

NOTES ON A MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT WORKING GROUP (EWG)

11th July 2022 via Teams

Attendees: Cllr John Turner (JT), (Chair), Cllr Paul Curry (PC), Cllr Dave Pate (DP), with Alan Ford (AF) and Lizzie Pannell (LP)

Apologies: Cllr Ed Langridge (EL) due to technical difficulties and Ken Howes (KH) due to personal commitments

In attendance: Catherine Barrett (CB) Assistant Clerk

Members of Public: There was one member of public present

1. Election of Chair

Since it was the working group's first meeting since the parish council annual statutory meeting, it was necessary to elect a Chair and JT was re-elected as Chair of the working group.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

EL was re-elected as Vice-Chair in his absence.

3. Public open session

Kim Smith (KS) attended the meeting to talk to the working group about finding an alternative to their current weedkiller which contained Glyphosate. She thanked the parish council for the care taken in general in looking after the parish. She said she was concerned about the accumulative effects of using glyphosate-based weed killer immediately outside Langton Green Primary School and in the playground at Langton Green Recreation Ground where children regularly played. She said that even though the areas where weedkiller was used were small, the harmful effects over time were significant.

KS had spoken to her brother-in-law, a Plant Scientist at Cambridge University, who had recommended the parish council look at a website called Hartzone, which lists over 17 Glyphosate alternatives. KS would be happy to find local outlets and investigate costings for these alternative products.

JT explained to KS that the purpose of this meeting was to begin to gather information about alternatives to Glyphosate. The working group would use the information KS had given to form the basis of their discussion, which was the next item on the agenda. JT asked for questions from the working group and LP asked whether they had the authority to make final decisions on the use of weedkiller. CB confirmed that the working group could make recommendations at the next full council meeting as a result of their discussion, which would then be formally voted on by all Councillors. KS confirmed that she would only be interested in working with the parish council if they agreed to stop using immediately.

If KS was still interested in providing costings for some of the alternative products, given that the working group was still in the assessment phase, they would welcome this input. KS left the meeting at 7.25pm.

4. Review the parish council's use of Glyphosate, as delegated to the EWG by Full Council on 6th June

Notes on the council's current position on the use of Glyphosate-based weedkiller had been circulated. In summary, the Groundsman would only spray on dry days from 7-8am. He would only spray on hard surfaces when there was no alternative. He would only carry out 'spot' application. Locations included paths, the carpark and some of the playground at Langton Green Recreation Ground. The Groundsman also sprayed twittens in Langton Green using the same best practice.

JT asked the working group for their thoughts on finding an alternative method of getting rid of weeds and the following feedback was given:

- LP said that she preferred a natural method and would rather trim twice than apply chemicals once. She suggested appealing for a working party of residents to weed the necessary areas during the growing season.
- AF said that he would not use chemicals in his own garden but appreciated that the challenges presented to the parish council in keeping weeds down were different.

- DP asked for it to be noted that the parish council always had empathy with the views and concerns of its residents, and their safety and health was its priority when voting on and carrying out any course of action. He said that Glyphosate was not a product that anyone wanted to use in the long-term, but that the working group needed time to gather facts and information before offering alternatives to full council.
- PC said that the parish council would eventually be pushed to start using an alternative as there would be a review of its licence in December 2023. He said that as the £120 spent on Glyphosate for the 2022 growing season was not a considerable amount of money, it should not be counted as a factor in what the working group recommended. He said that the issue would not go away and that it would be advisable to start working on a new approach now.
- JT said the aim should be to stop using glyphosate as soon as possible, once a suitable alternative had been found. He suggested spending 3 months pulling together information, facts and feedback from other parish/town councils who had already made a move towards banning glyphosate-based weedkiller before making recommendations to full council. PC said that based on his own reading on the subject, the parish council should be prepared for the fact that an 'as effective' alternative product doesn't currently exist.

After this discussion, the following action points were set:

- **Spend the next 3 months pulling together information on alternatives to glyphosate - JT, LP, PC and DP**
- **JT and CB pull together recommendation on how to move forward regarding weedkiller use ready for the Aug 1st Full Council meeting for agreement.**
- **JT to prepare a short statement to be used when expected questions come to the Council regarding weedkiller use. Also needs to go to Full Council for agreement.**

5. Update on biodiversity at Pocket Park

- **Update on Sussex Lund**
At a working party meeting on 8th June, it had been decided that it was too soon to apply for funding from Sussex Lund. Building a baseline picture of biodiversity over the next few months would be a more useful course of action. CB had advised Sussex Lund of this decision.
- **No mow signs in Pocket Park**
AF had put up 3 no mow signs. He reported that he had visited the park several times and taken photos of new species emerging in the un-mown area. These included two new species of butterfly.
- **New information sign**
EL had contacted two companies for quotes for a noticeboard type sign and was waiting to hear back.
- **Increase of unmown area**
An action point was set for CB to arrange a meeting between AF, JT and the contractor responsible for mowing the park. JT was keen to increase the area of unmown grass before the growing season ended.
- **Removal of invasive Laurel bushes**
Sussex Lund had recommended the removal of invasive plant species, and the working party visit to Pocket Park on 21st June had revealed a quantity of Laurel bush spreading across the park. These were not native to the area and did not add any value. It was agreed quotes were needed for the removal of the Laurel.
- **Improvement of hedging**
It was agreed that the old tree stumps should be taken out and be replaced with mixed species of hedging to improve their biodiversity potential. DP said he had recently planted mixed hedging where he lived and would be willing to help with this. He suggested making the planting a community initiative. It was suggested that the Woodland Trust could provide the plants. **An action point was set for CB to contact them about this.**
- **Removal/Renovation of gate into adjoining footpath**
The gate into the footpath adjoining pocket park was in a state of disrepair and discouraged walkers from using the correct entrance to the footpath. This caused walkers to make their own path through Pocket Park to access the footpath, which stopped the grass from growing. **An action point was set for CB to ask the Public Rights of Way Officer if the gate could be removed or renovated.** The gap in the hedge that walkers used as an unofficial entrance could then be filled in.

6. Update on contact with local residents and groups

- An action point was set for LP to liaise with EL about attending a session with the local Guides and Brownies at the start of the new school year.
- Speldhurst Primary School was planning to reinstate its 'Eco-Warrior' club in the new school Year. An action point was set for CB to contact the Headteacher about working together.

7. Any other business

An action point was set for PC to contact the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) for advice on pesticide best practice.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.