

Cabinet Meeting: Monday, 05 August 2024

Question from: Alex Greenwood

Question to: _____ Councillor Sarah Courtney

Does the Council have any specific plans to tackle the growing ragwort problem in the more rural areas of the borough as it is becoming very invasive and is classed as a noxious weed with hazard to both human and animal health?

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 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.