

Report of the Environment Working Group at August 2021 – Submitted to Councillors

Introduction

A damp early summer promotes growth in vegetation, but conversely this affects butterfly development as well as rodent populations and the raptors who depend upon them. Late frosts have affected fruit development and now the weather threatens the ripening crops. Unusually, the place to be has been Scotland with better than usual weather.

Council Environmental Policy

The Working Group notes the attention paid to environmental matters at its meetings and in decision-making and has not identified any breach of the Council's Environment Policy.

Matters Arising

The following matters are noted and recorded, many of which the Parish Council will already be aware of:

Roadside Litter – This continues to be a blight, with the ongoing discarding of plastic packaging from convenience foods at the roadside. Frequent litter picks by concerned parishioners can minimize the impact, though organized picking will be necessary towards the A342. As hedgerows planted by Wilsford Manor Farm develop, so it may become impossible for the parish to manage litter clearance along the A342 and the Parish Council might need to discuss with the Highways Department the clearance of litter deposited by passing traffic.

Incineration – An incident of waste disposal is noted, where agricultural rubbish was burned, including plastic sacks that gave off the tell-tale smell and particulates. Responsible disposal is recommended.

Rights of Way and Surface Condition – Formal and informal discussion on the maintenance of rights of way continues. The mood of the moment appears 'personal' rather than 'community', with considerable "I feel" in place of "might a reasonable approach be ..." Each interest group has a particular need and the many groups have no one common and achievable standard of maintenance.

This 'tall grass vs short grass', 'cow-parsley vs visibility', 'narrow cut vs wide cut', 'environment vs public passage' debate has a hint of self-interest across all stakeholder groups and the groups include pedestrians, dog-walkers, horse riders and hare coursers (the demands of one facilitates access for the other), cyclists, ecologists, and landowners.

The Parish Council in collaboration with the Highways Department might consider establishing a policy on maintenance, which provides unobstructed passage for all, with due regard for today's environmental needs, and without reducing or denying rights provided for in law; the fundamental right being 'unobstructed passage' and not 'unconstrained pleasure'.

In the meantime, the environment benefits in Wilsford while the voluntary path maintenance is suspended pending a uniform policy on grass and hedge cutting. The environment benefits

also in Charlton St. Peter where recently cut-back scrub and topping of grasses along rights of way is facilitating the return of wild flowers.

Hare Coursing

Hay-making and harvesting are clearing fields of cover and hare coursers are again active in our parishes. Persons seeing evidence of coursing or actual coursing are encouraged by the police to report sightings on 101 for evidence of past coursing, or 999 for active sighting.

Hedgerows

Hedge growth is abundant, following spring maintenance, but so is all other vegetation including hedge-choking grasses and chick-weed. Nevertheless, the development of these wildlife corridors is proceeding satisfactorily.

Trees

Ash die-back continues to spread apace with most local examples now infected. Clearance by local authorities, including MoD, of roadside Ash is active and the losses will have a profound effect on the landscape.

The private planting of alternative species in both Charlton St. Peter and Wilsford is applauded.

Wilsford Verges

This initiative is proceeding with botanists recording species and a second cut-and-rake exercise required in June to address the rampant revival of cut grasses. Progress is good for this, the first season and diversity will improve year-on-year with management and the reintroduction of local wild flower species by volunteers using seed and plug planting. This initiative lends material support to the regeneration of wild-flower plots at ST. Giles Church, Imber.

Invasive Plants

The spread of two invasive plants in particular is noticeable, especially along water lines. **Hemlock** and **Giant Hog Weed** may appear to the unwary passer-by to be related to the widespread and harmless Cow Parsley. Hemlock is deadly if ingested, even in small amounts and Giant Hogweed causes serious burns and long-lasting damage to skin tissues if brushed against. Both are serious risks to health and neither is the subject of any public health awareness programme.

These two species are found in our parish and the Parish Council might consider:

- Recording the presence of these species
- Eradicating Hemlock with targeted application of herbicide (such as Round-up)
- Eradicating Giant Hogweed, which requires professional clearance.
- Promoting awareness in the community and in particular to children playing in the countryside.

Summary

Environmental awareness is increasing and the Parish Council plays an important part in this.

For the **Environmental Working Group**
Parish Council of Charlton St. Peter & Wilsford

Annex A to Charlton St. Peter & Wilsford Environment Bulletin No 5 – August 2021

Poison Hemlock

Poison hemlock stems are hairless, hollow, and almost always have distinctive purplish-red splotching or streaking on them, especially towards the base of the plant. These purple or reddish colored markings are a sure giveaway that it is poison hemlock.

All parts of the plant are poisonous, including the flowers, leaves, stems, roots, and seeds. Poison hemlock contains potent toxic alkaloids that affect the nervous system, and even small internal doses can cause respiratory collapse and death. It can also cause a severe skin reaction similar to a burn when touched externally.



Hemlock – flowers and distinctive stem

Giant Hogweed



Height: Cow parsley grows to 3-4 feet, unlike Giant Hogweed which can reach almost 12 feet.



Leaves up to 1.5m wide and 3m long and are jagged whereas regular hogweed leaves are rounded.



Stems are hollow and green with purple blotches and stiff, white hairs.