

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 13 September 2012

Question by Mike Harrison to

Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste

Would Mr Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste, be kind to enough to give me and fellow members an up date on the present position with regard to the Street Lighting situation in the county? I am sure that we have all noticed that the evenings are drawing in and the mornings are staying just that little bit darker each and every day and that the need for the street lighting will become more and more required.

I am full aware of the excellent work carried out by our lighting inspectors even though they might not yet have all of the up to date equipment they require to carry out this very difficult and at times dangerous work. In my own division (Whitstable) we have been blessed with a great deal of good work from KHL but this is being sorely undermined by the time it is taking for repair work to damaged lighting columns and directional signs. These delays I am told are due to having wait for outside contractor to complete various aspects of this work! I am told that there are only 2 (two) Connecting Teams for the entire county and this is causing as much as 6 to 8 weeks delay in completion of works.

My question Mr Sweetland is firstly is it true that there is only this small number of teams to do this particular work? If so do you have any plans to encourage our contractor to take on more staff to enable the backlog of work to be completed prior to the long dark evenings setting in?

The second part to my question is have our hard working KHL Inspectors now got all of the various up to date equipment to carry out their work such as up to date telephones and clearly marked vans?

Answer

There are around 119,000 street lights in Kent.

The target for columns being lit during the hours of darkness is 98%, in the last quarter we achieved 99%. The target for repairing street lights is 90% within 28 days. In the last quarter some 7200 faults were identified or reported. We repaired 6400 within 7 days. Around 840 needed more substantial repairs or replacement. There have been some delays in carrying these out and as a result the average percentage of repairs in 28 days for August was 84%. Repairs are now being done at an accelerated rate and will be back to normal by end of September.

Performance of the night patrols has improved significantly and the patrols will be increased to twice a month from 1st October and resources are in place to ensure potential reported faults are repaired quickly

Repair and restoration of power supply to street lights are carried out by UK Power Network (UKPN). The target for these is 75% in 28 days. Last month we achieved 78.8%.

Under UKPN's Rent-a-Jointer scheme we have the full use of two jointing teams who do this work. However, Ofgem have introduced competition on this field which will enable suitably qualified contractors, (not just UKPN crews) to carry out connections/disconnection to the power supply. We are in discussion with a number of companies which will enable connection/disconnection activities to be carried out 'in-house'. This will speed up the process significantly and a trial is planned for the Autumn, subject to approval by UKPN.

A review of vehicle requirements across H&T was completed recently and properly equipped vans for appropriate members of staff are being procured. The first batch is scheduled for delivery by the end of the calendar year. In the meanwhile the relevant staff will continue to use a mixture of leased, liveried and hired vans.

Work is being done to improve mobile working technology. New mobile working software is being developed which will further reduce the time taken from identification of defects to repairs being undertaken. The new software will enable photographs to be appended to work orders, which can be done directly in the field.

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Thursday 13 September 2012

Question by Leslie Christie to

Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills

Can the Cabinet Member provide the numbers of pupils in Kent Schools who sat their GCSEs in June 2012 who had their gradings adversely affected by the change of criteria for marking between January and June 2012?

Whether or not he can provide the numbers can the Cabinet Member report what actions he has taken to give support to the schools, pupils and parents many of whom have been adversely affected for life by this grossly unfair change in the grading criteria within the one academic year?

Answer

There has been considerable concern raised by Kent secondary schools about the 2012 English GCSE results.

Officers, at my request, contacted all 100 Kent secondary schools to ask for data to ascertain the extent of the issue and 56 schools responded.

These schools gave us data on the Examination Board used, their early entry data, and predictions for the summer session of English GCSE matched to their actual results. We further requested the predictions matched to actual results in terms of those students who achieved a grade D.

From the responses it is impossible to determine the number of pupils affected, but we can say that 82% of the schools that returned the enquiry form have seen worse results than predicted. These are schools with a proven track record of accurate predictions.

There has been an almost identical increase in Grade D's with 79% of our schools seeing more D grades than predicted.

I believe this gives clear evidence of the impact of the decision to vary the grade boundary from January 2012 to the summer examinations.

