

## Care of the environment (road verges) in rural areas

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### Summary

Large areas of roadside verges are left uncared for, which needs to be addressed in an efficient manner. Creating synergies between the Local Authority, community organisations, private contractors and local landowners in a creative way can overcome this rural challenge.

### Challenge

Areas of land between the edge of roads and the landowners fences are becoming uncared for. Often this growth can encroach onto the road. This can lead to dangers for road-users, which includes walkers, cyclists, farm machinery and other cars and vehicles. These areas of land, which often can be substantial, are sometimes described as 'no man's land' and the responsibility for its upkeep and maintenance is often disputed between adjoining landowners, the Local Authority and the local 'village enhancement group'. If these areas are not maintained, the weeds of today can lead to shrubs of tomorrow and trees in a short space of time.

The longer these areas remain wild, the more resources will be required to address the overgrowth.

### Policy

National policy in Ireland (Roads Act, 1993) dictates that it is the responsibility of all landowners to maintain their hedgerows along public roads in an orderly manner. The National Roads Authority, a statutory body, lists the following areas in their Maintenance Categories:

- A – Drainage Systems
- B – Pavement Maintenance
- C – Verge Maintenance
- D – Road Sweeping & Litter Removal
- E – Footpath Repairs
- F – Landscaping Areas & Trees
- G – Fences & Safety Barriers
- H – Public & Traffic Lighting

Category C, 'Verge Maintenance' refers to the all land between the landowners' fence and the edge of the public road. However, with reduced maintenance budgets, the Local Authority is only able to maintain verges in dangerous areas, such as at road junctions, near schools and hospitals, etc. This is generally done by tendering out to private contractors the work involved, paying an hourly rate to the contractors. Community Groups, with volunteers or in association with participants in various 'labour schemes' also take on the maintenance of road verges, but this intervention is limited in its scope.

## Interest in the Issue

The Mayo Abbey Rural Alliance has taken a keen interest in this environmental care issue. They have enlisted the support of their locally elected representative and are exploring a creative solution to this challenge in their rural area. The proposal being considered involves the Local Authority, the private contractor, the labour scheme (Rural Social Scheme – RSS) and the landowners, under the direction of the Alliance. To make it work, they propose that when the Local Authority awards a tender for work to a private contractor, the Alliance is informed immediately. The Alliance members will meet with the contractor and agree a set price per metre for trimming the hedgerows of the landowners in the area of the tender work. In return for facilitating and securing this extra work for the contractor, an agreement is reached where the contractor will maintain the verges where the Local Authority cannot. In order to make the best use of the contractors' time, some of the participants in the Rural Social Scheme will assist the contractor in the safety aspects of the work.

## Conclusion

Care of the environment is the responsibility of many players in a rural area. By working together across local government, private enterprise and the community sector it is possible to find a solution to a 'growing' problem. The initiative and intervention of the Mayo Abbey Rural Alliances will enable the various sectors to co-operate to provide a workable solution to all those who have an interest in a positive outcome for the environment.

## Sources

- Roads Act, Ireland – 1993
- The Wildlife Act, Ireland – 1976
- National Roads Authority, Ireland – Maintenance Standards

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