

Council is unable to cope with grass cutting

The cost and effort involved in clearing up cut grass makes it impossible for West Lothian Council an official has admitted.

As climate change and service cutbacks means that grass is longer there are more complaints in councillors in-boxes across the county. A council NETs officer outlined the logistics and costs for elected members.

It is an unhappy combination of hotter and wetter summers and fewer resources to tackle vegetation.

Craig Meek, the chair of the Fauldhouse and Breich Valley Local Area Committee raised the issue with Pat McArdle from Whitehill Service Centre who gave the quarterly update on his department's work to councillors.

"I get a lot of complaints, asking why don't we lift the grass that we cut and how bad it looks." Councillor Meek told the meeting.

Anecdotally, regular complaints to the council in the past have come along every cutting season that trails of wet grass are dragged along pathways after NETs run their mowers over verges.

"Is there any particular reason apart from disposal that we just cut and leave [grass] ? asked Councillor Meek. " Is it better for the environment?

Mr McArdle told the meeting: "Carbon footprint. The amount of vehicles that we would need to use to move the grass.

"We did a pilot scheme in an area of Whitburn about 15 years ago where it took nine hours to cut the grass, three machines going in for three hours each. To add cut and lift, it took 31 hours. We took six tonnes of material back to the depot then.

"We've not got the infrastructure to do it, to cut and lift everywhere across all nine wards. The amount of grass we've got, it would be prohibitive.

Mr McArdle added: "We have reduced the amount of cuts down to 12 as the service level agreements have been agreed. Is 12 enough?. I don't think so, I don't know. We've not got the resources to do any more.

Mr McArdle added that when he had first started in horticulture the thinking on grass cutting was "little and often".

Things have changed: "We are also getting excessive grass growth at certain times of year. We used to get a time called burn off, where you got to July/August when the grass took a die back and was not as active.

"We've not had that in the last couple of years. It's just rain, heat, sunshine. An abundance of weeds, abundance of grass. It's unfortunate."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter.