Appendix 2I – Life Cycle Management Plan for Verges and Trees

Introduction
The verge asset comprises the grass and/or vegetation, including trees at the edge of the carriageway and within the highway boundary. According to the CIPFA classification, the verge asset is a level 3 component of carriageway, and it is therefore not valued or enumerated separately.

Inventory
We have limited inventory data, including schedules for annual verge cutting (lengths only, not widths), lists of sites with noxious weeds (e.g., Ragwort, Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed) monitored annually, and a highway tree inventory limited to urban areas of Cheltenham, Gloucester, and some market towns.

Current Condition & Performance
The asset is declining with exception of the Ash Dieback Programme (see below). Defects on verges are usually due to seasonal grass, vegetation, or tree growth. Annual verge cutting includes a full 1m wide swathe on all identified verges and visibility cuts at junctions and bends for safety. Some parish and town councils conduct additional grass cutting, resulting in more than two cuts per year.

Noxious weeds, like Ragwort, Japanese Knotweed, and Giant Hogweed, are monitored and treated annually. Tree inspections identify those posing danger or inconvenience. Gloucester and Cheltenham have a significant number of street trees, with Cheltenham known for its mature, tree-lined avenues.

We will:
- Execute verge cutting, highway shrub, and tree maintenance as per the Highway Safety Inspection Policy and Highway Tree Inspection and Maintenance Guide.
- Collaborate with Parish Councils for local or enhanced grass cutting initiatives.
- Treat noxious weeds via annual spraying or weed pulling, depending on funding.
- Conduct regular highway tree inspections every three years in urban areas and every five years elsewhere, prioritizing maintenance for safety hazards.

In our two major urban areas, Gloucester and Cheltenham, we are working with the respective councils to develop verge treatments which minimise maintenance in areas not required for visibility. This has included planting swathes of wild flowers which support biodiversity, and also have received a very favourable response from residents.

Ash Die Back
Ash is the third most common tree in Britain and there are up to 60 million ash trees outside woodlands in the UK. Ash Dieback was first officially recorded in the UK in 2012, with only a small fraction of trees proving resistant. Ash trees are very common in Gloucestershire, and is commonly found in parks, gardens and hedgerows.

The disease is particularly destructive of our native common ash. The disease affects the structural integrity of a tree, this can create health and safety risks as tree's becomes brittle, losing limbs and in more sever cases causing the tree to fall.

The Council launched the Ash Dieback Project in 2020, to start to tackle the effects of this disease, to keep the public highway and county council land safe and further details can be found at Ash Dieback | Highways.

Creation, Acquisition, Upgrading and Disposal
New verges are most likely to be created as part of developments or through transfer from other authorities. Members of the public can apply for a cultivation licence to maintain a section of highway verge, but the ownership of the verge remains with the highway authority. There are no plans for disposal of any verge asset.

Deterioration
Reduced verge maintenance leads to larger vegetation encroachment and greater issues with trees and vegetation at the carriageway edge.

Treatment Options & Costs
Annual verge and tree maintenance, dependent on seasonal conditions, typically includes one full cut and one visibility cut. Additional cuts may be necessary. Grass cutting focuses on safety but needs more funds for long-term resilience by removing self-seeding vegetation. Hedge cutting, mainly the responsibility of riparian owners, is also done annually to address problem areas and maintain visibility and road width. Tree management focuses on safety through prioritized inspections.

Demands & Risks
These include:

- Network resilience impacted by downed trees
- Management of conservation verges
- Journey delays due to closures from downed trees
- Overrunning of verges
- Highway encroachment into verge areas

Investment Options
Regular maintenance includes at least one full and one visibility cut, plus reactive cutting for safety. Investment in ‘back to boundary’ cuts and extensive vegetation clearance would enhance long-term network resilience.

Future Developments
These include:

- Develop detailed inventory of verge dimensions
- Establish treatment costs for all options
- Explore low-maintenance dwarf grasses and clovers for non-visibility areas.