

Cabinet Meeting: Monday, 05 August 2024

Question from: Ed Greenwood

Question to: Councillor Scott Patient

Whilst acknowledging C.M.B.C.'s environmental objective of not managing the verges of highways for which it has responsibility, has it assessed, risk or otherwise, the unforeseen consequences of this activity on the proliferation of Ragwort that is now evident in the rural landscape. I draw your attention to the Weeds Act 1989 (as amended), the Ragwort Control Act 2003 and Code-of-Practice-on-how-to-prevent-the-spread-of-ragwort.pdf April 2018 and ask.

What is C.M.B.C.'s Policy, Strategy and Action plan(s) in order to address this potential danger to the people and to livestock, especially the equine interests?

Where are the above published on its website?

Does it recognise the possibility of insurance claims for lack of action of its responsibility.

What direction has it given to Suez and its staff on their varying disposal actions of this weed?

May I remind you that each Ragwort plant produces between 70,000 and 120,000 seeds with a 70% fertility rate and "one year's seeding is seven year's weeding".

I look forward to a transparent, honest and numerically evidenced response.

Response

Calderdale Council is embracing the 'No Mow May' initiative as part of our commitment to promoting biodiversity and a healthy environment. This involves reduced cutting in targeted areas across the borough, including parkland, green spaces and grass verges. By taking this approach, we are aiming to create havens for vulnerable wildlife and combat air pollution, while also locking away carbon below the ground.

This annual campaign, spearheaded by the conservation charity Plantlife, encourages sustainable management of green spaces. Recognising the vital role these areas play in providing sustenance for pollinators like bees and butterflies and facilitating wildlife movement, we are committed to enhancing nature-friendly practices in targeted sites.

As we confront the challenges posed by dwindling biodiversity, it's imperative to acknowledge the profound impacts of our actions on the natural world. In the UK,

nearly 97% of flower-rich meadows have vanished since the 1930s, underscoring the urgency of our conservation endeavours.

We acknowledge the ecological role of ragwort as part of a mosaic of wildflowers, as is it is frequently visited by butterflies and highly attractive to bees and many other insects, including the cinnabar moth. Given that most of the sites we own are urban and are cut before ragwort can seed, the risk of the plant spreading is low. Our goal is to manage these sites effectively to promote a variety of species, rather than allowing any single species to dominate.

However, we also recognise that while grazing animals do not typically eat ragwort, due to its pungent smell and unpalatable taste, consuming small amounts over a long period or large amounts at once is harmful to their health. Therefore, we advise landowners and land managers to control and remove ragwort in and around fields and paddocks where horses, ponies and cattle graze. Haymakers should also be particularly vigilant to ensure dried ragwort is not included in their crop.

In respect of disposal, where Suez are aware of loads containing ragwort it will be dealt with via the appropriate route. However, given that Suez handle over 7,000 tonnes of garden waste each year it is possible that some ragwort may slip through and go to be composted as sifting through every garden waste bin or skip they deal with is impractical.