The impact has been felt right across the family of Kent schools – academies and local authority schools, wide ability and grammar. There have been some well-articulated, and angry comments from headteachers.

I feel strongly for the young people disadvantaged by this change and have therefore written to the Chairman of the Government's Select Committee to provide him with the evidence of the impact in Kent, given the Committee is taking a very welcome, and vital look at how this summer's English GCSEs were marked. We are also taking evidence to Ofqual and exam boards to challenge the inequality that we perceive to

have occurred between January and June 2012. Furthermore, we will work with ADCS and other professional organisations to have a united approach.

Personally, I would support the idea of young people re-sitting their exam in November. However, re-grading the papers, as they are planning to do in Wales, would avoid asking Kent's young people to go through the stress of another exam.

Whilst we wait for the Government to come to a decision, we have been providing advice to schools and have asked schools to provide support, advice and guidance to all young people irrespective of whether they are returning to the sixth form or continuing learning elsewhere.

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Question by Martin Vye to

Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste

According to the World Health Organisation and research published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) lowering urban and residential speed limits to 20 mph has a direct impact on the number of road injuries with a reduction of all casualties of 40% to 60% and in the severity of road injuries – with a pedestrian survival rate of 97% compared to 1 in 5 pedestrians (or 20%) who will be killed hit at 30 mph. The 20 mph zones in London are estimated to already be saving more than £20 million annually in crash prevention.

Does the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste agree that 20 mph limits save fuel, lower emissions and pollution levels and improve traffic flow; and will he inform this council where KCC has introduced 20 mph zones/limits:-

- what has been the effect of slower traffic speed;
- what is the reduction in the number of collisions and the severity of road injuries; and
- what is the (estimated) saving in crash prevention annually?

Answer

Reducing road casualties is my highest priority and despite the difficult economic climate the County has still budgeted over £1.6million on crash remedial measures in 2012/13 which will contribute to the continuing year on year reduction in road casualties on Kent's roads.

Crash statistics recently published show the number of people killed or seriously injured in road crashes in Kent fell significantly, by 53%, over the last ten years, exceeding the governments target of a 40%, as a result of our targeted road safety improvements and publicity campaigns.

Over the last ten years the Kent County Council has supported over fifty 20mph schemes in the county with nearly 800 roads being subject to 20mph speed limit orders.

In addition all new residential developments in Kent are designed to keep traffic at 20mph although they are not necessarily signed as such to avoid unnecessary sign clutter.

The current County Council policy is to use our financial resources to target locations with the poorest crash record first and use 20mph limits or zones as one of many different tools to achieve causality reductions. This approach has been very successful as outlined in the statistics I have just mentioned.

While no formal before and after studies have been carried out on the 20mph schemes in Kent, research has been carried out in other parts of the Country.

In London & Hull studies in to 20mph zones (zones use traffic calming to reduce traffic speeds) have concluded that they reduced crashes by 42% and 56% respectively.

Research reported in the recent DfT consultation paper on changes to guidance on the setting of local speed limits conclude that the annual collision frequency may fall by around 60% in 20mph zones.

However, an analysis of the UK's first city-wide scheme - in which the limit was lowered from 30mph to 20mph on all residential streets in Portsmouth, at a cost of £500,000 - found that it has not brought any significant reduction in the number of accidents.

In Portsmouth, the new, lower speed limit applies to all vehicles, at all times, on 94 per cent of the city's streets. It is not enforced by speed cameras or road humps, but relies on drivers to obey limit signs.

The number of people killed or seriously injured on affected roads in Portsmouth actually went up, not down, after the limit was lowered.

Motorists' groups said the findings cast doubt on the case for city-wide 20mph schemes.

Paul Watters, head of public affairs at the AA (an organization that the Lib Dem group have quoted in the past), said: "By just putting up signs everywhere you are not going to change things dramatically.

The AA went on to say that they support targeted and tailored 20mph zones where they are really needed but not a blanket implementation across a whole city.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Oxford, Edinburgh and Bristol have all introduced 20mph limits in their city centres since the Portsmouth scheme began in 2007.

