

## Information note on Public Rights of Way and Hard Vegetation Clearance

The Countryside Access Team (CAT) of Oxfordshire County Council acts as the highway authority for most unsurfaced public rights of way (PRoW) – footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways. The County Council has the statutory duty to assert and protect PRoWs and keep them reasonably convenient for public users.

A key part of the Council's maintenance work is undertaking 'Hard Vegetation' clearance. This is the woody undergrowth and overgrowth that cannot be cleared using mowers and grass trimmers. In undertaking this clearance work the council has to protect wildlife and habitats which is why this HVC work is mainly undertaken from November to March which is outside of the main wildlife breeding season.

Oxfordshire County Council's basic standard for this work, as outlined in the adopted [Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025](#) is to ensure that rights are not obstructed and routes are maintained in a reasonable condition.

### **LIMITED BUDGETS MEAN THAT THIS WORK HAS TO BE PLANNED AND PRIORITISED**

There are two types of HVC – 'medium' and 'heavy'. Medium can be usually be done without chippers and using smaller tools (e.g. brushcutter, tractor mounted flail and hedgecutter) and more length can be completed per day. Heavy clearance necessitates mechanised chipper and extensive chainsaw use.

The intention is that a cyclical approach for those routes needing clearance will enable more medium clearance to be undertaken more often, thus preventing regrowth and the need for the more extensive and resource-consuming heavy clearance. In order to make best use of available resources and to provide a guide to operations the following points set out how the team will normally undertake this work.

- 1) HVC work will take the form of the HVC Programme (HVCP). The HVCP is planned and prioritised. It will be taken from a list of routes marked as needing HVC in the Countryside Access Management System. This is a database maintained by CAT officers and the HVC routes are based on inspections and internal/external reports as well as previous works.
- 2) The programme will normally be reviewed by CAT officers before September each year so that the season's planned work is agreed
- 3) When considering the inclusion of routes on the HVCP, CAT officers will normally consider the route for
  - a. type of route (e.g. commuting route)
  - b. the amount of obstruction and inconvenience
  - c. whether medium clearance this year will prevent need for heavy clearance
  - d. the amount of resources available and HVC needs in the wider area
- 4) Reactive works outside of HVCP may be undertaken but these will normally only be considered if the route is impassable

**Check out our handy 'how to' paths guide path at**

**<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/countryside/countryside-access/improving-countryside-access-oxfordshire/communities-and-paths>**