

Proposal for Harberton Parish Council to advise a ban of the use of pesticides (herbicides, insecticides and fungicides) for the sake of human health within the Parish, and to encourage wildlife-friendly practices in the management of Parish Council owned/managed land, as well as land used by the public outside schools, churches and village halls, and road verges.

Background: A number of local authorities are planning to phase out their use of glyphosate-based weedkillers due to cases linking herbicides of this sort with certain cancers. Last week, B&Q decided to stop selling glyphosate due to its links to cancer: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8349041/B-Q-stop-selling-weedkiller-Roundup-cancer-link-discovered-US.html>

In addition, according to the nation's Wildlife Trusts, "the UK is now officially one of the most nature depleted countries in the world." The statistics globally are alarming – 70% of insects lost since the 1970s – and unnecessary to dwell upon. It is up to all parts of society to reverse this trend and so, as residents of Harberton Parish, we call upon the Parish Council to support us in calling for a change in land management within the Parish.

Key Aim/Objective: All areas must be managed in a way that supports and benefits wildlife and plants, especially native flora and fauna. This is in line with the government's National Pollinator Strategy and is Devon County Council's key land management aim. It is also draft Harberton Neighbourhood Plan Objective 4. on p.3 'Protection of wildlife and enhancement of its habitats and conservation of trees and woodland'. The most recent HNP survey showed 95% support for protecting and regenerating wildlife, see p.44.

Key Strategies to achieve this:

1. A complete ban on the use of pesticides and adoption of alternative management systems.
2. Practical guidelines for cutting back vegetation to benefit wildlife and plant diversity. Timing is crucial and there are two main options:

a) Single cut in August/September

b) Two cuts – of the two suggested schedules, cuts in February/March and September/October might suit the parish best because it means that old winter vegetation will be removed at the start of the year.

- Avoid cutting April–August.
- Annual management essential – coarse vegetation will develop if grass is left uncut
- Grow, flower, seed, mow – plants need to grow, flower and set seed in order to thrive.
- Remove cuttings – grass cuttings smother plants and increase soil fertility. (Although abandoning regular summer mowing saves time and resources, the removal of cut material represents an additional task.)
- Mix it up – leave some areas of long grass, e.g. a strip along a wall or hedge.

Paths and steps

Where paths and steps, etc., have to be kept clear for health and safety reasons, the parish could consider flame treatment, which is particularly suitable for paved and gravel surfaces and both leaves no residues and is safer for the operator. Persistent perennial weeds may need several treatments.

Churchyards

The C of E has produced a document 'Biodiversity,' which recognises the enormous biodiversity potential of churchyards and suggests, amongst other things, leaving some areas of long grass – with a mowing and removing regime as above. The churchyard at Buckland-on-the-Moor is now successfully managed this way, with the area containing graves strimmed regularly and the rest managed by an informed volunteer group.

Public engagement

It is recognised that there may be some initial resistance to changing the way things are done. Parishioners who are members of the Harberton Parish Environment Action Group undertake to work with the Parish Council to find solutions.

Further reading:

www.bc-legal.co.uk/bcdn/854-270-british-local-authorities-re-evaluate-glyphosate-herbicide-use-amid-french-farmer-ruling; Pesticide Action Network UK

<https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/>

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/bumblebee-conservation-trust-welcomes-launch-national-pollinator-strategy-england/>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/> Churchyard management

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/environment/wildlife/managing-verges-for-wildlife>

'Devon's Living Churchyards' <https://ecochurchsouthwest.org.uk/actions/living-churchyards/>

Church of England biodiversity policy www.churchofengland.org.uk

<https://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free/>

<https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/roadvergecampaign>

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/road-verge-management-guide>

The Wildlife Trusts 'A Wilder Britain' outlines the importance of 'a joined-up' approach, with action at every level – and that includes our parish!

www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Nature_recovery_network_final.pdf