

October 2023 Full Council Meeting

Motion submitted by Councillor Tim Taylor WEEDS In April 2023, with neither consultation nor (so far as we are aware) notice, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) decided to cease all cyclical spraying to suppress weeds on our pavements, roads and in our gullies.

On September 8th a letter was sent by Frank Jordan (Executive Director for Place & Sustainability at CCC) to all Councils in the county, recognising "that the County Council should have engaged with its partners in district and parish councils more effectively at the time when this policy change was being considered, and then when it was implemented, and that is something we wish to improve upon" and advising that CCC is "reviewing the impact of the change in both rural and urban areas" and that CCC "will be considering changes to [their] approach when [they] have the assessment results and presenting this to members" of CCC. Many residents have complained that our roads and footpaths have already become unsightly as a result of this new policy to cease cyclical spraying on our highways. If the policy isn't reversed by CCC, this will only become worse with time. Council notes with concern the reports in September after periods of intense rain in Manea, March and Whittlesey that road surface water did not drain as quickly as would otherwise have been possible because drains and gullies were blocked or impeded by weed and grass growth which was a direct result of the change of policy stopping cyclical spraying, creating a safety hazard for road users and increasing flood risk in adjacent properties.

Council further notes the spurious justification for the policy to cease cyclical spraying that glyphosate, the most commonly used chemical for this purpose, is unsafe. We note that the use of glyphosate as a weed suppressant is approved in the UK and by the European Union, and that a recent study showed that glyphosate is less toxic to humans than vinegar or table salt. In failing to take preventative action to suppress weeds, a significant increase in roadside Ragwort has been noticed. Ragwort is poisonous to ruminants generally and to horses in particular. The County Council as Highways Authority is under a statutory duty to remove and prevent Ragwort, and should do so in accordance with DEFRA's best practice guidance. The resumption of cyclical spraying should be an important preventative element as part of the County's control strategy in respect of Ragwort.

Council therefore agrees to respond to CCC advising them of the contents of this motion and our desire to see cyclical spraying recommenced to suppress weeds on our roads, pavements and in our gullies

December 2023 Full Council Meeting

1. Fenland District Council recognises and notes the huge contribution made by Fenland's farmers, growers and wider food and drink industry to the local economy, environment, and rural communities.
2. Fenland District Council commits to further enhancing our partnerships with local arable, livestock and dairy farmers to enhance our magnificent countryside.

3. Fenland District Council commits to supporting our local farmers, growers and food and drink sector by, where possible, ensuring that food and drinks provided at council organised events are sourced from local suppliers. If plant-based produce is provided, meat and dairy options should also be provided.
4. As part of furthering Fenland District Council's environmental priorities, the Council will consider ways to encourage residents, where possible, to shop locally, taking advantage of home-grown, affordable, and nutritious produce, including meat, dairy, and plant-based options, thus reducing food miles to our tables, and boosting the local economy

February 2024 Full Council Meeting

BLUETONGUE & BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS

Council Notes:

1. That Bluetongue is a viral disease, most commonly spread by midges, which primarily affects sheep and, to somewhat lesser amounts, cattle, deer, goats and camelids (such as llamas and alpacas).
2. That vaccination is the standard and most effective measure that farmers can normally use to protect their livestock, but unfortunately there is not yet a vaccine developed which is effective against the serotype currently spreading around Europe.
3. That within England, at the time of writing this motion, 99 bluetongue cases have been identified at 55 premises across 3 counties: Kent, Suffolk, and Norfolk.
4. That the nearest suspected outbreak has been at Emneth, although this has now been found to have been a false alarm.
5. That, worryingly, DEFRA have not yet been able to confirm that the current bluetongue outbreak is being transmitted by midges, which had been the transmission vector for all previous serotypes.

Council Further Notes:

1. That Bovine TB (bTB) results from a bacterial infection, most commonly spread directly between cattle.
2. That bTB is a disease which presents very slowly in infected livestock, months or even years after infection.
3. Given that bTB is a zoonosis (humans can be infected), that bTB is a notifiable disease which is primarily detected through routine testing of cattle rather than as a result of animals becoming symptomatic.
4. That routine tests for bTB in the UK either use a skin test (Single Intradermal Comparative Cervical Tuberculin – SICCT) or they use a blood test (Gamma Interferon).

5. That the frequency of testing depends upon the location of a farm, with Fenland currently being defined as being in a low-risk area. Nevertheless, the 'edge risk' area requiring 6 monthly testing now reaches the border of Northamptonshire.

As far as Fenland's farmers are concerned, Council notes:

1. That the risks posed to their herds and flocks is very real.
2. That farmers have a real commitment to the health and welfare of their animals.
3. That farming businesses can be significantly damaged financially in cases of bluetongue or bTB, either in their own animals or even if the outbreak is at another farm in the locality.
4. That farmers are experiencing increasing amounts of stress generally, exacerbated by the threats of bluetongue, bTB and other pressures to the extent that there should be concerns as to some farmers' mental welfare.

Council therefore resolves:

1. To contact our Member of Parliament, Steve Barclay, requesting that routine testing for bTB be conducted using a blood test (Gamma Interferon) rather than a skin test (SICCT) since blood testing is more accurate, produces far fewer false positives, results in fewer uninfected cattle being unnecessarily slaughtered (at considerable cost to farmers) and because blood tests have a quicker turnaround time than using SICCT.
2. To contact our Member of Parliament, Steve Barclay, requesting that testing for bluetongue be allowed to be conducted by any qualified local veterinary surgeon, as opposed to the current requirement for testing to be done only by a DEFRA vet, as the DEFRA vet service currently has a 12 week waiting time for such visits, leading to an increased danger of both intra-flock and onward transmission and increased costs to farmers. Additionally, to request that our MP supports a greater priority being given to developing a vaccine for the current bluetongue serotype.
3. To contact CCC Public Health and the North Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Care Partnership asking them both to include farmers' mental health as a specific item on their register of mental health risks, with a view to generally promoting awareness of mental health risks to farmers together with identifying and dealing with any farmer's mental health issues at the earliest possible stage