

# YOUR OPINIONS

## Action on ragwort invasion too late

**Ron Jeffries, chairman, Aldborough Hatch Defence Association, Spearpoint Gardens, Aldborough Road North, writes:**

The farm and grassland of Aldborough Hatch has become infested with ragwort, an invasive weed that is fatal if eaten by horses – of which many are stabled locally.

Government guidance on preventing harmful weeds and invasive non-native plants spreading – of which ragwort is top of the list – makes clear that landowners must prevent such plants on their land from spreading into the wild and prevent harmful weeds on their land from spreading onto a neighbour's property.

Landowners could be fined up to £5,000 or be sent to prison for up to two years if they allow

contaminated soil or plant material from any waste transferred to spread into the wild.

This year, ragwort has taken hold in the field next to St Peter's Church and the Aldborough Hall Equestrian Centre. After my association made strenuous representations over many weeks to Redbridge Council as landowners, the tenant partly-cut the field a week or so back, finishing the job on Sunday last.

It is, of course, too little and too late. The council as landowners and their tenant should have eradicated the ragwort – as they are legally required to do – as soon as it appeared – but they did not.

The ragwort should be pulled by hand to remove the roots before the flowers go to seed. This year ragwort has been rife across Aldborough Hatch Farm and is now spreading to others areas. These include Brett Tarmac's gravel area on Aldborough Hall Farm which is undergoing restoration – also land owned by

the council.

This summer the ragwort flowered, so the seeds are now in the ground ready to grow next year. And the seeds have blown onto other land. Cutting it now has not eradicated the ragwort. Spraying later will only kill any other species of wildflowers – and will not kill the ragwort seeds in the ground that will germinate next spring.

If this situation is allowed to continue Aldborough Hatch will have fields of ragwort and sick and dead horses.

Until ragwort is totally eradicated from Aldborough Hatch, the Aldborough Hatch Defence Association will continue to hold Redbridge Council and its tenant to account. We are determined to do so in the knowledge that we have the law on our side. We call upon the legal authorities to take note and take action by taking the offenders – Redbridge Council – to court.