

FAQ's – Grounds maintenance and estate services tender

Why are you changing the current grounds and maintenance contractor?

Our current contract is coming to an end and we are retendering to ensure we receive the best value for money service for our customers.

What will this new ground maintenance contract cover?

This will include, but is not limited to:

- Communal grass cutting;
- Strimming around obstacles;
- Grass edging;
- Turf maintenance;
- Shrub/herbaceous bed maintenance;
- Rose bed maintenance;
- Hedge maintenance;
- Tree maintenance;
- Hard surface weed control;
- Hard surface moss control;
- Leaf clearance;
- Litter picking;
- Hard surface sweeping;
- Ditch and drainage channel maintenance;
- Snow clearance and gritting;
- Hard surfacing pressure jetting;
- Periodic inspections of playgrounds and play areas.

Please refer to the specification which we have made available to you for full details.

The letter mentions a payment of £100, does this mean I need to pay this or that this is going to be my contribution?

No. This letter is not a request for payment and at this stage we do not know what the cost to you will be for this service. We are required to consult with you about our intention to enter into a new agreement with a new contractor which will continue for longer than 12 months and where your contribution **may** exceed £100. We will write to you with details of the cost at stage two of this consultation once the tender exercise has been completed. You will have received this letter as you are a customer who receives a ground maintenance service.

How long will the agreement be?

The new agreement will be five years, with the option to extend for an additional two years if the required standards continue to be met.

If a contract is for a number of years, what happens if the contractor doesn't perform well, do they keep getting the work?

The contract will say that if works or services are not delivered or are not value for money there will be sanctions, or we may end the contract.

When do you hope to have the new contract in place?

1st November 2021.

What criteria has been set to assess and evaluate the proposed contractors?

There will be a detailed evaluation process, which will include quality as well as cost considerations, along with an investigation into their performance under existing contracts with other clients. We will engage with a panel of customers as part of the evaluation process.

How do I know if I currently pay towards a grounds maintenance service ?

This information should be contained in your latest service charge statement. In the absence of this you will be able to check this with our service charge team – servicecharges@aster.co.uk. The cost on your service charge statement will be under the heading “Grounds maintenance & Contract Grounds maintenance”.

You can also view your service charges online through [MyAster](#).

MyAster is an online portal where you can monitor your account with Aster, complete tasks yourself and contact us at any time to suit you. If you have not yet registered to use our MyAster portal service, please [click here](#) to get started.

Will I be charged a weekly/monthly service charge for this service if I do not receive grounds maintenance?

No, you will only be charged for services you receive.

Why have I received this letter, I do not pay for or receive a grounds maintenance service?

The approach we have taken is to write to all customers who have had a grounds maintenance cost in the last two financial years connected to their property. However, we understand that this may include customers in homes that are not paying for these services due to their tenancy agreement. Despite this, you are being consulted with should this service be recharged to your home in the future. If you have any questions specific to your service charge account these should be directed to our service charge team - servicecharges@aster.co.uk.

If I receive this service but do not currently pay does this mean I will now begin to pay?

No.

Why have I received this letter, I am the freehold owner of the property?

Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act does not require us to consult with freeholders. However, as a freehold owner who pays a charge towards the cost of grounds maintenance and/or estate services which we provide to your estate we wanted to include you in the consultation to give you an opportunity to make any comments on our intention to enter into a new agreement for the provision of these services.

I am not happy with the current services provided.

Under this consultation process we are unable to deal with complaints about the quality of current provisions. Please visit our website or contact your

neighbourhood/housing officer through our contact centre on 0333 400 8222 to discuss any issues you are experiencing.

FAQs – Section 20 consultations

What is a section 20 consultation and why does it affect me?

The Section 20 consultation process was put in place to protect service charge payers and to make sure that landlords only carry out work or enter into service contracts that are necessary and at a reasonable cost.

Anyone who pays a service charge whether they are a leaseholder, shared owner or tenant maybe be affected by a section 20 consultation.

The process allows service charge payers the chance to comment on the works and sometimes to suggest contractors for the works depending on the value of the contract.

When is the S20 consultation process used?

For any one-off works that will cost an individual service charge payer over £250 or for any new service (for example grounds maintenance) that lasts longer than 12 months and may cost any service charge payer over £100, we need to let you know and give you the chance to comment on what we are planning.

Your comments (known as observations) form part of a formal consultation between us and you and it's our legal requirement under section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to involve you.

How does the Section 20 consultation process work?

This may vary according to the type of work and the cost but it's usually along these lines:

1. We send you a legal Notice telling you what work or type of contract we are planning to enter into. This will include letting you know where you can find out more details and how you can provide your comments.
2. We get some quotes from contractors, taking into account any comments we've received.
3. We send you a 'notice of estimates' which gives you the details of the estimated costs. You are able to provide feedback to us on the estimates.
4. Taking into account any feedback we receive we award the contract to a preferred supplier to carry out the work.
5. If the contractor is not the cheapest, we will write to explain why they have been awarded the contract.

Can I nominate a contractor?

While the opinions and views of tenants, leaseholders and shared owners are invited and considered, you are not invited to nominate a contractor or company for us to approach. This is in line with the regulations set out in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 as amended by the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002, as the invitation to tender is made by way of public notice.

What is an observation?

You have a right to reply with your comments to a Section 20 notice up to 30 calendar days from the date of the notice. Your reply is known as an 'observation'. We will consider any observations received during the consultation period.

A summary of all the observations received and our responses to them will be sent out with the next stage of the consultation documents.

All the comments and feedback we receive are taken into account when awarding the contract.

How do I make an observation?

Your observation must be in writing either by letter or email. Emails should be sent to the email address at the top of this letter. Letters should be sent to the following address, Section 20 Officer, Aster Group, Sarsen Court, Horton Avenue, Cannings Hill, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 2AZ. You can't make observations verbally over the telephone or in person.

Is this Section 20 Notice a bill?

No, this is not a bill. You don't need to make any payment in response to receiving this letter or any enclosed notices.

How much will this cost me?

At Stage Two of the Section 20 Consultation (Notice of Estimates) we will provide detailed estimates from contractors and a breakdown of costs.

What if I cannot afford to pay?

If you are worried about how you will meet the cost, please speak to your housing officer. For more information visit www.aster.co.uk/existing-customers/leaseholder/what-to-do-if-you-are-struggling-to-pay

I have received a S20 notice but I don't think it's for me?

If you receive a notice to your address but not in your name please let us know, it may be that our records need updating or that the leaseholder is subletting the property to you.

If you are a leaseholder sub-letting your property, please let us have a correspondence address so we can send S20 Notices to you there.

I am planning to sell my property before the service described in the S20 notice is completed, what should I do?

You should keep the documents safe and pass them to your solicitor when you have accepted an offer. Any potential purchaser needs to be aware of any Section 20 consultation.

Where can I go for advice?

You can contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau for independent advice. The following websites also have useful information about the S20 process:

<http://www.lease-advice.org>

<http://www.leaseholderadvicecentre.co.uk>