

Parks and Open Spaces FAQs

Maintaining and investing in parks and open spaces is getting more and more difficult as council budgets become smaller. However, we believe that there are opportunities for innovative approaches to be introduced which could help resolve this and ensure a bright future for our parks and open spaces.

North Somerset Council's contract which delivers maintenance services in parks and open spaces is coming to an end in April 2021. The council maintains approximately 900 hectares of parks, open spaces and verges. Our maintenance currently provides a range of different activities which includes grass cutting across all our parks, open spaces and verges, tree maintenance, shrub bed and hedgerow management, fountain and pond management, litter and dog bin emptying, play area safety inspections and sports pitch maintenance.

This consultation is asking for your views about how well maintained your parks and open spaces currently are, which services you feel are most important for the council to provide, what is important to you about your parks and open spaces, and what could be done locally to support the service and to make improvements where they may be needed.

Your responses will be used to decide what is included in the new maintenance service in parks and open spaces, and to start designing a plan for future maintenance and investment in parks and open spaces.



On the following pages you'll find answers to commonly-asked questions about the maintenance of our parks and open spaces and re-wilding that may come up as you go through the consultation questions.

Does the council have to provide parks and open spaces for residents?

Providing and maintaining parks and open spaces is not a statutory function of the council (meaning the council does not have to do it). Most councils choose to spend money on public open green space because of its importance to residents. Open spaces help us be active and improve our well-being; they provide valuable habitat for wildlife; and as climate-change impacts increase they will help reduce flooding and cool our environment.

What parks and open spaces maintenance services does the council provide now?

Grass cutting, sports pitch maintenance, shrub and hedge maintenance, rural flailing of verges, all tree surgery, stump grinding and tree planting.

Which parts of the current service are essential for the council to deliver?

Some elements of the parks and grounds maintenance service are essential to maintaining the green spaces and highways networks. These include addressing potential health and safety problems alongside appropriate maintenance needed to make sure our open space estate does not deteriorate and become inaccessible or unsafe. Such tasks include tree management, ensuring highway sightlines are maintained, safety inspections for children's play areas and essential repairs. Some other services are a choice and could potentially be delivered by volunteers or reduced.

What services do town and parish councils currently provide?

Many town and parish councils maintain and manage public open spaces in their area, including providing bins and dog bins, grass cutting, sports pitch maintenance, shrub and hedge maintenance, planting and maintaining flower beds and many other functions. In some areas North Somerset Council and town and parish councils maintain spaces jointly and the council is keen to work closely with local councils and local residents to improve the quality of local green spaces.

Why does the council have a contract to maintain parks and open spaces?

We have used contractors for the last 30 years and there can be benefits in doing this. Employing companies that have national experience of grounds maintenance can make efficiencies and improve delivery. This consultation is about asking residents and businesses for their ideas about how we might maintain our parks into the future and the results will inform future arrangements.

What can I and my community do to improve local parks and green spaces?

There are loads of great examples of local communities working hard to improve their parks and green spaces. Examples include, Friends of Trendlewood Community Park Nailsea, Friends of Watchhouse Hill Pill, Friends of Prince Consort Gardens Weston super Mare, Friends of Grove Park Weston super Mare, Portishead in Bloom and Turn the Tide in Portishead. All these groups carry out multiple improvements to our parks and open spaces.

How can I volunteer?

To volunteer in our parks please email rewilding.volunteering@n-somerset.gov.uk

Why do the community need to volunteer? Shouldn't the tasks be carried out by the council?

Firstly, our current volunteers participate because it's fun. You get to look after your local area making a visible difference to your neighbourhood; the tasks can be a great way to exercise; you can learn new skills; you get to be closer to nature; and you can meet other like-minded people.

However, providing and maintaining parks and green spaces is not a statutory function of the council (the council does not have to do it). Most councils choose to spend money on public open green space because of its importance to residents. Maintaining and investing in parks and green spaces is getting more and more difficult as council budgets become smaller.

To continue to deliver some of the local, neighbourhood services that people value (such as parks and open spaces) they will need to be delivered in a very different way in the future. The council will need to work more alongside communities and volunteers, generate more income, create more partnerships, make services as efficient as possible and potentially reduce some of the things that are delivered now.

What is re-wilding?

Re-wilding is an initiative to address the climate and nature emergency. It means that we are changing the management of about 25% of our open spaces to increase biodiversity. We are planting more trees; and only cutting grass in the autumn in some areas. Both these activities will create habitats that will encourage more plants, insects, birds and animals to thrive; as well as reducing our carbon footprint because we'll be doing less grass cutting.

How will you identify areas for re-wilding?

We are using the idea of the Blue Heart to identify and explain about the areas we have re-wilded (<https://bluecampaignhub.com/>).

Can I cut the verges outside my house myself?

People can cut the grass outside their house if they want as long as they make sure they do not put anyone at risk. However, we would not permit this in areas that we have re-wilded because it will harm wildlife.

Can I plant bulbs or wildflowers in the verges outside my house?

Yes. But please be mindful of yours and others safety; and please try and plant native plants. This is much better for wildlife.

If you reduce leaf collection won't drains become blocked more often?

If we decide not to collect leaves (which can help wildlife) we will make sure this is not done in areas that might affect drainage.

If you reduce pruning shrubs and hedges will these cause obstruction (for example on footways)?

We prioritise pruning to keep our parks and open spaces accessible. However, most vegetation blocking paths comes from private property so we would ask property owners to keep an eye on their boundary to try and minimise such obstructions.

If you remove hedges and trees how will this affect wildlife?

We only remove hedges or trees for very limited reasons. This leaflet explains why - <https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/tree-maintenance-leaflet.pdf>

If you reduce the number of litter and dog bins won't this increase littering and dog fouling?

We do not think so. Most people are very responsible and if bins are not available they will dispose of their rubbish or dog poo in an appropriate place. Most people take it home and dispose of it with their household waste.

Will I have to pay to visit a park?

No – our parks will always remain free at the point of entry