

CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 7 November 2023

Title: Pesticides Policy

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

At the Climate, Biodiversity meeting on the 13th of June 2023, officers reported to the council on the current systems of weed control with the purpose of creating a new pesticide policy. It was decided officers draft a pesticide policy on Town Council-owned land for agreement at a future meeting.

This policy would also help administrative staff with complaints they receive regarding these matters, rather than dealing with each situation individually.

Current Situation

A draft policy has been started and will be submitted to the next Policy, Governance & Finance meeting on the 20th of November. This report is a chance for councillors to steer how that policy aims to tackle issues that require pesticide applications.

No Spray Zones

An aim of the policy is to control and reduce the application of pesticides across land managed by Witney Town Council. A large amount of that control and reduction will come in the form of no-spray zones that will be defined by a map.

The policy drafted covers basic pesticide application to the below-mentioned, total weed killers will be used and then followed up with a residual weed killer to reduce the overall use of those total weed killers.

- Windrush ashes path
- Tower Hill memorial wall
- Buttercross

Other areas are more specifically defined such as trees and ivy and the Council is asked for the best procedure for officers to use. The policy will also set out the pesticide use across bowls and cricket greens (fine turfs).

Ditches and watercourses

To avoid the need to complete LERAP (Local Environment Risk Assessments for pesticides) documentation and the high environmental risk that comes with the use of pesticides around water courses no spraying or direct injection will take place near watercourses, these will be defined in the no spray zones.

Trees

The damage caused by mowers and strimmer's to tree roots and trunks is minimal due to the cut height of around 35-50mm however it has caused complaints from residents.

- Continue with the current mowing practices.
- Apply a growth regulator around the base of trees.
- Leave the areas uncut around trees to a height of around 100-125mm, reducing the total number of cuts and risk of blades coming into contact with protruding roots.

Applying a growth regulator would be an unnecessary use of a herbicide to tackle this issue however it's the only complete solution. A better solution would be to avoid cutting the areas however as trees provide shade, they are prime locations for residents to use and the long grass would cause complaints.

Ivy growth

Ivy growth is not a huge issue affecting Witney and the programme of ringing the ivy in autumn or spring and then removing dead growth a month later has been successful in controlling its growth. The office has received some comments on ivy growth but nothing substantial. As ivy is very resistant to herbicide applications and it would require substantial herbicide use this is an area where any potential complaints don't outweigh the use of herbicides.

The policy will be supported by a map highlighting non-spray zones and the processes carried out in those areas to manage ivy growth, weed control, self-seeding trees and any other plant that require pesticide application.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Pesticides have an impact on the environment, some glyphosate-based herbicides don't break down causing unintended damage to the surrounding environment. In all areas, the council should be aiming to reduce its pesticide application and balance this against potential complaints and the overall image of the town.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- There is a sufficient budget to cover the cost of additional herbicides and basic equipment in the ground maintenance budget.
- To train more staff in the storage and safe use of pesticides an increase in the training budget of £1500.00 would be required for future years to ensure the team has sufficient numbers trained in their use.
- The Operations Manager has explored the potential use of modern equipment for weed control but the majority of these are built for particular tasks, not just one for all. It would result in a large financial outlay for an assortment of equipment for relatively small areas within the town.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Provide feedback to officers for the final drafting of the policy for the use of pesticides across Witney Town Council open spaces. In particular, the implementation of no-spray zones and the exclusions listed, the approach to ditches/watercourses and ditches, and confirmation on an earlier committee recommendation on growth regulator around trees.