

Scythe Risk Assessment

Core Hazards & Control Measures

Hazard	Control Measures
Sharp Blade & Swinging Action	Maintain a safe working distance of at least two scythe lengths (approx. 5m) from others. Use cordons to keep the public and dogs away.
Untrained Users	Ensure all volunteers receive a safety briefing or induction. Maintain a supervision ratio (e.g., max 8 volunteers per trained leader).
Blade Sharpening	Volunteers must wear heavy-duty leather rigger gloves when sharpening or cleaning the blade. Use a sharpening stone with water as instructed.
Transport & Storage	Always use blade guards when carrying or transporting tools. Never leave tools unattended in public areas; store them flat on the ground with the edge facing down when not in use.
Uneven Terrain	Carry out a visual survey before starting to identify rocks, anthills, or hidden debris. Avoid scything on steep slopes where footing is insecure.
Environmental Hazards	Volunteers should wear long sleeves/trousers to protect against poisonous sap (e.g., Giant Hogweed), ticks (Lyme Disease), and stinging insects.
Manual Handling	Encourage regular rest breaks and rhythmic swings to prevent back strain.

Parish Council Responsibilities

- **Insurance:** Ensure volunteers are explicitly covered under the council's Public Liability and Employer's Liability insurance policies.
- **Training & PPE:** The council must provide appropriate tools in good condition and necessary PPE, such as gloves and sturdy footwear.
- **Emergency Planning:** At least one person (the Lead Volunteer) should have a charged mobile phone and access to a first aid kit.
- **Incident Recording:** Any accidents or "near misses" must be recorded in an accident book and followed up.

Volunteer Safety Briefing Checklist

Use this checklist to ensure all critical safety points are covered before anyone picks up a scythe.

- **Arrival & Wellbeing**
 - Everyone signed in on the volunteer register.
 - Any new medical conditions or allergies (e.g., bees, hay fever) to disclose?
 - Does everyone have a water bottle and appropriate clothing (long trousers, sturdy boots)?
- **Site-Specific Awareness**
 - Point out the **First Aid kit** location and the designated First Aider.
 - Identify hazardous plants in the area (e.g., Giant Hogweed, Brambles).
 - Confirm the site has been checked for hidden debris like rocks, metal, or glass.
- **Scythe Safe Handling**
 - **Safe Zone:** Demonstrate the **5-metre** (two scythe lengths) buffer zone between workers.
 - **Sharpening:** Remind volunteers to wear **leather rigger gloves** and sharpen away from others.
 - **Transport:** Scythes must be carried by the side with the **blade guard on**.
 - **Storage:** If taking a break, lay the scythe flat on the ground, blade facing away or covered; never lean it against a tree.

Briefing Record Template

To maintain your council's **Duty of Care** records, have the Lead Volunteer complete a simple log like this for every session:

Session Detail	Notes
Location:	
Lead Volunteer:	
Date & Time:	
Emergency Contact:	
Incident Log:	

- **Volunteer Sign-off:**

I confirm I have received the safety briefing, understand the risks, and will follow the control measures.....