

(address redacted)

18th May 2023

**For attention of Emma Freemantle and Amanda Woodhead
and for agenda of Open Spaces Committee meeting 6th June 2023**

Re. strimming of daffodils and cow parsley near Ellendune Centre and Moat Pond

On Thursday 11th May as the Step out Swindon walkers were setting out, I noticed the beauty of the wild cow parsley among the daffodil leaves in two patches near the Ellendune Centre and another area by the Moat Pond opposite. An hour later, two of these areas has been cut to the ground and a groundsman was working by the pond. I am sure I was not the only resident to be angered and distressed by this unnecessary destruction of areas which were both attractive and alive with pollinators and other insects.

The timing of strimming down daffodils was discussed at the Fauna and Flora Working Party meeting held on 7 October 2021. Notes of that meeting read as follows:

“Daffodil Cutback Procedure

RH explained that the minimum length of time daffodils are left after flowering is 6 weeks in line with Royal Horticultural Society Guidance. Due to workload constraints of WPC Grounds Team RH stated that it is often 8-10 weeks. The group agreed to continue with this approach to ensure nutrients return to the daffodil bulb before the green leaves are cut off.”

In 2021, the daffodils were strimmed on 27th May and there was comment at Fauna and Flora that this seemed too soon, “earlier than usual”. This year, due to the cold spell in the Spring, daffodils bloomed later: there were yellow flowers into the 3rd week in April. Cutting them on 11th May, therefore, was only 2 – 3 weeks after flowering finished. The leaves lying in the ground were still very green and fresh, even on the Friday, their ‘stumps’ left in the ground oozing sap.

In an episode of Gardeners World on 5th May, Monty Don told viewers:

“It’s important not to cut back the foliage until it’s completely yellowed.”

Why was horticultural advice ignored this year and why did the Grounds Team not honour its written undertaking to the Fauna and Flora Group?

Apart from the effect on the daffodils (fewer flowers likely in 2024), cow parsley is beautiful and one of the best plants for pollinating insects. More newspaper and magazine articles than ever this year have stressed the biodiversity crisis in the UK, especially in relation to numbers of insects. Mowing around the patches of cow parsley, at its finest in May, and leaving it and the daffodils to die down naturally until the end of June, would have been so easy. Please do not tell me that “people like to see the area tidy”. The broken stems of cow parsley and long, green daffodil leaves left strewn across the ground looked anything but tidy.

Please will the Grounds Team leave untouched the few remaining areas of beautiful wildflowers, until at least the end of June? I refer to the stream side in the Pitches, the wilder area around the trees near Berry’s, and the passage way from the High Street to Willow Walk. Studies have shown that, by mid-June, ‘No Mow’ plots yield 8 times more nectar than in late April. Dandelion plants, for example, support more than 50 species.

While other small towns and villages have adopted eco-friendly policies to managing verges and green areas, Wroughton Parish seems set to destroy nature by continual mowing and strimming. This is profoundly disappointing.

Elsbeth Wollen