

Briefing Document 'Green Policy for Open Space

Briefing Document for Steyning Parish Council.

Proposal for a Green Policy for SPC Open Spaces. July 2019

Purpose

To provide Councillors with background information on the range of issues facing the Environment, with particular reference to the use of chemicals and plastics used in the Open Spaces in the parish for which the Council has responsibility. These include the Playing Fields and both Allotment sites.

To propose a plan by which a 'Green Policy' might be adopted for such areas. This Green Policy would include guidance on the use of herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, peat, water, plastics etc. It would also give some ideas on how to generally improve these areas for wildlife, whilst maintaining them for their primary purpose.

Main Recommendations.

1. Produce a list of 'approved products' for use on SPC Open Spaces
2. Amend Allot Regs to permit small ponds and wildlife areas. Encourage installation of bird nesting boxes and bat boxes, woodpiles, bug hotels.
3. Continue to manage/plant hedges sympathetically, cutting on rotation where needed.
4. Encourage/support rainwater storage schemes on allotment plots.
5. Recommend peat-free composts be used in preference to peat-based ones.
6. Ban use of woven polypropylene ground cover membranes. To give advice on alternative ground cover membranes and plastics use on the allotments.
7. Improve biodiversity on fringes of Open Spaces by less frequent grass cutting/leaving some permanent wildlife areas.

Introduction

As Councillors will know, the Greening Steyning movement has been very active for many years, and is currently calling for urgent action on climate change and the use of plastics. So an Open Spaces 'Green Policy' for Parish Council owned land could make a big contribution, by ensuring that these spaces are managed in an as environmentally-friendly way as possible.

Recent scientific articles on the state of our insect populations have highlighted how desperate the situation is for them, especially regarding the widespread use of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides. "Plummeting insect numbers 'threaten collapse of nature' (Ref 1). "Biodiversity of insects is threatened worldwide....dramatic rates of decline that may lead to the extinction of 40% of the world's insect species over the next few decades". (Ref 2).

See **Appendix B** for more examples.

Some would argue that there is a case for farmers using these chemicals as they work in a highly regulated industry and are required to keep records to show that they are using them responsibly.

But it is gardeners, local growers and allotment holders where the argument for the continued use of these things is weaker. Does it really matter if roses have a bit of black spot, or aphids arrive on broad beans, or 'weeds' grow amongst the crops? It is entirely possible to garden without the use of any chemicals, by hand-pulling weeds, or using organic mulches to suppress weed growth. Many plant pests also have their own predators, who given the chance, will keep such 'pests' under control.

The current situation in Steyning.

Allotments

Our two allotment sites already provide a diversity of habitats, as well as providing a 'wildlife corridor' connecting other habitats together. That is the nature of allotments. They are all slightly different, some immaculate, some a bit more messy! There is already an abundance of wildlife on the allotments. (see Appendix A). But there is so much more we could do.

Many allotmenters are already very environmentally aware, and garden as sustainably as they can. For most of them, being able to grow fresh produce organically is one of the main benefits of having an allotment, and they welcome the role that insects play in pollination and pest control, and this allows them to move away from the use of herbicides and pesticides. Other allotment holders may take a little more persuading.

But it is very difficult to make informed choices when faced with the complex labelling of these products, the advertising campaigns that large manufacturers run, and the changing regulatory landscape that approves and bans products, often at individual country level. Much of this use could be an awareness issue of what alternatives might be available.

This could be addressed by SPC providing a list of 'approved products' to allotment holders and others, so that we reduce the use of such products.

Eg.

- **BugFree** (Bug and Larvae Killer) is a contact insecticide containing Pyrethrins (a natural insecticide derived from Chrysanthemums)
- **Weed Free Express**. An organic herbicide containing Pelargonic acid, derived from geraniums.

We could also improve the allotments habitats by allowing tenants to have small ponds (currently banned under our Regs), leaving small areas for wildlife, and by encouraging installing bird nesting boxes and bat boxes in the boundary trees, or on sheds.

Woodpiles and bug hotels really do work in attracting beneficial insects and bees etc. We might even consider a larger pond on one of the less popular plots.

To continue the current programme of planting native species hedging plants on the boundaries. We are already managing the hedge cutting around Rublees in a more sympathetic manner than previously.

To propose that each allotment holder stores rainwater on their plot by collecting from shed roofs etc. The Council might consider a subsidised water barrel scheme by buying them in bulk.

To recommend peat-free products in preference to those composts containing peat.

To ban use of woven polypropylene ground cover membranes. To give advice on alternative ground cover membranes and plastics use on the allotments.

Other Open Spaces

Most of these are playing fields/playgrounds. So their primary purpose will be paramount. But even here, there are things that could be done to improve biodiversity.

