

Notice of Motion: Protection of the Bee Population

Briefing Paper by the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

1. Summary

The County Council at its meeting held on 10 December 2015 considered a Notice of Motion on the protection of the Bee population, from Councillor Hook, as follows:

“Bees play an essential role in food production. The Bee population has been in alarming decline in recent years, due to various external influences. One such harmful influence is the use of neonicotinoids, an aggressive pesticide. Devon is heavily reliant on agriculture and this council will therefore prohibit the use of this pesticide on all land that it owns or manages in a proactive effort to reverse the destruction of the Bee community here in Devon. The Council will also explore other ways which, in addition to banning this particular pesticide, will help the survival of the Bee population. A report on other potential actions will be brought to Place Scrutiny.”

In accordance with Standing Order 6(6) the Notice of Motion was referred, without discussion, to the Cabinet for consideration (County Council Minute 160 (d) refers).

This paper provides information to assist Members in responding to the Notice of Motion.

2. Background

The pollination services of bees and other insects are critical to food production and estimated to be worth between £430 million and £603 million a year to UK agriculture. However bee numbers are declining, not just in the UK, but worldwide. A number of complex causes are being investigated including disease, climate change, loss of habitat and the use of insecticides such as neonicotinoids ('neonics').

Neonics have been widely used worldwide for the last 20 years. They are all neurotoxins, attacking the central nervous system of insects, and are used to control pests in a wide range of situations e.g. seed treatments for cereals, sugar beet and oil seed rape (the largest use); soil treatment for pot plants; treatment for turf, and foliar sprays for orchards and glass house crops. Five neonics are authorised for use in the UK. Research now shows that exposure to neonics at sub-lethal doses can have significant negative effects on bee health and bee colonies. Build up of the pesticide over time impairs the bee's immune and nervous systems (interfering with navigation). Research has also linked the decline of some aquatic insects, insectivorous birds and butterflies to neonics.

In 2012 the European Food Safety Authority published an assessment of the risks associated with the use of the three most common neonic pesticides (clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam). As a result of this the **EC introduced a precautionary ban on these three neonics, in certain circumstances, from December 2013. The ban is not time limited**, however the EC stated that it would review the science within two years (there is no news on a date for this review to be published). The ban relates to use on flowering crops such as oilseed rape and sowing of treated seed during the spring and summer when bees are foraging. It allows the continued use of all neonics on crops such as winter wheat, on horticultural crops and for domestic use. The ban only applies to 'crops attractive to bees' and does not take into account the impacts on aquatic invertebrate

species, birds or other insects which are also major areas of concern. It doesn't currently cover a new neonic insecticide, Sulfoxaflor, which has been authorised for use by the EC but is not yet approved for use in the UK.

The UK Government did not support the restrictions but has implemented them as required. The government's resistance was based on its view that field trial evidence did not support the restrictions and that there had not been sufficient analysis of the impacts of the alternative insecticides that would be used.

EU legislation allows Member States to seek an emergency authorisation for a restricted pesticide. In July 2015 the UK Government granted time-limited authorisation for use of two neonics for oilseed rape in Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. This was a controversial decision. Buglife has stated that recent harvest figures show that the need for emergency authorisation is a 'total nonsense'. However the High Court cut short a legal challenge by Friends of the Earth.

A UK parliamentary debate on neonics took place on 7th December 2015. This was secured via a Parliamentary petition with 92,707 signatures asking the Government to '*Please ban the use of neonics on crops*'. The Government response included a commitment to protect bees and other pollinators using expert scientific evidence, a commitment to provide funding for farmers via Countryside Stewardship and its new Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package, and a commitment to address pollinator needs through implementation of the National Pollinator Strategy which was published in 2014.

All local authorities and other public bodies have a legal duty, under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions.

Buglife has identified specific ways in which Local Authorities can help pollinators:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Protecting pollinator habitats via the planning process.2. Encouraging all new developments to provide for pollinators.3. Stopping the use of insecticides on local authority land.4. Establishing wildflower meadows on un-used areas of parks and public greenspace5. Planting pollinator-friendly plants as part of amenity planting in parks, gardens and green spaces.6. Planting trees for bees – blossom producing spring flowering trees such as apple, cherry, hawthorn, blackthorn, willow.7. Managing road verges for spring and late summer flowers. |
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Members of the Devon Local Nature Partnership (including Buglife) have been promoting the Government's *Bees' Needs* Campaign and July 2016 will be *Devon Pollinator Month* with a series of events and promotional activities. The Local Nature Partnership is coordinated by Devon County Council.

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