

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 05 June 2023

Portfolio:	Streetscene
Subject:	Streetscene Sustainable Pesticide Use
Report of:	Head of Streetscene
Corporate Priorities:	Protect and Enhance the Environment

Purpose:

To inform Members of the Executive about the current use of pesticides on public land by the Council's Streetscene team, the legislation controlling pesticide use and what alternative measures other local authorities are currently adopting. This information will be used to inform a debate on the Council's use of Glyphosate following the receipt of a petition received at the Council Meeting held on 20 April on the use of Glyphosate on Public Land.

Executive summary:

On 20 April 2023 the Council received a petition submitted by Councillor Ms C Bainbridge on behalf of Conserving Habitats in Portchester (C.H.I.P), which requested that Fareham Borough Council ensure that, in public areas, it replaces the use of Glyphosate with chemical free weed removal methods, which are better for the environment and pose no risk to humans, wildlife and pets.

A small number of councils have initiated either a partial herbicide ban, or glyphosate ban for general use. However, it appears that all authorities are still using glyphosate to treat invasive species such as Japanese knotweed.

The Council's Streetscene Scrutiny Panel received a presentation on the Council's Pesticide Treatment Programme at the meeting on 26 January 2023. Members of the Panel were very supportive of the suggestion put forward in the presentation that a Policy be developed to regulate the Council's use of pesticides and to provide details of the measures being considered to reduce them.

As the first step in the development of a policy, officers have contacted other local authorities and reviewed recent trials and studies about the use of glyphosate for weed control which indicates this remains the most sustainable option.

Recommendation/Recommended Option:

It is RECOMMENDED that the Executive note the contents of the report.

Reason:

To inform a debate on the Council's use of Glyphosate following the receipt of a petition received at the Council Meeting held on 20 April on the use of Glyphosate on Public Land.

Cost of proposals:

Continuation with the current arrangements for use of herbicide treatment can be met from within the existing revenue budget. Further investigation would be needed to ascertain detailed costs for any alternative weed control method.

Appendices:

APPENDIX A – Summary of responses from local authorities using alternative weed control methods

Background papers:

Minutes of Streetscene Scrutiny Panel meeting - 26 January 2023

Minutes of the Executive meeting - 03 April 2023

Minutes of Council meeting – 20 April 2023

Reference papers:

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Briefing Paper

Date:	05 June 2023
Subject:	Streetscene Sustainable Pesticide Use
Briefing by:	Head of Streetscene
Portfolio:	Streetscene

INTRODUCTION

1. On 20 April 2023 the Council received a petition submitted by Councillor Ms C Bainbridge on behalf of Conserving Habitats in Portchester (C.H.I.P) which requested that Fareham Borough Council ensure that, in public areas, it replaces the use of Glyphosate with chemical free weed removal methods, which are better for the environment and pose no risk to humans, wildlife and pets.
2. Members were advised at the meeting that, whilst this petition was being formally submitted, it would not be debated until a later meeting of the Council following a formal report being presented to the Executive at the June meeting so that Members could be furnished with all the facts before debating the issue. Members were further advised that the lead petitioner has been advised of this and will be invited to give a deputation at the meeting of the Executive.

BACKGROUND

3. In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified glyphosate as 'probably carcinogenic'. At the same time, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) concluded that it is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans.
4. In 2019, US court rulings against Monsanto ruled in favour of plaintiffs who claimed to have contracted cancer because of the prolonged use of its glyphosate-based products namely Roundup.
5. In 2021, the Assessment Group on Glyphosate (AGG) concluded that glyphosate does not pose any hazard to human or environmental health.
6. In 2022, Bayer (the current owner of the Roundup product) successfully defended itself in five glyphosate-based product cancer trials in the US.
7. The use of Glyphosate in Europe will come under review again in 2023. The UK central government still supports the continued use of glyphosate. Indeed, most Councils appear to still use Glyphosate in the UK and all authorities in Hampshire do so.

