

**Report to:** Lead Member for Transport and Environment

**Date of meeting:** 19 October 2015

**By:** Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

**Title:** Notice of Motion: use of neonicotinoid pesticides on East Sussex County Council land

**Purpose:** To consider a Notice of Motion from Councillor St. Pierre to ban any use of neonicotinoid pesticides on East Sussex County Council owned or managed sites.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Reject the Notice of Motion from Councillor St. Pierre because there is inconclusive evidence on the use of neonicotinoids to agree a Policy stance; and**
  - (2) Agree an amended Notice of Motion as set out in paragraph 2.8 of this report.**
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## **1 Background Information**

1.1. The following Notice of Motion has been submitted by Councillor St. Pierre:

*“East Sussex County Council (ESCC) opposes the introduction of neonicotinoid pesticides when the 2 year ban, introduced in 2013, comes to an end and supports a continuation of the ban to support the numbers of bee keepers and farmers dependent on a healthy bee population.*

*Further, ESCC undertakes to ban any use of neonicotinoid pesticides in the ESCC owned or managed sites such as the Ashdown Forest, the country sites such as Seven Sisters Country Park, Ditchling and Chailey Commons and gardens associated with ESCC offices and properties throughout the county should the ban be overturned in the UK.”*

1.2. In line with County Council practice, the matter has been referred by the Chairman to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment for consideration to provide information and inform debate on the Motion. The Lead Member’s recommendation on this Notice of Motion will be reported to the Council at its meeting on 01 December 2015.

## **2 Supporting Information**

2.1. Neonicotinoids are a class of neuro-active insecticides chemically similar to nicotine. They are more toxic to invertebrates than mammals, birds and other higher organisms, and are effective against sap-feeding pests, certain beetles, fleas, certain wood-boring pests, flies, cockroaches and others. They are systemic pesticides and are taken up by the plant and transported to all the tissues (leaves, flowers, roots and stems, as well as pollen and nectar). Products containing neonicotinoids can be applied at the root (as seed coating or soil drench) or sprayed onto crop foliage.

2.2. Research indicates that neonicotinoids are also toxic to bees and other beneficial insects, through low level contamination of nectar and pollen. Although these low level exposures do not normally kill bees directly, those exposed have trouble feeding, navigating and foraging, as well

as suffering from impaired movement. Bees consuming the pesticides have been shown to eat less food overall, affecting their condition and survival.

2.3. In the UK, five neonicotinoid insecticides are used in four main ways - seed treatments for cereals, sugar beet and oil seed rape, soil treatment for pot plants in the ornamental sector, treatment for turf in the amenity sector, and foliar sprays on apples, pears and a range of glasshouse crops. In addition, several insecticides are available to the public as treatments for lawns, houseplants and pot plants and greenhouse crops.

2.4. The European Commission has imposed restrictions on the use of three neonicotinoids on a long list of crops, with a two year ban which came into force on 01/12/13. The ban provides for limited and controlled use of the particular neonicotinoids on an exceptional basis in emergency situations to control a danger that cannot be contained by other reasonable means. The Commission will review the ban by 01/12/15 taking into account relevant scientific and technical developments.

2.5. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) receives advice on pesticides from the Expert Committee on Pesticides, which takes into account a range of issues (for instance, agronomic techniques to reduce the need for pesticides). In 2013 the UK Government opposed the ban by the European Commission, stating that lab-based evidence did not replicate realistic conditions, and in July 2015 DEFRA decided that two neonicotinoids can be used for 120 days on about 5% (c. 30,000 hectares) of England's oilseed rape crop, predominantly in Suffolk.

2.6. Other scientists, (including Professor Goulson from the University of Sussex) however, have stated that studies provide clear evidence that colonies of free-flying bumblebees exposed to neonicotinoids used as part of normal farming practice suffer significant impacts in terms of reduced colony growth and queen production. On the basis of this evidence, 13 leading environmental organisations including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Wildlife Trusts and the Soil Association are supporting the continued ban of neonicotinoids. Looking at the situation as a whole, there is no consensus as to the effects of neonicotinoids on bees. In November 2014, DEFRA launched a 10 year pollinator strategy which includes research on the use of pesticides.

2.7. The health of bees is vital to agriculture and the environment. However, evidence on the use of neonicotinoids is divided. Currently, the County Council does not use neonicotinoids on any of its land. In terms of leased land, the County Council has mainly farm business tenancies (FBTs) for grazing rather than crop farming. However, current agreements refer to not using any pesticides banned by DEFRA, the Health and Safety Executive or any other relevant government body. To ensure that pesticides that are also banned by the European Commission are not used on land leased out by the County Council may require alteration of all the FBT agreements. Rather than come to a Policy stance on neonicotinoids against a background of conflicting evidence, it would be proportionate in this instance to recognise these circumstances, and, to review FBT agreements at the appropriate time to ensure that no pesticides banned by either the UK Government or the European Commission are used on any part of the holding.

2.8. It is considered that the Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor St Pierre should therefore be rejected as there is conflicting evidence on the use of neonicotinoids. A more appropriate approach would be to recognise that the County Council does not use neonicotinoids on its own land and, that FBT agreements will be reviewed to ensure that no pesticides banned by the UK or European Commission will be used within the smallholding. An amended Notice of Motion would read as:

*“The County Council recognises the divided opinion on the use of neonicotinoids. The County Council does not use neonicotinoids on its own land. Taking into account the precautionary approach in this case, the County Council will review, at the appropriate time, farm business tenancy agreements to ensure that no pesticides that are banned by either the UK Government or the European Commission are used on any part of the smallholding.”*

### **3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

3.1. The importance of a healthy bee population for agriculture and the environment is recognised by the County Council. Evidence is divided on the use of neonicotinoids. However, they are not used on County Council land. Changes could be introduced to farm business tenancy agreements to ensure that no pesticides banned by the UK Government or the European Commission are used on any holding. Lead Member is therefore recommended to reject the submitted Notice of Motion, and agree the amended Motion as set out in paragraph 2.8 above.

#### **RUPERT CLUBB**

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillor St Pierre

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None