The analysis, carried out by the consultants Atkins on behalf of the DfT, found that prior to the reduction in the limit in Portsmouth, an average of 18.7 people per year were killed or seriously injured on the streets covered. After the reduction to 20mph this rose to 19.9 per year.

It's clear from the research and government guidance that 20mph zones, using traffic calming measures, are far more successful at reducing speeds and casualties than 20mph limits which only use signing. However, the adverse impact and cost of installing and maintaining traffic calming cannot not be discounted.

Mr Vye asks "Does the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste agree that 20mph limits save fuel, lower emissions and pollution levels and improve traffic flow." Members will also read on the Lib Dem website Mr Vye is demanding that ALL residential roads in Kent have 20mph limits.

While lower speeds on some roads maybe more fuel efficient, the use of traffic calming negates this benefit by increasing the emissions of some pollutants from

vehicles. Traffic calming does cause discomfort and increases the risk of injury to some people with conditions such as degenerative discs or weak bones.

The Highways Agency say that cutting the speed limit from 30 mph to 20 mph on the wrong roads can increase CO2 emissions by more than 10% with the result that well-intentioned safety schemes may backfire in environmental terms.

On average, petrol car fuel consumption on longer and relatively free-flowing 20mph urban streets can worsen by 5.8 miles per gallon (1.3 miles/litre). Over a year this will significantly increase CO2 emissions – burning 1 litre of unleaded petrol produces 2.36kg of CO2.

The majority of crashes in Kent occur on built up A class roads and the widespread introduction of 20mph zones on these roads would be inappropriate and have the potential of creating delays to emergency services and the travelling public.

Both the Government and the County Council are currently undertaking trials to determine the best ways of implementing safe, sensible and affordable 20mph targeted schemes which improve road safety where they are most needed and after consultation with local communities, the Police and Joint Transportation Boards.

KCC's current 20 mph policy was debated at the EHW Cabinet Committee held in July and the recommendations on a way forward were agreed by all Members (including the Lib Dem spokesman).

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Thursday 13 September 2012

Question by George Koowaree to

Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services

Is the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services aware of published research demonstrating that:

- child pedestrians can't judge vehicle approach speeds as well as adults. The "speed illusion" problem relates to children's low-level visual detection mechanisms, children's estimates of how fast a vehicle is travelling became unreliable once 20mph is exceeded (Prof. John Wann, Royal Holloway College, London University); and
- the benefits of 20mph zones are most marked in young children accident rates with deaths or serious injuries to children are reduced by half (Chris Grundy, Dept. of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine).

Armed with this knowledge will the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services pledge her active support to the lowering of urban and residential speed limits in Kent to 20mph to the benefit of children and families health by cutting child pedestrian accidents and providing safer streets where they can walk and cycle?

Answer

Following a similar question posed to Bryan Sweetland I would like to reiterate Mr Sweetland's response and confirm the County Council's commitment to reducing road casualties in Kent as one of our highest priorities and recognising the part that 20mph schemes have to play in this. At the same time, consideration must be given to any adverse impact and cost of installing and maintaining traffic calming in 20mph zones, something that colleagues in Highways will look at in detail.

Although no formal studies have yet been carried out in Kent, I am aware of the published research on 20mph schemes carried out in other parts of the country. This research has highlighted the reduction in road casualties is greatest in younger children, particularly child pedestrian casualties and recognises that 20mph areas can unlock the potential for more physical activity such as walking and cycling, leading to better health, more social interaction and stronger communities.

The majority of crashes in Kent and elsewhere occur on built up roads and areas. There is an important link between areas of highest deprivation and the risk of being injured in road traffic accidents where research has found that children from these areas are five times more likely to be injured in accidents. It is therefore important that schemes should be prioritised to places of most need first, i.e. those with the poorest crash record, areas of social deprivation with high populations and around schools. The current County Council policy is already using its resources to target

these locations. However, we must take into consideration that the widespread introduction of 20mph zones on A class roads in Kent would be inappropriate and have the potential to cause delays. The County Council are currently undertaking trials and will be consulting with local communities, the Police and Joint Transportation Boards in order to implement cost effective and sensible 20mph schemes to improve road safety where it is most needed.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 13 September 2012

Question by Dan Daley to

Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills

Before the introduction of legislation* by the Labour Government in October 1998 there was widespread concern about the indiscriminate and uncontrolled disposal of school playing fields with an estimated 10,000 playing fields disposed of between 1979 and 1997 when the Conservatives were in power. Local authorities and schools now need to obtain the Secretary of State's written consent before they can sell, or dispose in any way, or change the use of playing fields used by schools. Between 1997 and 2009 212 applications were approved, since May 2010 approval has been given for the disposal of 21 playing fields.