8. Pesticides, also known as 'plant protection products' (PPP) are used to control pests, weeds, and diseases. Examples include insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, molluscicides, and plant growth regulators.
9. They can exist in many forms, such as solid granules, powders or liquids and consist of one or more active substances co-formulated with other materials.
10. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) is the national pesticides regulator for the UK, on behalf of the UK government and the devolved administrations.
11. HSE aim to ensure that pesticides do not harm human health or have unacceptable effects on the environment by:
 - Enforcing the regulations
 - Ensuring only authorised products can be marketed
 - Ensuring products are used in a sustainable fashion
 - Monitoring the impact of chemicals
12. Anyone applying for authorisation of a product must provide an extensive range of scientific and technical data. Through this data, they must demonstrate that the product is effective and humane and poses no unacceptable risks to people (including users, residents, and bystanders), wildlife and the environment.
13. Only when the Government is satisfied with the above data can authorisation be granted for the product.
14. There is a Code of Practice for using Plant Protection Products. This code of practice is for all professional users of plant protection products in England and Wales in respect of Part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 (FEPA) and the regulations controlling pesticides,
15. The Code's statutory basis means that it can be used in evidence if people are taken to Court for offences involving PPPs.
16. The Council is not the only user of pesticides in the Borough of Fareham, including herbicide products containing Glyphosate. Residents use a range of pesticides to control weeds pests and diseases on their property. Hampshire Highways treat weed growth on Highway hard surfaces such as roads and footpaths. Farmers use pesticides for crop and vegetation management.
17. Nationally, although incidents of pets suffering ill effects from glyphosate poisoning have been recorded, there are no known deaths of a pet attributed to glyphosate poisoning.
18. To date Fareham Borough Council has yet to receive a toxicology report confirming Glyphosate poisoning in a pet leading to sickness in the animal, although social media activity has indicated some residents have associated this with their pets being poorly.

STREETSCENE PESTICIDE USE IN PUBLIC SPACES

19. Streetscene use a range of pesticide products in public spaces including the herbicide Glyphosate.
20. Fungicides and herbicides not containing glyphosate are used to control disease and weed growth in fine turf sports surfaces such as bowling greens and cricket squares. This is a necessary and cost-effective solution to maintain a playing surface that is fit for purpose.
21. Herbicides including glyphosate-based formulations are used to control plant growth around obstacles and street furniture in parks, cemeteries, open spaces, housing amenity areas and roadside verges.
22. A small variety of chemicals including glyphosate-based formulations are used to treat invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed.

HOW STREETSCENE ENSURE THE SAFE USE OF PESTICIDES

23. All operatives applying pesticides have undergone accredited training and hold a certificate of competence in the safe use of pesticide.
24. Operatives are clearly identified when undertaking herbicide application by wearing high visibility vests with the wording '*Herbicide application in progress*' on the back to inform residents they are in the process of spraying herbicide.
25. The Grounds Maintenance page on the Council's website indicates the current Ward in the Borough that herbicide application on roadside verges and open space is taking place to help keep residents informed when treatment is underway in their area.
26. Parks, cemeteries, open spaces, housing amenity land and roadside grass verge chemical treatments are applied using controlled droplet technology. It is a sealed and ready-to-use format and, as such, there is no risk of spillages, while the delivery system allows for extremely accurate application and virtually eliminates spray and run-off.
27. Most herbicide, including Glyphosate based products, are usually used just once a year as part of a sustainable integrated control programme in parks, open spaces and on highway verges to help control growth around obstacles. This is to ensure that the current grounds maintenance resource can maintain a reasonable standard of presentation of the borough's public amenity areas at an affordable cost.
28. The Council use a small variety of chemicals including glyphosate-based formulations to treat invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed. Japanese knotweed is treated up to three times a year to prevent the plant spreading to neighbouring properties and avoid potential substantial compensation claims.
29. Glyphosate is the only active ingredient that is approved for use in or near water. This is an essential tool for the control and eradication of hazardous weeds such as Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed growing near water courses.

