Provision of an attractive environment in which to work, live and play.
- Conservation and protection of Torbay's natural and varied beauty.
- Use of green spaces for communities to become involved in their own environment and identity.
- Provide a safe area to enjoy nature and the outdoors.

## **Health benefits**

- Open air exercise can reduce stress levels and promote a feeling of wellbeing.
- Providing a safe environment for exercise in the fresh air.
- Parks provide people a safe and controlled environment to interacting with nature and wildlife or go for a walk.
- To encourage social interaction of all ages.

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## The benefits of playgrounds to Torbay

- To encourage social interaction of all ages.
- Providing a safe environment for children to play.
- Encouraging exercise in the fresh air.

## The council seeks to:

- Encourage greater use of green spaces by local people.
- Meet social and economic needs in a way which sustains the environment.
- Act as a catalyst for the community to improve the local environment.

The service provided is important to many people – it provides the care for their local environment, ensures that public open spaces are safe.

## WHO DOES WHAT?

### The council

The council is responsible for managing and maintaining all land and open spaces in Torbay, which are owned by the council. This does not include land managed by the Coast and Countryside Trust or housing companies/associations.



We are responsible for all open space in Torbay; this includes parks, recreation grounds and roadside verges

## **Contractors**

Torbay Council employees work alongside TOR2 and our grounds maintenance contractor Glendale Grounds Management Ltd to ensure this work is carried out efficiently.

- We have a system of planned maintenance works (Cyclical Service) which are carried out on an appropriate basis e.g. weekly, monthly, annually. They are responsible for identifying the frequency of these works and to ensure the best methods are used to achieve the standards required.
- They are responsible for meeting these standards and work closely with Torbay Council to ensure these are met.

## **The public**

- Members of the public may notice problems before any council staff do – reports can be very helpful.
- Give valuable feedback on how well the work is progressing.

If you have any suggestions/comments you wish to make please contact Torbay Council. We will try to use your feedback to continually improve our service.

Please be aware that on occasion work may be delayed or hampered by external factors such as the weather, both good and bad. Torbay is a diverse area with hundreds of urban and rural sites – a difficult task to get them all right all of the time.

## GENERAL GUIDANCE

**This general guidance and advice will hopefully answer the most frequently asked questions about trees.**

### Playgrounds

#### *How often do you check these?*

We are responsible for ensuring our playgrounds are kept safe and usable. Litter picks and other checks are carried out on a regular basis. The equipment is inspected by trained operatives for safety issues in accordance with current Health and Safety requirements; if any issues are identified the equipment will be made safe and/or repaired in due course.



### Grass

#### *Why do you cut the grass when you do?*

We aim to keep our grass on verges etc maintained between 30mm (1 inch) and 125mm (5 inches) however this isn't always possible due to varying factors. The weather can cause the grass to have a faster growth rate than on average and we are not always able to amend the cuttings schedules to accommodate this.

#### *Why don't you arrange to remove the grass cuttings?*

There is no requirement for the providers of this service to remove the grass cuttings however they are required to sweep or blow off any cuttings that fall onto footpaths back onto the mown lawn immediately after cutting, as far as reasonably practicable.

Any litter and debris to be removed from the maintained lawns immediately prior to mowing so that litter is not cut up and spread by cutting machines.

### ***Why don't you save money by cutting less often?***

If the grass is cut less often we need different mowing machines to cut the longer, thicker growth and the increase in cuttings leads to more cleaning up which will cost more money. Opinions on the need for grass cutting differ across Torbay so we strive to accommodate our residents as best we can.

### ***Why are you cutting the grass when it's wet?***

Grass cutting across the whole of Torbay is a large scale, highly organised operation and therefore cannot only be performed in perfect conditions. Unless conditions are very bad and there is the possibility that the mowers will cause serious damage, or in order to protect operator safety, we cut the grass in all weathers - otherwise grass cutting would fall behind schedule.

### ***Why do you only cut some grass areas?***

Grass areas are managed and subject to different schedules. Torbay Council with the joint venture partner and contractor may alter the standards from time to time. Some areas are for conservation and are kept long for wildlife.

We are striving to increase the number of wildflower area across our parks and leave areas of grass long to increase our biodiversity.

We do not cut grass areas which are under private ownership or have not yet been adopted by the council.

If you think an area has been missed in error, please contact us so that we can look into it.



## **Hedges**

### ***Why have you not cut the hedge as I requested?***

During the bird nesting season (approx March until August) if a hedgerow is believed to be home to nesting or roosting birds, we will be unable to carry out works until the young birds have fledged and left the nest or after the

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end of the season.

We try to maintain our hedges so they do not obstruct or overhang the highway. However, we do not cut hedges to create or maintain private views.

## ***A hedge is growing over the footpath making it difficult to pass- will the council cut it?***

The hedge is the responsibility of the land owner, if the hedge is growing over from a private property onto the pavement the Highways Authority will instruct the owner to cut it back – if nothing is done and the hedge is causing an obstruction the Highways Authority may arrange for it to be cut by a contractor.

To report any obstruction on the highway, please contact the Highways Department on 01803 207740.

## **Shrub and Flower Beds**

### ***How do you manage the shrub and flower beds?***

TOR2 and our contractors are responsible for designing and maintaining the shrub and flower beds across Torbay.

