

NO LEAF LEFT UNTURNED



The action and movement of the hydraulically-operated suction hose arm on Dacorum Borough Council's Trilo SG1100 vacuum sweeper-collector is controlled from the tractor's cab.

The department within Hertfordshire's Dacorum Borough Council responsible for maintaining parks, playing fields, grass verges and streets is known, appropriately, as 'Clean, Safe and Green'. AME visited the Borough in 2010 as the leaves were falling.



Employing around 70 staff, Dacorum Borough Council's Clean, Safe and Green department provides residents and businesses with a variety of essential services ranging from litter picking and street cleaning to mowing and hedge cutting, all of which are carried out by seven separate area teams.

Each team is dedicated to a specific neighbourhood within the Borough which is centred on the so-called "new town" of Hemel Hempstead, created after the

Second World War primarily to house Londoners displaced by the Blitz.

Dacorum Borough Council itself has existed since 1984 as the successor to a District Council formed when the Borough of Hemel Hempstead was abolished as part of the local government review of 1974 and the town of Hemel Hempstead, along with nearby Tring and Berkhamsted, was incorporated within Dacorum District Council. However, ten years' later, Dacorum lobbied successfully to become a Borough, restoring the status that had been granted originally to Hemel Hempstead back in 1898.

Robert Wright, a supervisor with Clean, Safe and Green, pointed out that street care and grounds maintenance operations were merged within the department in 2007 and that every team offers multi-skill capabilities, enabling a wide range of tasks to be carried out without having to call in help from another council department or

outside contractors.

Two jobs that keep the teams busy throughout a large part of the year are grass cutting and litter collection, the latter ranging from regular street bin emptying to continuous picking and removal of dropped litter in public open spaces.

For grass cutting, the department runs a fleet of hand-held, walk-behind and ride-on powered machines, the latter including Ransomes and Hayter triple cylinder and rotary mowers, a pair of Trimax Pegasus three-gang trailed rotary mowers and a Hayter five-gang tractor trailed cylinder mower.

Side-arm flail cutting of hedges bordering public open spaces and footpaths is normally carried out towards the end of August and into early September.

As with most local authorities in Britain, leaf collection for Dacorum's Clean, Safe and Green department has traditionally consumed a huge amount of time and effort starting in late October and running through to mid December due to the borough's large and varied collection of primarily deciduous trees.

Although leaves from urban streets form a significant part of the workload,



Suction hose parked up, the vacuum sweeper-collector gathers leaves from hard surfaces through its 2m wide suction head.

Profile

the majority of the trees shedding their leaves are located within or close to the Borough's 20 playing fields, gardens and public parks, the largest of which is the 32ha Gadebridge Park, whose southern end lies close to the centre of Hemel Hempstead.

Mr Wright pointed out that the department always waited until the "big drop" before despatching the area teams on their main leaf collection rounds, which can take up to two full weeks to complete. Further collections are then carried out every seven to 10 days until the trees are bare.

"For public safety reasons, we concentrate first and foremost on hard surfaces such as footpaths, steps and roadways," he pointed out. "However, contamination issues dictate that none of the leaves collected from public roads are sent for recycling unlike those falling on parks and playing fields which are turned into a valuable compost for use as a mulch on planted beds and borders throughout the Borough."

Up to 2008, the department had hired-in a Trilo tractor-trailed vacuum collector to



Tremendous suction is produced at the nozzle of the 200mm diameter hose to gather up wet or dry leaves and other debris.

complement its dedicated street sweepers, fleet of back-pack blowers and engine-powered truck-loaders that are used with wander hoses to collect and blow fallen leaves into the rear of cage-bodied pick-up vehicles.

Although truck loaders are still deployed wherever needed around the Borough, staff clearing larger open green spaces such as Gadebridge Park and other "Gateway" routes into Hemel Hempstead town centre have had available to them since 2009 their own Trilo SG1100 vacuum sweeper-collector.

Purchased by the Borough that year, the machine was specified with a side-mounted collection hose arm that is operated electro-hydraulically from the tractor's driving seat, giving the Gateway team the capacity to quickly collect the large piles of leaves created with the help of backpack blowers.

Ownership of a key piece of seasonal equipment has removed concerns about escalating hire costs, commented Robert Wright.

"I reckon the machine has now paid for itself," he said. "Furthermore, ownership gives us the ability to go leaf and litter collecting at any time to suit the specific situation and availability of staff. The machine is saving us a great deal of time and effort, being able to collect leaves and other debris using either its remote-controlled side-arm collection hose or 2m wide suction head."

Equipped with an 11 cu metre hopper, the Trilo SG1100 vacuum collector requires a tractor producing a minimum of 70hp at the power take-off. Dacorum Borough Council's machine is attached to and powered by a Kubota M9540, which has a PTO power rating of 84hp.

Other features of the SG1100 that appealed to Clean, Safe and Green's Gateway team when assessing the machine prior to its purchase were the high suction



Typical outward distance cleared by backpack blower around the foot of larger trees is 3m.

capabilities of the four-bladed centrifugal pump, its quiet operation and the low overall height of just 2.8m, enabling the SG11 to work reasonably close to trees without knocking branches.

This ability helps keep to a minimum the time spent shifting leaves from around trees by staff wielding backpack blowers. Typical outward distance cleared from around the foot of larger trees is around 3m.

All of the leaves collected from around the Borough are transported back to Dacorum's main depot at Redbourn Road for sorting into recyclable and non-recyclable elements, depending on source.

"The system works extremely well and leaf collection is nowhere near the chore it was 10 or so years ago," concluded Robert Wright. "I would recommend anyone looking to make a high capital investment in seasonal machinery to try it out first, ideally for the whole of the season. We hired-in the Trilo for four years and got to know its capabilities inside out. It's proving a first-class purchase." ●