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Hedge owners cut down to size

Residents struggling with neighbourhood hedge disputes have been handed a green-fingered answer in the form of new legislation.

New powers mean Leylandii owners could face fines of up to £1,000 if they fail to cut down their high hedge when ordered to. The new laws allow residents to ask Coventry City Council to intervene and establish whether a hedge is too high.

Until now, local authorities have been powerless to act in disputes over high hedges.

However, before residents come with a complaint, they need to note that before the council can take action, it must be proved that complainants have taken all possible approaches to resolve the problem. Residents have to provide evidence to the local authority that they have approached the hedge-owner concerned.

For this reason Whitefriars Housing Group has teamed up with the Coventry Community Safety Partnership to offer free mediation to residents involved in a neighbourhood hedge dispute. Its innovative asb4 service, a pioneering project introduced in 2004, allows residents to enter free mediation in a bid to resolve disagreements before they head to the courts or, in this case, the council.

A budget for the service will determine how many cases will be dealt with each year. Complaints will only be considered where the hedge is evergreen, over two metres high and blocking out light, access or reasonable enjoyment of neighbours' property.

Whitefriars' Gail Cooper said: "Under the legislation, councils can charge a fee at their discretion for solving disputes, so this service is a good way of saving what may be a few hundred pounds. Neighbourhood disputes often escalate because people fail to talk to each other – mediation is one way to resolve this and put an end to problems which can make people's lives a misery.

“Whitefriars is working hard to reduce anti-social behaviour and to make Coventry a better place to live, so we are delighted to offer this service.”

Most councils have set their fees at between £300 and £500.

Whitefriars expertise in mediation has led Coventry Community Safety Partnership to promote the service to residents across the city.

Whitefriars has already helped the group with its aim of reducing crime and disorder, and Paul Hargrave of the Coventry Community Safety Partnership welcomed this new offer of help.

He said: “We will use mediation as the frontline method of resolving such disputes. It is a far more effective way of producing long-term results in communities.”

For more information on asb4, contact Gail Cooper on 024 7649 6749.

Ends

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