**Appendix 4: Grounds Maintenance**

Full Parish Council Meeting Date: 13th March 2023

The Grounds Maintenance contract needs to be agreed for the next fiscal year 2023/4.

The period of the contract ran from mid-May to mid-September last year. We can either renew it as it is and with the same contractor or amend it and/or consider retendering including for a longer period if we wish which might get more favourable quotes. The existing contractor is Woodland South-West Ltd who quoted £910 plus VAT.

Given the much-publicised crash in both insect numbers and wildflower meadows there is a widespread desire to improve nature across the country by paying attention to how public spaces and roadside verges are managed. Parish Councils have a duty to have regard for the protection of biodiversity in carrying out their functions. I have therefore considered the current contract to see if it might be possible to improve it from a biodiversity point of view such as letting more wild plants flower and seed for the benefit of insects, small mammals etc.

The current contract has some good elements in respect of improving the situation for nature such as the single cut of the A39 verge in September. We should consider whether it is possible to apply similar management arrangements to the other areas for cutting in the contract. However, two significant considerations need to be taken into account. Traffic safety so lines of sight are preserved and the danger of being fouled by hidden dog excrement where people walk or play. These considerations mean there is probably little scope for making significant improvements to the contract. Some villagers might also think maintaining a tidy appearance is more important to them than modest improvements for nature.

The proposal is therefore that we renew the current contract with the same contractor for next year subject to consideration at the meeting of the following options for amendment:

1. We could extend the uncut area next to the property hedge on the Bowling Green (1) to 2 metres rather than 1. At present it looks as if this width is already applied as brambles spread at least 2 meters from the hedge.  Confirming we are happy to leave 2 metres would be potentially beneficial to wildlife along the hedge without affecting enjoyment of the Bowling Green and would still give a clear path for people to walk from the Hodders Combe track to the lane to Alfoxton.
2. Dodington Island (2). We could only "clear undergrowth" and strim as necessary for clear visibility not to achieve a "tidy appearance".
3. We could cut the grass on the Triangle (8) at the junction of Stowey Lane and Combe Lane to the same regime as the A39 verge, ie cut in September. This would help show a commitment to improving how we manage our verges with wildlife in mind so might encourage other land holders in the village to do the same, though as it is a very small area it would not achieve much in itself.