ALTERNATIVE WEED CONTROL COMPARISON

30. There are several alternatives to using pesticides that have been trialled by different

local authorities. The Council's own Streetscene team have trialled hot foam and wire sweeper brushes.

31. The trials undertaken by the Streetscene team and other local authorities show that alternative methods of treatment do not provide the same level of weed control as herbicide use and require more frequent visits to achieve satisfactory results. A summary of alternative weed control methods is included in the table below.

Method	Speed of Application	Root Kill	Staff Resource	Cost	Access	Frequency of Application
Chemical	Fast	Very good	Low	Low	All	1-2
Manual	Slow	Partial	Higher	Higher	All	4-6
Hot Foam	Medium	Good	Higher	Higher	Restricted	3-4
Hot Water	Medium	Partial	Higher	Higher	Restricted	4-6
Flame	Medium	Good	Higher	Higher	Restricted	4-6

32. Alternative methods often involve increasing vehicle and equipment use combined with increased operational staff time and therefore, is likely to increase carbon emissions and service costs.
33. Hot foam and hot water methods rely on the use of high volumes of water and diesel fuelled boilers, making the environmental impact high. There is also the need to use long trailing hoses that can be restrictive so not all areas that require control will be accessible.

OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES APPROACH

34. Officers have recently contacted several local authorities to understand their position on pesticide use. According to the Pesticides Action Network (PAN UK), at least 40 UK local authorities have banned its use. The Councils listed below have been identified as stopping altogether or in part their use of glyphosate and were contacted for feedback:

- Brighton and Hove
- Lewes and Eastbourne
- Croydon (Suffolk County Council)
- Somerset County Council
- Hackney
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Rochford District Council
- Cornwall Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Reading
- Richmond
- City of Westminster
- Dorset Council
- Portsmouth City Council

35. In total, 5 local authorities responded back to the enquiry out of the 14 contacted. Studies and trials have also been undertaken by local authorities who have either shared or published their findings. A table detailing the responses received is contained in Appendix A. The main findings were:
- There is no consistent type of ban across the authorities that responded
 - Only two Councils have introduced a total Glyphosate ban
 - One Council has a complete Herbicide ban
 - One Council has a partial ban
 - One Council has not initiated a ban to date
 - All Councils contacted still use herbicides (Glyphosate) to treat invasive/hazardous species including Japanese Knotweed.
 - At this time, no Council has found or are using an alternative chemical to Glyphosate.
 - While alternative methods are still being trialled, most respondents stated that they rely on manual weeding.
 - The response to increase in complaints is divided but three out of the five responding did admit resident complaints have increased.
36. It is worth noting that not all authorities share the same landscape environment and therefore face the same issues to the same extent. An example is in a city such as Portsmouth or London Borough such as Hackney most residential roads are hard paved without grass verges. In Fareham however, most residential roads in the borough include grass verges that have trees and street furniture within and so any lowering of preserved standards will affect the majority of residents outlook in their neighbourhoods.
37. In a similar way rural authorities tend to maintain rural roads and countryside parkland, so this landscape type lends itself to more long grass and wildlife habitats that are visually and socially acceptable but do not encroach on densely habitable areas or areas of high footfall.

PESTICIDE USE POLICY

38. The Council's Streetscene Scrutiny Panel received a presentation on the Council's Pesticide Treatment Programme at the meeting on 26 January 2023. Members of the Panel were very supportive of the suggestion put forward in the presentation that a Policy be developed to regulate the Council's use of pesticides and to provide details of the measures being considered to reduce them.
39. A pesticide use policy will help to ensure the Council continues to comply with HSE requirements to only use approved products passed as humane that pose no unacceptable risks to people (including users, residents, and bystanders), wildlife and the environment.
40. It would show how, where when and why the Council use pesticides and what measures are being considered to reduce pesticide use. It can also highlight details on any reductions in pesticide use that have already been achieved, good practice undertaken and what alternative methods are being employed and where.

41. The development of a policy would allow the Council to consider the cost options and potential outcomes for alternative solutions to be fully assessed so that a more informed debate on the impact locally can be made.