- Sympathetic hedge cutting, eg, not to cut every hedge every year, but on a 1-3 yr schedule.
- Leave some non-sport grass areas to grow, and cut once in late summer.
- leave permanent wildlife strips around the field boundaries.
- Ban use of weedkillers.

I hope that this document is helpful in starting the discussions towards a 'Green Policy' for the Council's Green Spaces.

Roger Brown

Appendix A. Wildlife recorded at Rublees recently.

Foxes, badgers, deer, butterflies, bumblebees, bees, moles, toads, 4 species of bats, even a weasel.

A 1 hour bird survey counted 90 birds of 14 species.

Just a sample of the wildflowers seen at Rublees. Bird's Foot Trefoil, Goat's-beard, Fleabane, Campion, Chickweed, Speedwells, Fumitory, Poppy, Crane's bill, Dandelion, Dead-nettle, Fat hen, Scarlet pipernel, Fluellin, Fumitory, Weasel's snout, Wild carrot.

Appendix B. Recent examples of chemical products found to be damaging to the environment.

- **Slug Pellets.** Those containing metaldehyde are now banned from sale, following evidence of them causing harm to birds and mammals, and will be illegal to use from Spring 2020. But this has had hardly any publicity, and there are bound to be lots of the old slug pellets in people's sheds etc.

Slug pellets now contain Ferric phosphate. But there is now doubt about these also as they contain a chelating agent EDTA that makes the iron more soluble in the guts of slugs - and in every other living thing. The slugs die from Iron poisoning, as would birds, dogs, earthworms etc if they ingested sufficient quantity. So current advice seems to be to use slug pellets with care, sparingly and keep containers out of reach of pets/children. (Ref 3)

- **Neonicotinoids.** 3 of these 'neonics' were banned by the EU, because of the damage they are causing to bee populations, and that ban was implemented by the UK in early 2019. However there are 2 other widely used, but less toxic, neonics that were not banned, including acetamiprid (contained in Rose Clear and Bug Clear Ultra), and thiacloprid (Provado Ultimate Bug Killer). France has since banned all 5 of these neonics.

- **Glyphosate.** (eg Weedol and Round Up) Used extensively by gardeners, farmers and councils as a weedkiller. The debate around it has been ongoing for many years with the weight of evidence gradually causing it to be restricted or banned in some countries. The EU extended the licence for use of glyphosate in 2017 until 2022. France and Belgium voted against the extension and are trying to overturn the licence in their own countries. The WHO describes glyphosate as 'probably carcinogenic'. A US court has recently granted £226m damages from Monsanto (the manufacturer) to a man who claimed glyphosate exposure at work led to his terminal cancer. (Ref 4)

- **Aminopyralid.** Is a broadleaf herbicide used by farmers on arable to control thistles, docks etc. The problem comes when hay is cut from these fields.(a similar herbicide Clopyralid, is sold to gardeners as a weedkiller for lawns). The hormone weedkiller passes through animals fed this hay without breaking down. Manure from these animals spread on food crops distorts growth and can ruin the crop. Many allotment holders across the country have been reporting this damage since 2009. (Ref 5)

-**Chlororthalonil .** Is the most used pesticide in the UK, used as a fungicide to treat mildew and mould on roses and crops. It has just been banned by the EU as it has a 'high risk to fish and amphibians', and concerns about groundwater contamination. It has also been shown to be a factor in bumblebee losses. (Ref 6)

- **Ground cover membranes.** Used by many gardeners to cover areas of land to suppress weeds whilst awaiting planting.(and by SPC to cover unused allotments) The commonest one is woven polypropylene. It is fine if used as a drive base covered with gravel, but in an allotment situation it frays at the edges, causing thousands of black plastic fibres to be spread around the site, which will be there forever. There are many green alternatives that can be used instead, such as Biodegradable Corn Starch membrane.

Cited References

(1) [Plummeting insect numbers 'threaten collapse of nature'](#)

Guardian Newspaper. Plummeting insect numbers 'threaten collapse of nature'

(2) [Worldwide decline of the entomofauna: A review of its drivers](#)

Worldwide decline of the entomofauna: A review of its drivers. [Biological Conservation](#) [Volume 232](#), April 2019, Pages 8-27

(3) [Restrictions on the use of metaldehyde to protect wildlife.](#) DEFRA ban on metaldehyde

(4) https://issuu.com/panuk/docs/glyphosate_monograph_complete?e=28041656/43997864A review of the science documenting the adverse human health and environmental impacts of glyphosate and glyphosate based herbicides. 2017

(5) [Weedkiller in manure / RHS Gardening](#) RHS advice about aminopyralid weedkiller in manure.

(6) [EU bans UK's most-used pesticide over health and environment fears](#) Report of EU ban on Chlorothalonil