



GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SPECIFICATION

INTRODUCTION

Ocean Housing has a housing stock of c.3,000 general needs and c.900 sheltered housing properties across Cornwall. The properties are sited on over 200 estates, of which c.160 require some form of regular Grounds Maintenance service.

PURPOSE:

To maintain the grounds, trees and playground areas of the housing stock owned or managed by Ocean Housing Ltd, in a manner which ensures the health and safety of operatives and residents.

OBJECTIVE:

To provide an amenable environment for residents, which delivers quality and value for money.

SCOPE:

- Target average frequency of visits: Rolling programme every 2-3 weeks (unless adverse weather/circumstances)
- Environmental team and customer-facing staff briefed to advise residents on the boundaries of responsibility between Ocean and Cornwall Council land
- Seasonal variations on priorities as set out below, with core focus on grass cutting April to October (grass clippings are dispersed not collected)
- Environmental team briefed to liaise with local Tenant Monitors when visiting their estates and relay back any key feedback
- Emergency works will be conducted as required and will take precedence over day-to-day business
- Risk assessments will be completed periodically, in liaison with the Head of Neighbourhood Services and the Head of Health, Safety and Environment

WINTER PROGRAMME:

November to January

- Play inspection reports
- Winter pruning
- Weeding control
- Applying fresh chip bark to shrub beds
- Leaf clearing
- Moss treatment on pathways and hard standing areas
- Lifting of lower branches on trees
- Edging back grass on path ways
- Storm damage remedial works
- Snow clearing and grit laying at Ocean's sheltered schemes (Fifield House, Prince Charles House, Rialton Heights, Windmill House)
- Tree maintenance
- Hedge maintenance
- Shrub maintenance
- Grass cutting, pre-cutting litter picking, if required and conditions suitable
- Maintenance and servicing of equipment

February to March

- Play Inspection reports
- Edging back grass on path ways
- Moss treatment on pathways and hard standing areas
- Weed control
- Pruning
- Tree maintenance
- Hedge maintenance
- Shrub maintenance
- Grass cutting, pre-cutting litter picking, if required and conditions suitable
- Maintenance and servicing of equipment

SUMMER PROGRAMME:

April to October

- Play Inspection reports
- Grass cutting, pre-cutting litter picking, if required
- Weed control
- Light pruning where needed
- Tree maintenance
- Hedge maintenance
- Shrub maintenance
- Maintenance and servicing of equipment

MONITORING:

The Tenant Involvement and Social Inclusion team, in conjunction with the Quality & Performance Manager, facilitate and interpret monthly inspections and reporting from a base of tenant monitors. The Monitors' Checklist is attached as Appendix 1. An annual survey covering a representative base of tenants is conducted to provide a wider confidence interval.

The Environmental Co-ordinator (EC) will ensure all relevant inspection logs and health and safety reports are completed at timely intervals.

The EC will also provide information on a core set of performance indicators to the Head of Neighbourhood Services, who will use this data to ensure maximum efficiency and the minimisation of any waste or barriers to optimal performance.

GRASS CUTTING

The operative should ensure that all litter and debris is removed and that, upon completion of the work, the site is left in a neat and tidy condition with all arisings being removed from any surrounding hard standing. Back-up mowing and strimming of edges and obstacles should also be completed.

Ensure that cut grass does not lie in 'clumps' on the area being worked on. Cuttings should be spread evenly.

Volume Grass – cut on a fortnightly basis

Applicable to open park areas, estates and highway verges. These areas will provide:

Neat, pleasing appearance with all grass uniformly cut, including perimeter edges and obstacles.

Free of all unsightly litter debris and clumps of clippings.

Grass height between 35-125 mm.

Paths and surrounding edges free of clippings at all times.

Use of herbicide for grass edging permissible by agreement
Edges to beds should be maintained to be sympathetic to site's design.

Low Frequency - cut 2- 4 times a year

These are rough banks and verges.

Entire area to be cut uniformly and cleanly including perimeter edges and obstacles.
Free of all unsightly litter debris and clumps of clippings.
Grass height between 50-150 mm.
Paths and surrounding edges free of clippings at all times.
Use of herbicide for grass edging permissible by agreement.

SHRUB MAINTENANCE

All shrubs will be maintained throughout the sites to the highest standards in order to maintain and improve the current specification.

Only employees who are trained in the use of equipment and the correct methods and timing of pruning operations, shall carry out all shrub maintenance.

Pruning shall take place with adequate hand and power tools. All will be sharpened and adjusted to the appropriate standard.

Depending on the type of shrub and its location, shrubberies will be kept weed free by either cultural or other methods. For example, hand weeding will only be performed for weeds that are easily pulled, out complete with the full root system. Where weeds are deep rooted a fork will be used.

When forking beds through, employees shall take care not to damage the root system of the shrubs. The surrounding grass/hard standing area shall be kept free of any arisings.

Following work at each shrub bed, all pruning and trimmings, litter, perennial weeds and any other unwanted debris will be removed from the site and disposed of at an appropriate facility.

Where chemical control of weeds is performed, the areas will be visited on a regular basis and localised spraying will be implemented to ensure the quality threshold is achieved.

HEDGE MAINTENANCE

All hedge cutting operations will be carried out at a time of year to ensure that all bird-nesting activities have finished. All hedges will be trimmed to establish a regular line and shape. Pruning will take place at the correct time of year dependent upon the species concerned.

Ornamental

Hedges will be cut back to designated size with any extension growth no longer than 300 mm. The top of the hedge will be level and even.

The profile of the hedge will be narrower at the top compared with the base, to encourage uniform, compact growth, well furnished to the base and to prevent damage from snow and be uniformly cut along its length. Any dead or diseased plant material will be removed and gaps in the hedge replenished and protected to ensure continuous cover in a timely fashion.