After the euphoria of the Olympic Games there is once again widespread concern that Michael Gove is 'quietly' urging the selling of school playing fields. Will the Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills please inform this Council:-

- How many school playing fields have been sold in Kent in the last ten years?
- What is KCC policy on the sale of school playing fields in the light of David Cameron's support for sport following unprecedented success and support for Team GB; and
- Do all the communities in Kent meet the 'Playing Space' National Standard*** of six acres per 1,000 head in the public domain (not part of private clubs) and if they do not, does he not agree that playing fields in schools should be maintained and open for general use where possible to assist in achieving the Standard?

Note:

* Legislation: Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (as amended).

** Source Dep. Of Education FOI response <https://bit.ly/PmtmBK>

*** 'Playing Space' National Standard Definition – a space which is especially designed for the playing of team or organised games or sport – therefore marked out pitches and greens etc. It differs from 'Open Space' which is not levelled or prepared in any way and which cannot safely be used for games with balls.

Answer

The Olympics have certainly inspired the next generation. In Kent, school sport is enormously important to the County Council and this has been demonstrated conclusively during our Olympic campaign, where the biannual Kent School Games engaged over 30,000 young people and 500 schools, and achieved national leadership.

Of course, to achieve our sporting ambitions, it is crucial to have suitable sporting facilities available. Since 2005, which is the earliest data we have, Kent County Council has sold four playing fields and a further two playing fields where contracts have been exchanged but not yet sold. To put this number into context, Kent has 575 schools.

Capital receipts from these six sales have underpinned the ELS capital programme over recent years enabling the Council to access funding streams which have enabled over seventeen schools to benefit from new school buildings and associated sports facilities, for example all-weather sports pitches. All of these seventeen schools have community use agreements in place, which are agreed with Sport England, so the local community is able to use the new sporting facilities.

Kent County Council adheres strictly to national legislation, regulation and guidance. When redesigning the school playing field facilities of the 6 schools, we have referred to the former Government's Building Bulletins 98 & 99, which are the guidelines giving a range of sizes based on pupil numbers, and the new facilities at least meet, and often exceed, these criteria. As a planning authority, we also consult with Sports England on all planning applications that could impact upon school playing fields in accordance with the 1998 national legislation.

Turning now to the issue of the 'Playing Space National Standard', this 'Standard', or 'Ratio', was produced by the National Playing Fields Association in the early 1970's and although it is still quoted by some people, this standard has been over taken by new planning regulations such as Development Plans and Supplementary Guidance, and now the new National Planning Policy Framework.

The responsibility for community playing fields rests with District and Borough Councils. I advise Mr Daley to redirect his third question to them, as this is not a matter for the County Council.

Finally, I note Mr Daley questions if Mr Gove is secretly urging schools to sell off their playing fields. Doing simple arithmetic using the information Mr Daley has provided, it is clear for all to see that the number of playing fields transferred each year under the Labour Government was higher than under the current Coalition.

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Thursday 13 September 2012

Question by Michael Northey to

Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste

We all recognise how difficult it is for individuals and families who are struggling financially. I feel that Members will agree that we must stand up for those who commute by rail in and out of our county, including many of my constituents who use the two stations in Canterbury and also outlying villages. Does the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste agree with me and the majority of Kent MPs that the latest proposed rail fare increases are unacceptable, and what can the County Council do about it?

Answer

Yes, I do agree with the Member for Canterbury South East that the latest proposed rail fare increases are totally unacceptable.

The County Council has already made it clear that we are very concerned at the serious impact this will have on families in Kent, at a time when household budgets are very tight.

