

Responses to Public Question From Pesticide-Free Cambridge

Further to the last ECSC meeting in January, and the council's formal launch of its Herbicide Reduction Plan (HRP), and Herbicide-Free Streets (HFS) scheme, it concerns us greatly that there has been no mention since that meeting of progress regarding the two-ward herbicide free trials planned to begin in Newnham and Arbury this Spring. We also have heard nothing about the Working Group that was committed to in January nor of the precise wording of the Herbicide-Free Streets adoption scheme or indeed the overall communications strategy for the HRP.

1. Can we have an update on the two-ward herbicide free trials please? When precisely will these start and what kinds of community consultation are being planned around these?

The herbicide free wards were approved in January, and we have prepared an article for the City Matters publication. The new website content gives further information and an opportunity to give feedback. There will be series of social media posts and Officers have already attended North Area Committee.

Two wards going herbicide-free as part of trial

Weeds and unwanted vegetation in the public areas of two Cambridge wards will be kept under control without the use of chemical herbicides, as part of a council trial this year.

The trial will see alternative methods used for controlling weeds on streets and roadsides in Arbury and Newnham wards, to counter the adverse effects of herbicides and help make more room for nature as part of our wider Biodiversity Strategy.

These wards have been chosen for the initial trial period, as both contain a variety of road types if the trial, which will last throughout the 2022 growing

season, is successful it is hoped that it can then be extended across Cambridge.

Within the trial wards this year, residents can now expect to see more vegetation left to grow in the streets, including along kerbs and on areas of hard standing which may previously have been controlled by use of herbicides. It is hoped that leaving more areas to grow without restrictions will boost plant, insect and animal life.

In addition to the trial throughout Arbury and Newnham, residents in up to 12 other Cambridge streets will have the chance to come forward and opt out of weeds being sprayed



with chemicals in their street and take on responsibility for weeding it themselves without the use of herbicides on a voluntary basis.

The Herbicide Reduction Plan is part of the council's response to the Biodiversity Emergency which it declared in 2019. The declaration included a commitment to reducing and

removing the need to use herbicides on highway verges, roads, and pavements, and to find viable and effective alternatives.

For more information visit:
Website: [cambridge.gov.uk/street-and-park-maintenance](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/street-and-park-maintenance)
Phone: 01223 458282

2. When will the working group be set up? Who will sit on it, and who will be taking the lead?

The Working Group will be set up in April, and comprise Officers from Streets and Open Space, myself and the lead point of contact will be Robert Martyr.

3. On streets that have been adopted as part of the HFS scheme will residents be obliged to remove all weeds, or will some be allowed to flourish if they don't present a trip hazard, in recognition of recent research that shows that urban weeds can be more important for insect pollinators than planted wildflower meadows?

There is no obligation to remove all weed growth from Herbicide Free Streets. There is however an expectation to

- *Keep the area free of weeds, without using herbicides*
- *Apply to become a Streets and Open Spaces volunteer*
- *Work with your neighbours to ensure your Happy Bee street is a success*
- *Look at other ways to improve your neighbourhood, such as:*
 - *Planting wildflowers and creating areas for wildlife*
 - *Pruning shrub areas*
 - *Picking up litter and removing graffiti*
- *Consider joining other Streets and Open Spaces volunteer activities*

4. When will the Herbicide-Free streets webpage be made available to inform residents about how they can opt in to the street adoption scheme? We are concerned that it is nearly Spring and this information still hasn't been made available.

The webpages will be live next week if not already. There is currently a webpage which explains the restricted use of herbicides.

5. Will your online communications make it clear that members of the public should not be using herbicides or any other pesticides on council land, for example insecticidal dusting powder commonly used for ants, on pavements and streets that border private gardens? How can residents report such instances of pesticide-free breaches?

We will not be including this information on the website because the City Council is not the owner of the highway and therefore has no enforcement powers in this respect. The County Council are partners in this trial and at

this time, the use of herbicide by residents has not presented itself as an issue. We will of course review this during the trial.

6. Will the council highlight in its communications the public health dimension of pesticide exposure in addition to its links to biodiversity breakdown so that people better understand the rationale behind the HRP?

The background reports to herbicide trial are available to those wishing to research the context of the HFT. The webpage content advice when we drafted was that most people read about 20% of content so therefore, we have not included this in the webpages at this time.

7. Will you post herbicide spraying schedules in advance of spraying or at least at the time it happens, in keeping with commitments made in last July's herbicide-free motion to protect the health of residents and particularly those with existing allergies for whom pesticide-exposure presents additional risks?

We have prepared a web resource so that residents can track our progress in following a sequenced order of our herbicide spraying.

8. Will you at the very least, ensure that schools are pre-warned of herbicide spraying in their vicinity, and will operatives be advised to avoid spraying at school drop-off and collection times (e.g., 8.00-9.30 am, and 2.30-4.00 pm) given childrens' heightened vulnerability to the toxic impacts of chemical exposure?

The web resource schedule will be available, and I am advise that we already avoid school drop off and collection times.

9. We were pleased by the response to our question at the last ECSC meeting that herbicide spraying operatives will now be required to wear full PPE as is the law. Can you confirm that this requirement will now be enforced? Can you also explain why it has not been enforced until now?

All staff are issued a risk assessment and with full PPE and there is a requirement for them to follow the instructions. If there are incidence where this is not being followed, if they are reported to us, we will investigate, and appropriate actions will be taken.

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