

MELBOURN PARISH COUNCIL
Maintenance Committee Meeting : 24 November 2021

Rabbits – update

In September the increasing numbers of rabbits on the New Rec was brought to the attention of the Parish Office.

Guidance provided by Natural England and the British Pest Control Association advised that it is legal to kill or take rabbits by any lawful methods at any time of year. Rabbits are considered pests under the Pests Act 1954, and all occupiers of land have a legal responsibility to take action to prevent them from causing damage to e.g. crops. Lawful methods include ferreting, gassing (with Phostoxin or Talunex), shooting, snaring (in compliance with the Defra 'Code of Good Practice on the Use of Snares in Fox & Rabbit Control'), live-capture cage-trapping and spring-trapping.

Following this The Pest Company, who has carried out work for the Parish Council in the past, inspection the area on the New Rec and identified 60 burrows that need tackling. He identified lots of digging in the basketball and nursery areas and this is a trip hazard.

The Pest Company had previously advised on the possible steps that could be taken. His guidance is below in bold:

1. Gas –**Yes this is effective. I am not registered, as not enough demand. However, once cleared, other rabbits can re-infest area.**
2. Traps and snares— **Yes, I provide trapping and completed this for you in the past. Traps are well down the burrows and have the entrances restricted. This makes them safe, unreachable to dogs and none targets. Burrows can be filled in but again area can be re-infested.**
3. Rabbit Fencing — **This is the best solution to keeping cleared rabbits out. Challenges are vast area and expense of installing and maintaining, damage and vandalism. Gates left open.**
4. Ferrets — **Good option. If you can find a local person who wants to work their ferrets and take away rabbits for payment/part payment. Can return, if other rabbits move in.**

Following his visit where 60 burrows were identified he suggested two options trapping or gassing. Gassing has been discussed previously by council and, due to the fact that the gas needs to be monitored continuously for safety reasons, it has not been seen as an appropriate method.

The Pest Company provided a quote for carrying out trapping. It should be noted that the Pest Company suggests purchasing the traps for the Parish Council to keep, so that if there was this problem again in the future a large number of rabbits could be dealt with at once.

The cost of trapping and clearing the rabbits, would be as follows:

25 traps for you to keep and use going forward would be £220.00 in total.

Set up of the traps would cover 2 days, once first area cleared and be £500.00 in total.

Checking the traps daily, for 2 weeks, would be £1050.00. This would be a maximum amount and if cleared quicker, then reduced.

Unfortunately trapping is very labour intensive to set up and check. Due to being a public area, I would need to restrict the burrow entrances to deny dogs and non-targets from reaching the traps.

Total: £1,770.00

The Chairman of the Dynamos informed the Parish Office that he knew a group of experienced game keepers and farmer who could carry out ferreting on the New Rec. The Pest Company have previously advised that ferreting is a good option for dealing with rabbits. The group of ferreters have kindly offered to carry out the ferreting and disposal of the rabbits for free. The group has previously ferreted in public areas and they roped off the areas they are working in and put up Pest Control in progress signs. Due to the scale of the task it would take several sessions to deal with the current infestation and the ferreting would take place in the early morning when it is not busy.

Since beginning to discuss when the ferreting could take place, it has been noted that the ferreters are busy with other commitments and may struggling to find time to do this, and unfortunately there has been no proposed start date from the ferreters.

Just Pests is another pest control company who were contact to advice and provide a quote. They advised that shooting and gassing weren't feasible, so would recommend finding a local person with some ferrets and get rid of them that way.

Evergreen Rabbit control are a company who have experience clearly rabbits from public areas, such as playing fields and recreation grounds. They have quoted **£900+VAT** to carry out two days of rabbit control with ferrets, nets and dog trained to locate rabbits. They would try to carry out the control on a week day with poor weather as is likely to keep people away and they would do their best to be discreet. Also it is best if the rabbit control is carried out over the winter months. They have advised that the council may wish to carry out this type of control annually to keep the number of rabbits low and reduce the chance of another large infestation.