The reason given by the Government for the proposed fare rises is that it is their policy to increase the amount paid by the passenger and to decrease the subsidy paid by the taxpayer.

However the problem with the pricing formula is that some stations in Kent could see rail fares rise even higher than the 6.2% proposed for January, as the train operator is entitled to increase or decrease regulated fares by a further 5%. If this were to happen and in the worst case, some rail passengers could see increases of up to 11.2% next year.

So I have made it very clear that any further increase, on top of the proposed 6.2%, would be totally unacceptable to Kent's rail hard-pressed rail passengers.

The County Council urges Southeastern not to impose any higher increases above the national level, and we eventually want to see no increase in rail fares above the level of inflation.

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Thursday 13 September 2012

Question by Tim Prater to

Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills

How many children have started this school term in Kent excluded from free home-to-school transport they would have been entitled to prior to the cut imposed by this Council on home-to-school transport provision?

Answer

It is not yet possible to report on the exact number of children who would have previously been eligible for free home to school transport, who may not qualify under the new arrangements. Applications are still being processed and there are still some appeals outstanding.

What is clear at this stage is that many parents have taken their responsibility to ensure their child can access their preferred schools seriously and have recognised that it is not the responsibility of the LA to provide transport except where there is a statutory entitlement. It is pleasing to see that the Kent Freedom Pass has provided a welcome solution for some and Kent families have secured 3000 more passes than had been provided at this time last year; bringing the current figure to almost 24,500.

I expect to have all the data held in relation to the applications received, by late October which will allow me to address Mr Prater's question at, with your permission Chairman, the November Council meeting.

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Thursday 13 September 2012

Question by Trudy Dean to

Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste

In view of residents' complaints about standards of grass, hedge and shrub cutting and the lack of maintenance of public rights of way, will the Cabinet member for Environment, Highways and Waste please inform the Council:

- i) what resources have been made available for extra grass cutting of highway verges, urban alleyways and hedges and shrub maintenance in addition to the annual cut allowed for?
- ii) whether he accepts more work needs to be done to restore public safety and amenity, and if so what additional resources has he applied for?
- iii) whether he accepts that the reduction in specification to one annual cut only has resulted in a fall in the appearance of many residential streets, and a decline in access and safety for residents particularly those with mobility problems.
- iv) will he tell the council whether he will be restoring the number of highway verges, urban alleyways and hedges and shrub maintenance cuts to two or more in next year's budget?

Answer

- i) The County Council maintains highway soft landscaping as part of its duties to ensure highway safety. The published standards (urban grass cutting; 8 times/year, rural (swathe) grass cutting; once/ year and shrub beds and hedge trimming once/ year) are considered to meet, and in respect of urban highway grass exceed, the standards required.

Majority of hedges in the County are in private ownership, in cases where these protrude on to the public highway we contact the owners and in the first instance request that they trim these to a point that they do not pose a danger to highway safety, failure to act can ultimately result in the County Council undertaking the necessary works and recovering the costs. Hedges in the County Council's ownership are generally trimmed once every year, which is sufficient to maintain highway safety.

This summer has been the wettest on record and has created ideal conditions for vigorous growth of vegetation. The resulting conditions were so poor that forced much of the soft landscaping maintenance including grass cutting to be delayed. The problem was therefore caused by the very wet conditions rather than available budget. The prolonged periods of rainfall meant longer periods between certain scheduled cuts which may have given the impression that no

action was being taken. Despite this we carried out additional cuts at locations where vegetation growth potentially affected highway safety. The programme is now back on schedule. The unseasonal weather also affected weed spray, here too, the operation had to be delayed which resulted in excessive growth of weeds. At the onset of dryer weather the spraying operation began and on taking effect it was followed by a visit to manually remove and dispose of the larger dead weeds, the smaller treated weeds were removed as part of street sweeping. A further investment of £250k has been made to undertake a second spray in October/November to kill the more stubborn plants that may grow since the first spray and to restrict further weed growth next spring.

