

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
CLIMATE EMERGENCY & NATURE RECOVERY COMMITTEE
1 October 2024

Officer: Helen Ball – Town Clerk

IMPACT OF WEATHER ON GROUNDS MAINTENANCE
OPERATIONS SPRING 2024

Purpose

- (I) To report on how the Grounds Maintenance operations have been influenced by weather conditions during Spring 2024
- (II) To consider how these changes to climatic condition will affect grounds maintenance functions going forward

Introduction

The first quarter of 2024 has seen the wettest conditions in the last thirty years and the eighth wettest in history. Since July 2023, five feet of water has fallen. The flood barriers have been erected five times and flood water has been in the Quarry and across the County Ground three times. On many of our sites we have had standing water in places where this has never happened before. Apart from the rain, it has also been a colder spring than normal. This wet weather has had an impact on our operational work, but the colder weather has kept the Spring bulbs flowering for longer.

Verge Mowing

Several verges were cut in February for the Queen's visit as these were on her route in and out of the Town. Since the beginning of April, we have had four machines out cutting for the majority of the time. In the first two weeks, they got stuck on numerous occasions and it was decided that because of the damage they were causing to the ground, mowing would stop for a few days.

Since they had started again the weather had improved and they had been out every working day. By the end of May, they had cut the majority of the town once. Some areas had been missed because the ground was still too wet, but they hoped to pick these up on the next cut. The grass was long in many areas and was taking longer to cut than normal and leaving a lot of arisings on the top. On the plus side, the colder weather was slowing grass growth down.

Tractor Mowing.

The large tractor and mower had been too heavy to use up until the last week in April when it got stuck on one school site and had to be recovered by another tractor. We found that the large open spaces and school mowing required carrying out so because of this they had to use a smaller tractor and mower where the cutting unit was a third of the normal size we use.

Sites had been cut, but it has taken longer. With the ground conditions improving, we had sent the large machine out and had cut all sites once.

Sports Fixtures

Football

The football season, after a request from the Sunday League, had been extended by one week to end on May 12. They will have played all their fixtures on Town Council pitches by this date. The Junior league had also been extended to May 12. End of season renovation will then start which includes overseeding, Earthquaking Aeration, Goal post take down and topdressing with sand to improve drainage.

Cricket

The whole cricket season had been moved back from 27 April to start on 4 May. This was going to extend the season to the 28 September. The consequences of this are that the end of season renovations will not start until October. By then the days and nights are cooler and grass seed germination takes longer. We have also experienced floods in late October which will wash the topdressing away. Finishing this late means that the Cricket and Football seasons will overlap by a month, causing extra work for the staff.

Bowls & Croquet

These have both started on time.

Rounders

The first week was cancelled because of the wet conditions, but they have now played their season.

Tennis

The grass tennis courts were three weeks late because of the weather. Monkmoor Recreation Ground tarmac courts required power washing and this work was carried out the week beginning 6 May.

Dingle, Castle, and Town Centre.

All have been kept to a high standard over the winter period. The spring bulbs had lasted well because of the cooler temperatures. The Dingle flower beds required topping up with soil as they are now lower than the surrounding lawns. This will require about 12 tons of topsoil.

Nursery

We have grown a number of the summer bedding plants from seed this year to reduce our costs. We have been able to do this by using the propagation bench we built this winter.

Play Areas

A number of play areas across the town were closed because of waterlogging during the winter. Some have been topped up with wood chips and had general maintenance carried out.

Countryside Team

Tree work.

A full season of tree work had been completed including the removal of trees identified in the Ash Die back survey. Tree work for Shropshire Council and trees identified by the Town Council of requiring work were being actioned but at times the ground conditions have made this more difficult to complete. To replace trees that have been removed over forty trees have been planted across the Town.

ORB Beaver Project

There has been a lot of work carried out by the team, weekly site visits, repair of storm damage and Tree protection work.

General Work

All sites have been regularly checked, any damage or vandalism to steps, handrails or bridges has been repaired.

Bird Boxes.

These have been installed at Greenfields Recreation Ground, Raby Crescent Recreation Ground and Mousecroft Community Woodland.

Matters for Consideration

Over this winter season the Operations Managers will look to undertake the following work:

- (i) Review how grass verges are maintained with Highways Colleagues with a view to leaving some verges to grow wild;
- (ii) Review the Town Councils Tree Management Plan and in particular the tree inspection regimes in prime locations;
- (iii) Review the choice of planting to develop more sustainable and resilient planting schemes;
- (iv) Review the impact on machinery particularly taking note of repairs and servicing, fuel used and the replacement/depreciation period of kit;
- (v) Review new technology to potentially free up staff and improve efficiency;
- (vi) Review the effect on staff of climatic conditions and to maintain an estate in ever changing adverse conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the contents of the report are noted