

# Public Open Spaces

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We are constantly striving to raise the standard of the services we provide for the residents of Northumberland.

This leaflet deals with questions you may have about public open spaces and amenity land that we look after and maintain.

It provides you with a list of the standards that we aim to achieve, in this area of our work, so that you can judge whether we are succeeding and how we might further improve what we do.

Produced as part of our commitment to raising standards by the Neighbourhood Services unit of Northumberland County Council.



# **Looking after public spaces**

Northumberland County Council maintains many areas of amenity land and green open space. We aim to ensure that these are attractive and well kept for the enjoyment of both residents and visitors to Northumberland.

## **How often do we cut the grass?**

We cut the grass 10-13 times, during the core season. This equates to about once every 14 days. However, this very much depends on the weather conditions.

During prolonged dry spells, for example, it is not necessary to cut the grass quite so often and, doing so frequently, might even damage it.

Grass can also be spoilt if cutting is attempted when it is too wet. In these circumstances, grass cutting might be suspended.

Any excessive growth will be removed as soon as possible after conditions improve.

What is important is what the grass looks like, not how often it is cut.

We cut around obstacles, such as trees, for example, by strimming or, in some cases, we use approved weed control.

## **What about grass cuttings?**

We do not collect grass cuttings except on plots within elderly people's residential developments, such as sheltered accommodation.

We cut almost one million square metres of grass about once every ten days.

To collect and transport cuttings for composting, would be very costly, uneconomical and environmentally unfriendly, partly because of the additional travel involved.

## **What about daffodils and other flowers?**

Some grassed areas that we look after contain spring bulbs, mainly daffodils and crocuses

Daffodils bloom from March to May and, where these are planted, we allow the green leaf of the plant to remain for about six weeks after the flower has died off.

This is because it is the leaf of the plant that makes food for the following year.

If they were cut down too early, then the daffodil beds would gradually deteriorate and the number of flowering plants would be reduced.

## **Wild flower planting**

We are planning to plant wild flowers in some selected areas and will be increasing the number of such plots throughout the county, over the next few years.

If you know of any grassed areas that we currently look after and which might benefit from the introduction of wild flowers, we would be keen to hear from you.

## **Who looks after shrub and rose beds?**

We plant and maintain shrub and rose beds in towns and large villages. Traditionally, we have tended to plant low maintenance variety shrubs but we are interested in experimenting with other species.

## **What would you like us to plant?**

If you would like us to consider planting something unusual, then just let us know and we will be happy to consider your idea.

## **Use of cuttings**

All cuttings from our trees, shrubs and roses are shredded and re-used on our planting beds as a soil conditioner and weed suppresser.

We do not use peat. Instead we use compost from sustainable sources.



## **What about formal floral displays?**

Floral displays are an important amenity for both residents and visitors and we work in partnership with parish and town councils to achieve the very highest standards of bedding displays in spring and summer.

We use some of the displays of bedding plants, in our main towns, to depict significant events and anniversaries. If you belong to an organisation that might want to take advantage of this facility, then please contact us.

We plant out flowerbeds in Towns and Villages throughout Northumberland and maintain others provided by the business community.

The authority works also with parish and town councils to help them with displays and supports the Northumbria in Bloom and the Britain in Bloom competitions.

## **Looking after trees across the County**

The council looks after trees on land it owns but also on other ground that it has maintained for many years. We also care for trees in closed churchyards.

Plots that we look after, which are not actually owned by us, include most village greens that are open to the public.

However, if you see a tree in any of these areas that you think might be dangerous, contact us immediately at the address or telephone number at the back of this leaflet.





## **How you can help us**

- Please show consideration for our staff, who are often required to perform difficult and contentious tasks.
- Please provide any documentation that we require from you, when carrying out our services, as quickly as possible.
- If you have cause to complain, please give us as much information as possible, so that we can look fully into the matter.
- Remember to quote any reference number that has been allocated to your job, whenever possible
- Please do ask for our help or advice, if there is anything that you do not understand.

## **We value your feedback**

We are constantly reviewing how we carry out our services and are pleased to have your comments or suggestions about how we can make changes or raise the standard of what we do.

- If you have an idea about how we can improve things, we would like to hear from you.
- If you're happy with the service you have received, please let us know and we will pass on your observations to the staff concerned.

- If you have a complaint, we need to know so that we can take any necessary action to put things right.

## **How to make a complaint**

We set ourselves high standards for our work with amenity land and green open spaces and generally we meet them.

However, if you think an area has fallen below the standard you would expect, tell us about it.

We will do our best to deal with your comments fairly and, if we agree that we have not lived up to our promises, then we'll bring the area back up to standard as soon as it is feasible.

If you want further information on our complaints procedures, ask us for our leaflet that explains what you should do.

## **The standards you can expect from us**

- We try to maintain the highest standards in our grounds maintenance work.
- We monitor your satisfaction with our work in maintaining parks, gardens and open spaces.
- We monitor spending on grounds maintenance.
- We report on our performance in these and other areas in our Service Plan, every year.
- We publish our targets for improving our performance.

For further information, to ask our help or to make suggestions as to how we can raise our standards, please contact our hotline below.

Customer Services,  
Northumberland County Council,  
County Hall,  
Morpeth,  
Northumberland NE61 2EF

Telephone: 0845 6006400  
Email: [contactcentre@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:contactcentre@northumberland.gov.uk)

Visit our website at <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/>

Copies of this leaflet are available in large print, or on audio tape, from Customer Services on 0845 6006400 .

“Northumberland County Council will deliver excellent services to support communities and protect our unique environment”

Our vision