

Cabinet

Meeting date: 13 June 2023

Public Questions (2 total)

1. Question from Mr Jay-Jay Potter-Peachey to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson

Cheltenham has long been an LGBTQ+ safe zone and the protections in the UK are better than most. Will the council consider a review of its relationships with certain countries, taking into account a full range of human rights, especially the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, and use its standing and relationship to help those of the LGBTQ+ community in our twinned cities/towns etc?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you to Jay-Jay for his question. While I acknowledge that this is a valid subject for debate for the reasons he has stated in his question and in the media, recommendations about changes to twinning relationships is a matter for the Cheltenham Twinning Association. That includes starting new twinning relationships or ending current ones. I'm aware that Jay-Jay is in contact with members of the Twinning Association and wish him and them well with discussions about this issue.

2. Question from Ms Claire Dovey to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

Could the council provide the strategy and timeline moving forward towards becoming a pesticide free town following their recent trial and subsequent move to reduce Glyphosate by 50%?

Response from Cabinet Member

Cheltenham Borough Council, like many other councils, is already actively seeking to significantly reduce or stop the use of herbicide weed spray (glyphosate). Our website sets out the various trials that have taken place with alternatives however none are as effective in reducing weed growth or as affordable. I support the aspirations of the Pesticide Free Cheltenham Group, particularly seeking support from the public, businesses and landowners in Cheltenham to reduce the use of pesticides, including herbicides, on public and private land including private gardens across the borough.

To balance both the environmental benefits and the financial costs, the council has already implemented a 50% reduction in weed spraying which is a significant

improvement on what has happened for many years, and we have also introduced manual weed ripping to remove dead weeds after spraying and reduce regrowth. This activity also serves as a deep clean in an area, removing detritus and other material along pavements and roadsides. The manual weed removal programme starts around the town once we start to see die- back from the weeds that are sprayed and this has already begun in the town and will continue until at least the start of Autumn leaf clearance.

As part of the 50% reduction in herbicide use, a more targeted approach to spraying has also been employed to further reduce the amount of herbicide used and the impact on other flora and fauna. We have started to reduce and stop cutting grass under trees at various locations and, I am pleased to say we intend to expand this initiative even further and herbicide spraying should not be necessary under trees in open spaces in the future.

The larger wild flower areas and the increase in the No Mow May initiative this year is supporting an improvement in biodiversity and helps insects and pollinators.

Interestingly, councils such as the Isle of Wight who banned the use of herbicides as part of the pesticide action network in 2018 are now returning to using herbicides to control weeds following many public complaints and the high cost of relying on manual crews to remove weeds.

I believe our approach is sensible and our timeline for any further changes to our strategy and policy on weed control will need to be taken in light of any assessments and approvals on the use of Glyphosate by the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency. The existing approval for Glyphosate was extended to December this year.

The Council will continue to seek to reduce the amount of weed spraying that takes place and explore other alternatives but, as Cabinet member, I want to do more.

I am already working with officers who are reviewing our existing weed control policy as part of our environmental services strategy. I would welcome the opportunity, working with officers, to engage with the pesticide free Cheltenham group to further develop our strategy and seek to address the challenges we all face in phasing out the use of glyphosate herbicide across the borough in the coming years. It is vital we seek support from the public, businesses and landowners in Cheltenham to reduce the use of pesticides, including herbicides, on public and private land including private gardens across the borough. The Health and Safety Executive safety sheet for the herbicide commonly used by local authorities, including Cheltenham, is attached to reassure anyone concerned about its safety. Whilst I appreciate public concern, the HSE determine it **not** to be harmful to animals or insects and pollinators, particularly in the diluted form we use.

