Parish Council Conference September 2014
Supporting communities to keep roadside hedges and trees tidy

Devon County Council is committed to engaging with Parish and Town Councils in order to manage roadside trees and hedges as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In the spirit of localism, we are asking Parishes and Town Councils to work with us to:

- Encourage residents to fulfil their obligations to safely maintain any vegetation and trees that border the public highway through
- Suggest ways we can improve our processes and work with Councils and landowners to minimise the County Council’s involvement, and the burden on the taxpayer

We will be producing factsheets summarising the main messages we need to get across regarding roadside hedges and trees. These will be available in the near future on the Parish and Town Council Webpages. We would be grateful if you would take the time to have a look at these when they are circulated and highlight their contents to your parishioners.

In the meantime, overleaf is our existing information sheet which is distributed during safety inspections and by Highway Officers when overgrown vegetation is identified. An electronic copy of this information to include in your parish publications is available on request.

The volume of reports we receive concerning overgrown vegetation during the summer months is staggering, and this summer it has simply not been possible to deal with them all as quickly as we would like. Often the reported issues are not safety defects and the expectations for action to be taken are unrealistic. Managing this demand draws scarce resources away from other highway services. We therefore are very much hoping to hear from you so that we can work together to reduce the number of problems relating to overgrown private vegetation, and therefore the number of reports that we receive.

If you would like to discuss options for working together on this subject, please contact the Exeter Business & Customer Management Team on:

01392 385084
ELM@devon.gov.uk

Any reports of overgrown vegetation should continue to be made to our Customer Service Centre on:

0345 155 1004
Or online via www.devon.gov.uk
As a landowner or occupier, it’s your responsibility to make sure that trees, hedges and other vegetation growing on your land do not cause a safety concern or obstruction for users of the public highway.

It ties up valuable council resources if we have to take action to address issues over privately owned trees and hedges, so please ensure that the overgrowth of vegetation is not creating a hazard or nuisance for your community. This includes hedges, trees, shrubs, ground cover and weeds such as brambles and nettles.

Highway inspections are undertaken throughout the year and, where vegetation is found to be causing an obstruction or safety concern, you will be formally requested to take action within 14 days. This is in accordance with the Highways Act 1980.

To avoid this, please monitor the growth of vegetation throughout the year and take action before a hazard is created.

Please check pavements are clear for everyone to use them.

Look out in particular for fast-growing plants such as brambles and nettles. Please note: These may be growing outside your garden fence but are still on your property.

Please check vegetation is not obscuring the light from streetlights or signs.

Please make sure that ground-cover plants are not growing over the pavement. They hasten deterioration of the pavement surface, get in the way when maintenance work is being done and could be a trip hazard, particularly for visually impaired pedestrians. Remember to keep hedge lines back behind the edge of the pavement.

Please check that branches are not growing too low and causing problems for vehicles - 5.5m clearance is recommended.

Leylandii hedges need regular maintenance throughout the year. If left until they become a nuisance, they are often unsightly when eventually cut back and do not recover their greenery.

Service lanes and paths behind properties need to be kept clear too.

Remember, refuse collectors and other services need access.

When undertaking any work to hedges and trees please be aware of regulations in respect of wildlife, such as nesting birds, planning and highway safety. Thank you for taking the time to read this information.