The very wet weather has also had an adverse effect PROW. The PROW team are reviewing sites on an individual basis to identify any safety works required. These will then be dealt with a programmed basis. Additionally we are due to meet with the Probation Service in the near future to explore opportunities on the use of their resources to undertake work on selected sites including PROW and urban alleyways.

- ii) Public safety is paramount; despite the economic climate vegetation is being maintained to required standards. Additional resources have been and will continue to be made available if and when a need arise.
- iii) Urban grass is cut 8 times a year, not once a year as seems to have been implied, and this frequency, exceeding that required to provide the minimum safety standards, contributes to the aesthetic appearance of the urban environment.
- iv) Despite the wet weather, the number of cuts and localised interventions has proved successful. The situation is being monitored and resources will be made available if a need is demonstrated.

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Thursday 13 September 2012

Question by Ian Chittenden to

Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities

I am now receiving regular complaints about 'Public Rights of Way' being severely obstructed by overgrown nettles, brambles and other obstructions. This is particularly affecting children and parents with push chairs.

I understand that the finance available to deal with these problems has been severely cut, but bearing in mind that many of these routes are regularly used as 'Safer Routes to School' and that the new school term has just restarted, would the Cabinet Member advise:

- i) what urgent action will be taken; and
- ii) for those Parish Councils who have been contacted to nominate two PRowS requiring a further cut - what should Parish Councils do if they have several such paths?

Answer

The exceptional growing conditions over the last few months have caused significant problems keeping public rights of way clear. However the Customer and Communities Directorate has identified £40K additional revenue to address immediately public concerns and to clear priority routes, such as those used as safer routes to school. PRow Officers are now co-ordinating this work locally using existing contracts as a priority.

Parish Councils may identify more than two additional routes requiring an additional cut but have been asked to identify the routes in priority order where this is the case. The service aim to clear as many of the routes as they are able to within the funding available.

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Question by Roger Manning to

Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste

"Whereas I am mindful of our budget challenges and also the Director of Kent Highways letter of 22 June 2011 in which he set out the policy of soft landscape maintenance, this summer KCC highways appeared to be competing with the Highways Agency and Rail Track for the most prolific displays of ragwort. Ragwort is a dangerous weed and kills horses by causing liver failure. I own horses, am a Master of a Hunt and represent a rural community, so I speak with some knowledge of the danger.

My understanding is that the Law of Weeds Act 1959 enhanced by The Ragwort Control Act 2003 and supported by a Defra 47 page Code of Practice which was published in 2007, places obligations on Highway Authorities to control the spread of injurious weeds, in particular ragwort. There is concern among the farming community that there is a lack of control by KCC that results in annual airborne seed contamination of adjoining pasture. Although not often fatal to sheep and cows it will cause debilitating symptoms.

In the light of the increasing proliferation will the Cabinet Member for EH&W explain how KCC adheres to the legislation and Code of Practice and thus how ragwort is controlled on our highways, including the use of and type of herbicide."

Answer

Responsibility for the control of Ragwort rests with the occupier of the land regardless of who the occupier is. There are no special requirements for highway authorities to control ragwort on highway land. Majority of reported cases of Ragwort are on land adjacent to public highway and in private ownership.

The 1959 Weeds Act empowers Defra to serve a notice requiring the occupier of a land to prevent the spread of ragwort. The Act does not make it illegal to have ragwort on a land or require occupiers to automatically control it.

The Ragwort Control Act 2003 exists to create a Code, "How to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort" (Defra 2004), for managing ragwort. Under the Code it is a landowner's responsibility to assess whether action should be taken to prevent the spread of ragwort by assessing the risk to livestock or to land used for feed production.

The Code does not seek to eradicate ragwort, recognising that it is important for wildlife.

The County Council follows the Code when managing roadside verges. When ragwort on highway land is assessed as high risk we control it through a combination of herbicide treatment (Glyphosate or Citronella) and traditional methods (hand

pulling or cutting) depending on the stage of growth. When we are treating high risk areas we take a proactive approach and will aim to extend the treatment to cover adjacent medium risk areas when resources allow. Treating and removing Ragwort is quite costly and we are due to meet the probation service shortly to explore opportunities for collaboration.