

Weed control / verge management

Wheldrake Ward 2023

This year, as previously, Elvington was the only village in Wheldrake Ward that committed to keeping pesticides away in favour of mechanical interventions to manage vegetation. There remain a strong commitment, from the parish council and from many residents, to keep glyphosate out of the village, except for spot treatment of dangerous plants.

Being a rural area, the verges in the ward are a mixture of ribbons of grass and roadside verge that can vary from 30cm in width to 7 or 8 metres. The kerbs are the same as everywhere else.

Trial of wire brushes to clean kerbs

Last year, I trialled mechanical intervention, using strimmers at selected areas in the villages, as can be seen in my report for that year. This year, following a meeting I had with Ed Bland in the village where we looked at the types of issue that weeds present, Elvington welcomed the council's trial of a wire brush sweeper. The results of the trial can be seen in the photo on the pages that follow.

The trial was quite small and didn't cover as many different types of kerb as I would have liked. The photos show clearly - at four separate locations in Elvington - that mechanical intervention successfully clears vegetation. Because the trial was conducted in the summer, the weeds had had all year in which to grow. To be successful, the brushes need to be used three times a year - just a glyphosate is to be sprayed three times a year - once in the spring to remove all the leaf matter and organic detritus that has collected in the kerb, to remove the vector that weeds grow in, and then twice more to remove any plants that have grown.

From my own investigation, I believe wire brushes would also be effective at removing vegetation/weeds on tactile kerbs as the brushes can successfully get inbetween the lumps and bumps on the tactile kerb.

Contrary to officer assertions, villages that were expecting glyphosate sprays three times a year have reported either not seeing any evidence of spraying or seeing only a single spray after complaining loudly. The lack of a GIS mapping system is clearly a challenge to any attempt to manage weed control in a coherent way across the city. The contrast between the city council's operation - involving printed A4 sheets and felt pens - and the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) approach - with effective mapping technology to monitor and manage what is cut or sprayed where - is clear for all to see. The IDB are more than willing to show CYC how their system works and, I believe might be willing to share their software with CYC to ensure better coordination of vegetation management to the betterment of biodiversity across York.

Wildflower Verges are expanded

Three years ago, Wheldrake created a wildflower verge on the road between Wheldrake village and Escrick. Some 7000 square metres in size, we saw 56 species of wildflowers flourish the first year, and the presence of a wide variety of insects and other pollinators, wildbirds and harvest mice.

The first year was not without its challenges as a number of landowners / farmers were unhappy about the creation of the verge and had to be cautioned by the police when they repeatedly flailed sections of the verge despite the presence of clear signage that the area was now a biodiversity habitat managed by the city and Natural England. Since then things have steadily improved. Natural England has invested in flailing equipment that removes the arisings. This means that we can begin to reduce the fertility of the soil, to the advantage of wildflowers and biodiversity. This autumn we have expanded the verge programme to include other routes out of the village. We believe that this approach could be used across the city to enhance biodiversity. It would still be of benefit if the arising could be sent to Allerton biogiester to produce power and an income stream but we are on our way.

My thanks to officers for the wire brush trial, to Natural England and Ad Astra for the flailing and arising removal, and to Cllrs Jenny Kent and Kate Ravillious for their help and their commitment to make this work. It is clear that we can move on from the bad old days of spraying pesticides over everything in sight!

Cllr Christian Vassie, 30 November 2023

Wire Brush Kerb Clean in Elvington



Stretch of B1228
between doctor's
surgery and
primary school,
(towards doctor's
surgery)



B1228 by doctor's surgery towards Elvington primary school ▶



Junction of B1228 and Dauby Lane, outside Elvington Primary School ▶



Kerb along B1228 opposite Elvington Primary School ▼



Junction of
The Conifers
and Wheldrake
Lane ▶



Wildflower Verge - Wheldrake Ward 2023



Wheldrake wildflower verge heading north from Wheldrake towards Crockey Hill 2023

Flail and remove arisings

By flailing the verges and removing arisings, we are managing the verge in a way that reduces soil fertility, promoting diversity and wildflowers ahead of a tall and thick monoculture of grasses. The arising can either be baled or left in piles by the hedgerow to provide habitat for wild animals

