

**Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills
Executive Director for Environment and Economy**

Report to:	Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Date:	10 July 2018
Subject:	Verge Biomass Project

Summary:

In 2017 Lincolnshire County Council attracted funding from the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership, to progress the Verge Biomass project. The money was matched by private sector funding (Lincolnshire Verge Harvesting) to design and build specialist equipment to cut and harvest verge side cuttings to be used in Anaerobic Digesters to create energy.

The work has created national interest and as a result Lincolnshire County Council is today hosting an event at Riseholme to showcase the work done so far.

This report provides an overview of the progress to date and an opportunity to see the machine in action will follow the meeting.

Actions Required:

Members of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee are required to consider and comment on the content of the progress report, and the direction of the project as a whole.

1. Background

Investigations have been ongoing since 2014 into how we might reduce costs of verge cutting, whilst maintaining or even improving the quality of road verges across Lincolnshire's highway network by harvesting the cuttings to be used as an energy source.

A previous study evidenced that verge cuttings make a good substitute for maize in the anaerobic digestion process. The same study highlighted some economic concerns regarding collecting the material with previous cutting techniques, and recognised that if these challenges could be overcome verge cuttings represent a valuable product.

Project Summary

The Machine – A tender was released at the end of August 2017, and in October the successful bidder 'Scotts Precision Manufacturing' were appointed. Scotts Precision Manufacturing is a Lincolnshire based company with over 20 years' experience in agricultural machinery manufacturing. The company has been very supportive of the project and where possible have sourced components for the machine locally. Since their appointment they have designed a bespoke machine to meet the requirements of the tender.

The trial – The trial commenced in April 2018 and will run until September 2018, replicating the current cutting regime (a minimum of 1.1m cut twice per cutting session but cutting deeper into the verges in certain areas of high vegetation growth. This should improve the economic figures). The trial area in its simplest terms will cover a 10km radius around 3 AD plants. One plant is located in the Wolds, another south of Horncastle and a third to the north of Boston.

Interest and publicity – There has been a considerable amount of interest in this project, with a number of other authorities wishing to see the machine and ask questions regarding the process, this is happening at today's event. Local Members as well as District and Parish councils affected by the work were contacted and information shared with the customer services centre. A number of stories have appeared across the media and it is possible that the work will also feature on the BBC's Countryfile programme next year.

Partnership – Collaboration across sectors has been central to the work undertaken. Key players include: Lincolnshire Verge Harvesting (the owners of this business operate the three anaerobic digesters being used) Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust who are undertaking a biodiversity study during the work to assess impacts of the scheme; Lincolnshire County Council, Environment and Economy teams (highways and sustainability) and Peakhill associates who have provided academic direction.

Challenges – For the purposes of this trial the AD operators are operating their plants under an Environment Agency enforcement position. The enforcement position will only cover works up until the end of September 2018. The ambition across the project team is to extend the trial into next year. In order to do this a permit variation for each plant would be necessary and discussion is underway with the Environment Agency to secure these.

2. Next Steps

The second phase of the trial will run during the summer. In the autumn decisions will be taken about the future of the project based on a series of tests – including economic viability. This work is being considered as part of the work around future highways contracts for 2020 and beyond.

3. Consultation

a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

No

b) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Vanessa Strange, who can be contacted on 01522 553038 or Vanessa.Strange@lincolnshire.gov.uk

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