IMPLICATIONS OF A BAN ON GLYPHOSATE

42. With the current staff resource available, banning the use of Glyphosate on public land would lead to an increase in weed growth and tall vegetation around the Borough, potentially detracting from the visual amenity of Fareham and in the long-term increasing the risk of infrastructure damage.
43. There is also a likely increase in public claims for injury caused by trips on weeds and surface damage on footpaths and paved areas such as council housing land and public spaces. Significant costs could arise if knotweed is allowed to spread onto private properties from adjacent Council land.
44. To mitigate these issues, it would be necessary to increase the staff resource in the Streetscene Operations team which would increase costs. Alternative methods of control would also require additional equipment, vehicles, and staff to operate.
45. To date there is no comparable alternative treatment for invasive weeds such as knotweed.

CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS

46. Depending on the option chosen there may be an increase in carbon emissions from the additional vehicle journeys and machinery used as an alternative vegetation control method to Glyphosate. Further studies would need to be undertaken to ascertain the scale and therefore impact on emissions.

CONCLUSION

47. Trials undertaken by the Streetscene team and other local authorities show that alternative methods of herbicide treatment do not provide the same level of weed control as herbicide use and require more frequent visits when using alternative methods to achieve satisfactory results.
48. The indication from the survey of local authorities, who have banned the use of herbicide, in most cases resulted in an increase in complaints from residents relating to excessive weed growth.
49. The Streetscene team current use of pesticide is kept to a minimum and applied with a controlled application. This ensures effective control of invasive weeds, good quality sports playing surfaces and cost-effective control of weed growth around furniture and obstacles on public open spaces.
50. The Streetscene Scrutiny Panel considered the Council's use of herbicide at the meeting on 26 January 2023 and endorsed the development and adoption of a sustainable pesticide usage policy.
51. Such a policy would allow the Council to consider the cost options and environmental impact of any future decisions regarding the use of herbicide and allow the potential outcomes for the various solutions to be fully assessed and measured alongside the local impact so that the appropriate solutions can be put in place.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Mark Bowler (Head of Streetscene or Mick Gore (Public Spaces and Operations Manager)

APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF RESPONSES FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES USING ALTERNATIVE WEED CONTROL METHODS

Councils	Type of ban?	Fungicides & pesticides still used on fine turf?	Used on Roadside verge, housing sites, parks & open spaces?	Alternative chemicals? Alternative methods?	Increased cost?	Increased complaints?	Use of herbicides on Invasive species?

Brighton and Hove	Glyphosate	No	No	No Manual	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hackney	Partial	Yes	Yes	No Sowing	Yes	No	Yes
Lewes and Eastbourne	Herbicide	Sometimes	No	Foam Stream Manual	No	Yes	Yes
Portsmouth	No ban in place but a trial of alternatives methods is underway.	Yes	Yes	Trial of Foam Stream, Mechanical & Manual	N/a	N/a	Yes
Somerset	Glyphosate	No	No	None	No	Yes	Yes

OTHER RECENT COUNCIL STUDIES

Cardiff Council

In 2021 Cardiff Council and its contractors undertook a trial of three weed control methods across the city. The three methods used were measured against four key criteria: cost, environmental impact, customer satisfaction and quality. Consultants from Advanced Invasives Ltd managed the trial and published the results.

Control methods trialled included glyphosate herbicide, acetic acid, and hot foam. Results showed that glyphosate was the most sustainable, being cost effective with low environmental impacts and high customer satisfaction and quality. In contrast, acetic acid delivered immediate costs and environmental impacts with low customer satisfaction and quality, while hot foam generated high costs and environmental impacts but high customer satisfaction and quality.

North Yorkshire County Council

In 2021 hot foam was tested and due to cost and logistical considerations concluded that they will not be deploying this method in the coming years.

Bristol City Council

In 2017 this council compared three methods of control and concluded that glyphosate was the most cost-effective treatment. Acetic acid was more than three times more expensive to use while hot foam was up to seven times the cost for the same outcome.