

Horsham Society

with Julie Dumbrell



Please look after your trees and hedges

Our warm, wet summer has set the trees and hedges growing. Good news for wildlife – they are an important habitat for birds and other creatures – but bad news for pedestrians if the burgeoning greenery crowds them off the pavement.

This anti-social behaviour is a particular problem for people using mobility scooters, who can find they simply cannot get around because the footpaths they should be able to use are blocked by overgrown hedges, which force them out into the road.

This is currently a problem in any number of locations around Horsham, and in most cases the solution is for householders to trim them back.

Landowners and occupiers with hedges running beside a highway are responsible for the maintenance of their hedge and should not allow them to block access, obscure signs or screen out street lights and they could be served by their local council with a legal notice to take action, if any of these problems arise.

Under the Highways Act residents are supposed to ensure that trees on their land are not a danger to anyone using the



Hedgerow overgrowing the highway on the A24.

highway and could be liable, especially if a fallen tree or branch causes an accident.

But whether you plan to do the work yourself, or hire a contractor, take care.

Roadside work should only be carried out in good visibility and beware of using

machinery which spits debris into the highway. Check that any contractors you hire have proper insurance as operators because you could be liable if there is an accident while the work is under way.

So, having decided to keep your hedges under control and your stretch of footpath clear, the next issue is making sure you look after the resident wildlife. Ideally major trimming should not be done between March and August so that birds nesting in the hedge are not disturbed. It's worth remembering that the Wildlife and Countryside Act makes it an offence to destroy any bird's nest that is either in use or being built.

Hedgerows are particularly important in areas with limited woodland, at least 30 species of birds rely on hedgerows for their survival. Whitethroats, linnets and yellowhammers which favour shorter hedgerows up to three metres high and grey partridges, who use grass cover at the hedge bottom to nest. It is therefore very important to manage for a range of hedge heights and tree densities and to maintain a grassy verge at the base of the hedge where wildflowers and grasses can help to camouflage nests from predators.

Even in winter care is needed because hedgerows can be feeding and roosting sites for resident birds and winter visitors like fieldfares and redwings. It's worth noting that if you do plan to plant a new hedge you should allow room for it to grow by planting it far enough away from the edge of your own property.

Forest Neighbourhood Council is discussing how to approach the issue, because foliage overgrowing footpaths is becoming a major problem in Horsham.

Perhaps people just walk from their parked car to their front door and back again and don't even realise their hedges are blocking the footpath. But local councils are now considering the wording and approach to take, and could soon start sending out letters to offending property owners.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 259038.