



Rosie Hughes

VILLAGE LENGTHSMAN

Rosie Hughes, Clerk to Sutton PC in Cambs, introduces their Lengthsman scheme

We often hear grumbles about litter, unmaintained grass and shrub areas, dirty street and road name signs, graffiti and a general un-kept look in the village. So, it was with this in mind that the parish council agreed to employ a Village Lengthsman to provide an enhanced and responsive level of service; resulting in improvement to the environment within Sutton. Sutton still proudly displays its 'Village of the Year' signs at the village entrances, whilst the competition was not about how pretty the village is, it is often asked "how could Sutton have won?" Sutton-in-the-isle, to give its full name, is a large fenland village in East Cambridgeshire and it suffers, like a number of other villages, from through traffic, including large haulage and farm vehicles.

For a number of years, Sutton Parish Council has contracted grass maintenance and odd maintenance jobs to local companies. Street sign cleaning and public rights of way have always been maintained by the County and District Councils, however with budget cuts, small works were not being undertaken as resources no longer provide for this to happen. It was becoming evident that if the parish council did not ensure that the village was maintained well, it was going to lead to a lesser quality of life for residents. The role of the lengthsman is believed to date back hundreds of years and is seen as a medieval solution to a very modern problem. They were employed to maintain a length of road within the parish and also canal and railways. The role has been revived over the years by a number of town and parish councils.

The council advertised the Lengthsman position and Gareth Thomas commenced in March 2017, he works 25 hours a week and undertakes a number of tasks within the parish. These include:

- Maintenance of open spaces and play areas
- Litter picking and sweeping
- Cleaning and minor repairs of street furniture and noticeboards
- Checking and maintenance of public rights of way, stiles and fences
- Clearance and digging of drains and ditches
- Removal of graffiti
- Controlling weeds and other vegetation
- Clearing leaves.
- Hedge cutting and maintenance
- Filling and seeding graves
- Emptying bins at burial ground
- Grass cutting at parish council owned facilities
- Maintaining village signs and notice boards



Sutton's Lengthsman, Gareth Thomas

The Parish Council has purchased a number of items of grass and hedge maintenance equipment and leases a van for the Lengthsman to get round the village. New policies have been identified whilst setting up this post; they include 'driving at work', and the 'use and storage of petrol'. Gareth has undertaken PA1 and PA6 training to allow him to use a knapsack weed sprayer and is due to take his test any day now. Once qualified, he will be seen out in the village looking like the 4th Ghostbuster.

Having Gareth on the staff team has given us the flexibility to prioritise the work in the village and has saved an enormous amount of administration time in obtaining quotations and setting up contracts for small works. We are able to react quickly to resident's requests and concerns, such as bin emptying, road signs that are dirty, or overgrown with vegetation.

There were a number of budget considerations in the first year: purchase grass cutting equipment, metal shed to store petrol and petrol machinery, Personal Protection Equipment and the council is leasing a van for Gareth to move his equipment and access the village.

£ Budget Costs:

Van Lease:	£2904.00 per annum
Salary and on-costs:	£12,000 per annum
Materials and equipment:	£2,500 in the first year.

🔍 Fact File:

📍 Sutton Parish Council	
👥 Electorate of:	3,800
★ No. of staff (FTE):	5
£ Precept:	128,376.00
£ Band D:	£96.89
£ Total budget:	£256,000.00