The hedge and base should be free of litter, debris, clippings and weeds.

Cornish Hedges

These are generally built of stone, turf, soil and other local materials with natural herbage, shrub and trees, forming an intrinsic part of the hedge.

Hedges will be cut back in accordance with the '**Hedgerow Management for Wildlife**' section.

Any dead or diseased plant material will be removed and gaps in the hedge replenished and protected to ensure continuous cover in a timely fashion.

The hedge and base should be free of litter, debris, clippings and weeds.

Employees undertaking repairs should be experienced in the traditional methods of the construction and repair of the Cornish hedges within in the Borough.

Hedgerow Management for Wildlife

This should be executed once per annum, in accordance with Health and Safety requirements. Hedge trimming shall take place from January to the end of February to avoid disturbance of bird's nests, which are present from March to August. From September through to December berries are present on shrubs such as Red Hawthorn, Holly and hedgerows containing these species are important food sources for wintering birds and animals. Therefore, trimming shall not be carried out during this time on species, which provide winter food and shelter. Trimming all hedges on any one site in the same year shall be avoided if possible.

NOTE: The nests, eggs and young of breeding birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. If an intentional offence is committed, it can result in a fine of up to £5,000 per nest or egg destroyed, and/or a custodial sentence of up to six months.

WEED CONTROL

Ocean Housing is aware of its responsibility to the environment and will look to use cultural weed control methods wherever practicably possible. There will be a need to use chemical control in certain areas of the service.

The application of chemical weed control on hard surfaces, such as paths, patios and drying areas, is seen as paramount in order to create a weed free environment. The timing of these applications is extremely important and, once the application has commenced, the operation will be continuous until spraying of all areas has been completed within the time scale stipulated. The weather conditions will be considered at the time of the programmed operation, and the supervising officer will be kept informed of any alterations to the programme.

Prior to spraying, the operative will:

- ensure the chemical is appropriate for the control of the unwanted vegetation.
- ensure the chemicals to be applied are within date, and have been stored in accordance with manufacturer specifications;
- check weather conditions and ascertain whether it is safe to apply pesticide;
- carry out an assessment of the work area and the likely effects of a spraying operation on people in close proximity. Any special arrangements will be recorded on an Assessment Sheet and given to the operators.
- ensure all operatives are carrying a copy of their spraying certificate, and have read and understood the instruction label of the pesticide being used;
- when spraying, place warning signs in close proximity and in a visible position;
- ensure that no spraying is carried out near drains or watercourses.

On completion of spraying activities, operatives will return any unused pesticides to safe storage, decontaminate equipment and wash their hands and other contaminated body parts.

Approved Pesticides

All materials to be used and all methods of application and trade mixes shall be in strict accordance with legislation arising from the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, the Control of Pesticides Regulations (COPR) 1986 and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) 1988.

TREES OPERATIONAL MAINTENANCE

Pruning of trees for shade, amenity and cultural purposes will normally be undertaken between October and February.

When carrying out pruning to all but immature trees, or when using a chainsaw, the immediate working area shall be fully cordoned off from members of the public. All tools and implements for cutting or pruning shall be sufficiently sharp to produce good, clean cuts without snagging or tearing.

Free climbing will not be permitted in any tree. Where climbing becomes necessary, full ropes and harnesses must be worn in accordance with the latest requirements from the Health and Safety Executive.

When pruning from a ladder, climbing in the tree, or when using a chainsaw, at least one additional operative must act as 'groundsmen' and be present at all times during the pruning operation, to ensure both public and operative safety.

In carrying out the pruning branches will be removed to its point of origin. Snags or stumps must not be left, however, the cutting must not exceed the "branch collar", if taken off at a main limb or on the bole. 'Flush Cutting' to the trunk or branch will not be permitted.

If a branch to be pruned exceeds 5cm in diameter, the three cut method will be used and the final wound must be smooth and free from tear. The angle of cut must be such so that the wound area is kept to a minimum. Sealants or treatments must not be applied to wounds as a result of pruning operations. If the branch diameter exceeds 20cm the edge of the cut shall be cleanly pared back through the cambium layer with a sharp knife at an angle of 45 degrees to promote natural healing. Where possible, arisings from pruning operations will be chipped/ shredded for composting or mulch.

CYCLICAL / RISK MANAGEMENT INSPECTIONS

A programme of cyclical inspections will be developed, which will seek to identify any issues regarding maintenance needs and quality of sites. They will also assess any hazards arising from wear & tear, vandalism or damage to the site that may present a risk to users. These inspections do not constitute a full risk assessment of sites, but should contribute towards adequate monitoring of sites.

ADDITIONAL / EMERGENCY WORKS

Although the majority of maintenance work is included in the core schedules, it is inevitable that from time to time additional work may be required. This may be part of a planned project such as a landscaping project or response to an emergency situation.

PLAYGROUND OPERATIONAL INSPECTION

Inspections will be carried out on a weekly basis throughout the year and are intended to assess and identify any problems with cleanliness, vandalism, wear and structural integrity of the equipment, ensuring also that all items work properly and that the general environment of the play area is safe and well maintained. An Inspection Checklist is attached as Appendix 2.

In the event of an item failing an inspection, or presenting significant risk, immediate action will be taken to rectify the fault, remove the risk, immobilise or prevent access to the equipment. Apart from emergency/ temporary repairs, only genuine manufacturers' spares shall be used.

Staff undertaking inspections must have a Disclosure & Barring Service check, to ensure that there is no risk of those who are unsuitable to work with or in the vicinity of children and vulnerable adults working in play areas and to avoid allegations of abuse.