This sometimes incorporates themes appropriate to the year's occasions.

These beds are kept reasonably weed free and are regularly replaced/updated. In some areas we seed wild flowers.

The control of weeds on paved areas along the highway is carried out by TOR2.



## **Sports Facilities/Multi-Use Games Areas**

### ***Who manages and maintains these facilities?***

Our various facilities are regularly used by local clubs and community groups. Torbay Council provides a variety of sporting facilities, some are free for public use and others are chargeable.

For more information about sports bookings, please contact the Community and Sports Department on 01803 207976.

## **Benches**

### ***I want to donate a memorial bench.***

#### ***Who do I contact?***

TOR2 is responsible for issuing and maintaining memorial benches. Please contact them directly for more information on 01803 207900

Following a review undertaken by Torbay Council, the local authority will no longer be able to provide new donation or memorial benches in Torbay. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause to you.

If you identify an existing bench which is not dedicated with a memorial plaque, TOR2 may consider accepting a request to denote a a donation bench. However, this is subject to TOR2's terms and conditions.

If you wish to pursue this option, please do not hesitate to contact TOR2 through the customer call centre.

## **Trees**

Please see our Tree Management and Protections FAQs leaflet for how we manage our trees.



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 **WE WILL**     **WE WON'T**

## EXPECTED STANDARDS

### WHOLE SITE

-  Work to good current horticultural practice
-  When leaving the site it should be left in a tidy condition
-  Treat with respect any areas being tended by residents
-  Maintenance of private or un-adopted areas
-  Management of planting undertaken on Council land without consent
-  Land belonging to housing associations or un-adopted land and lanes

### HEDGES

-  Cut as necessary to maintain hedges that do not obstruct or overhang
-  Cut hedges to create or maintain private views
-  Cut hedges during the bird nesting season, as covered by legislation, 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act.

### PLAY AREAS

-  Visit every site on a regular basis
-  Safety inspection of equipment and area on a regular basis
-  Remove litter and glass

-  Provide a full time presence on site
-  Restrict use out of daylight hours

## **SPORTS FACILITIES**

-  Supply all posts and fixings for goals
-  Mark pitches in accordance with requirements laid down by the governing body
-  Minor reinstatement of pitches between games and a full reinstatement at the close of the season
-  Supply nets, equipment, benches etc

## **GENERAL GRASS CUTTING**

-  Aim to maintain on average a grass height between 30mm (1 inch) and 125mm (5 inches)
-  Clear cuttings from paths
-  Replace shrubs that die (planting in the winter)
-  Collection of grass cuttings
-  Control of weeds, pests and diseases

## **ROUGH GRASS CUTTING**

-  Aim to maintain on average a grass height between 29mm (5 inches) and 400mm (16 inches)
-  Clear cuttings from paths

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Collection of grass cuttings

Control of weeds, pests and diseases

## WILDFLOWER AREAS

Are maintained to prolong flowering periods and to retain seeds for natural replacement. They are cut only when appropriate.



## FORMAL FLOWER BEDS

Flower beds and hanging baskets will be watered and kept in a turgid condition

Weeds and dead flower heads will be removed as required. heads removed as required

## SEATS AND BENCHES

These are to be kept clean, safe and in an attractive condition. This includes all donation benches.

Ensure that they are fit for purpose.

## LITTER COLLECTION IN PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

- ✓ Keep sites clean and tidy from litter when onsite for other operations (e.g. grass cutting)



## SWEEPING IN PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

- ✓ Only a few paths are in the contract for sweeping
- ✓ Leaf clearance will be done on paths when required to keep them safe or for pedestrian access
- ✗ Clear leaf debris litter on pathways outside of the park



## SHRUB BEDS

- ✓ Prune according to good horticultural practice
- ✓ Keep reasonably weed free by clearing when onsite or by use of approved method
- ✓ Replace shrubs that die (planting in the winter)

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## TREES

- ✓ Inspect for safety and management purposes on a regular basis as identified in our adopted Tree Risk Management Strategy
- ✓ Action works required for health and safety as identified in the inspection
- ✓ We will prune to allow clear passage of pedestrians and, where appropriate, of vehicles
- ✓ Where trees have to be removed because they have died or become dangerous, we will strive to replace them where possible
- ✗ Prune trees to create or maintain private views
- ✗ Cut back vegetation which overhangs private property except as a result of normal maintenance works
- ✗ Prune trees to improve light levels or allow reception of satellite TV signals/Terrestrial TV signals in adjacent properties
- ✗ Prune trees to abate a perceived problem with falling leaves, twigs, fruit or air circulation on adjoining private land



## HOW TO CONTACT US:

### Write to us:

Torbay Council, Town Hall, Torquay TQ1 3DR

### Telephone us:

For enquiries regarding the issues identified in this booklet, please contact our Customer Call Centre on **01803 207900**

### Visit us:

[www.torbay.gov.uk](http://www.torbay.gov.uk)

### Email us:

[naturalenvironment@torbay.gov.uk](mailto:naturalenvironment@torbay.gov.uk)

### Contact us via Social Networks:



Torbay's Natural Environment Services



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This document can be made available in other formats. For further information please contact 01803 207797.