

What are pesticides and how are they used?

Pesticides are the chemicals used to control a variety of pests in a range of situations including:

- Insecticides that kill insects
- Herbicides that kill plants
- Fungicides that kill fungal problems

Liskeard Town Council employs a contractor using a 'weed-wipe' machine to treat 40km of streets and pavement. This is usually done in two applications per year, once in June and again in September. The Facilities team occasionally use pesticide to control weeds around buildings. Other possible uses on Town Council owned and managed property are slug pellets and rodenticides.

Why go pesticide free?

The UK National Action Plan on Pesticides is the framework within which the UK works towards a more sustainable use of pesticides. Currently the NAP directs users of amenity pesticides to:

- i. Take all reasonable precautions to protect human health.
- ii. Confine pesticide application to target areas.
- iii. Ensure the amount and frequency used is as low as practicable.

The advantages of going pesticide free

There are many benefits to reducing the use of pesticides including the safeguarding of health. Non-chemical controls can be used all year round in any weather. Hand weeding and hoeing can also be done by volunteers and the local community. Reducing the amount of pesticides in the local environment improves biodiversity, specifically improving habitats for bees and other pollinating insects.

Options for reducing pesticide use and/or going pesticide free

1. Reduce the linear metre/km of footpaths and highways sprayed with pesticides. The Council's preferred contractor uses weed-wipe technology which significantly reduces spray 'drift' and overall amount of chemical used. Currently treat 40km of footpaths and highways each year. Two applications, one in June and one in September. Hard surface/paths in the centre of Town are treated by Cornwall Council.

+/- Possible reduction in cost. Careful to take a measured approach and involve local community. Could start with a pilot area.
2. Reduce number of sprays per annum from two to one.
3. Change the delivery method e.g. blanket spray to knapsack or weed wipe.
4. Target spray only e.g. specific weeds? Knap sack or weed wand – more expensive.
5. Investigate alternative mechanical methods of weed control such as hot foam and mechanical brushing. Expensive. Trials.

+/- Would need to find a contractor with the equipment to supply and operate. May be more costly if equipment must be bought in from further afield. Trials show that alternatives not as effective as chemicals so may require more frequent application.
6. Investigate hand weeding. Staff could tackle area such as buildings but would need to rely on volunteers and local community to weed other areas.
7. Selective weeding approach e.g. woody plants or those with a strong tap root (sow thistle)
8. Trial 'no weed' areas – some towns have embraced the idea of allowing pavement weeds to flourish. See the More Than Weeds approach - <https://morethanweeds.co.uk/>. Most pavement weeds are annuals that will self-seed freely.
9. Adapt public space to avoid need for weed control e.g. by using mulches, replacing bedding plants with wildflowers or perennials.

Example Action Plan:

	Actions	Target	Achieved	Notes
	<i>Year One</i>			
1.1	Undertake an audit of current pesticide use the Town Council e.g. contractors, local groups, allotments, Facilities staff/properties.			
1.2	Devise a policy which sets out a clearly the conditions under which pesticides are currently being used and what measures could be taken to reduce pesticide use.			
1.3	Raise awareness and publicise initiative. Possible link up with CC wildflower verges and Making Space for Nature.			
1.4	End the use of herbicides in public parks and green spaces by the end of year one. Signage.			
1.5	Begin at least one trial of alternatives , and ideally more, for hard surface areas such as streets and pavements. Examples of alternatives include mechanical brushing, hand weeding, hoeing, mulching (flower beds), and acetic acid (vinegar).			
1.6	Engage with other local groups e.g. allotment holders, Liskeard in Bloom. Making Space for Nature.			

	Year Two			
2.1	Commit to reducing metre/km of streets and pavements sprayed by xx amount by end of year two.			
2.2	End the use of pesticides in areas / properties owned or controlled by the council.			
2.3	Working in partnership with other local groups and organisations, to reduce and ultimately stop the use of pesticides / herbicides in areas outside council control.			
2.4	Ensure there is an ongoing dialogue with the public about progress of the project.			
	Year Three			
3.1	Further reduce and/or seek to end the use of pesticides on the remaining metres/kms of streets and pavements.			
3.2	Continue to encourage other key stakeholders to follow suit on land and areas under their control.			
3.3	Organise a public event to announce your success and consider expanding to local home owners, allotment plot holders, etc.			

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Further information:

Pesticides Action Network UK 'Going Pesticide-Free A Guide for Local Authorities' https://issuu.com/pan-uk/docs/pft_a_toolkit_for_local_authorities?e=28041656/43992989

BBC Radio 4 'Open Country', 8 August 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000lf9v>

The Guardian "Wild Cities" series, "Not just weeds how rebel botanists are using graffiti to name forgotten flora". 1 May 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/14/on-the-verge-a-quiet-roadside-revolution-is-boosting-wildflowers-aoe>

'Frome Hoedown' local people in Frome taking on street weeds <https://www.facebook.com/groups/912144769310853>

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