

Report of the Executive Director

USE OF GLYPHOSATE1. Purpose of report

To update Members on the Council's approach to the use of Glyphosate for the control of weed growth in the Borough and to consider options to reduce its use where appropriate.

2. Background

Glyphosate based herbicides have been the cost effective control method for local authorities to effectively treat weed growth on hard surfaced areas and around obstacles since their introduction in the early 1970's. In recent years there has been greater public and political interest in the use of Glyphosate following various high profile press articles.

In Broxtowe Glyphosate is used for the control of weeds growing on the highway as part of highway grass cutting and weed control contract with Via (East Midlands) and on parks, green spaces and cemeteries to treat areas around the base of obstacles and young trees in grass areas and in the cemeteries to prevent damage to memorials by machinery. In the last few years the volume of Glyphosate used has reduced and the table in the appendix provides further details, together with options as to how further to reduce its use.

Further details relating to Glyphosate and its use are provided in the appendix.

3. Financial implications

As detailed in the appendix the use of Glyphosate is the most cost effective method to control weeds. In addition, failure to control weeds in the short term can create longer term problems with damage to pavements and hard surfaces.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to NOTE the use of Glyphosate as a cost effective method to control weed growth and RESOLVE that the changes to reduce the use of Glyphosate as detailed in the report and then review the situation in 12 months be approved.

Background papers:

Nil

APPENDIXGlyphosate

There is a lot of conflicting information as to the safe use of Glyphosate. It has probably been subject to more scientific scrutiny than any other weed control product.

All herbicides are subject to rigorous scrutiny by Government regulations. Glyphosate, given its effectiveness and wide adoption, is one of the most studied herbicides in the world.

The approval of chemical herbicides is carefully managed by the Chemical Regulation Division (CRD), part of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), working closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). All commercially available chemicals are subject to rigorous testing and approved for sale by the CRD. As part of the process chemicals are ecologically and toxicologically tested with a Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) assessment, leading to the development of specific procedures for the use of the chemical so that any risk to the health of humans, animals and the environment is minimised or eliminated.

Glyphosate is approved for use in Great Britain until at least 2025.

The risks associated with the use of pesticides in amenity areas such as parks are specifically considered as part of the authorisation process.

The responsible use of pesticides in amenity areas as part of an integrated programme of control can help deliver substantial benefits for society. These include: management of conservation areas, invasive species and flood risks, access to high quality sporting facilities; and safe public spaces (for example by preventing weed growth on hard surfaces creating trip hazards), industrial sites and transport infrastructure.

Highway Weed Control

The existing contract runs until March 2022. Discussions are currently ongoing with Via (East Midlands) for a contract extension for the Highway Grass Cutting and Weed Control contract. The weed control element of this contract is carried out for the Council by an external contractor as part of a 2-year contract with an option to extend for a further 2 periods, each of 12 months, up to 31 March 2024. The contract specifies that Glyphosate is the only approved herbicide for use within the highway.

The County Council fund 2 applications each growing season, one in May and one in late summer, together with an intermediate application in the 4 town centres in July. The 2 main applications normally take around 3 weeks to complete depending on weather conditions. The programme starts in Beeston Rylands and progresses north through the borough finishing in Brinsley.

The following provides a useful summary of key issues relating to highway weed control.

What is a Weed?

A weed is a plant growing in a location where it is not wanted. On the highways, any plants growing in pavements and kerbs or around drains and street furniture, are weeds.

What Level of Service Can We Expect?

The contractor is employed to keep weeds to a manageable level, we do not expect a weed free surface but we would expect all substantial growth to be treated.

Why Control Weeds?

Weeds are controlled for the following reasons:

- Appearance – weeds detract from the overall appearance of an area and trap litter.
- Safety – weed growth can interfere with visibility for road users and obscure traffic lights.
- Drainage – weeds in kerbs or around drains can prevent or slow down surface water drainage.
- Damage – weed growth can affect paving surfaces and force kerbs apart increasing maintenance costs.

Where are Weeds Treated?

All pavements and kerbs on residential roads are treated together with Council owned car parks and public footpaths in residential areas. The edges of paths immediately adjacent to walls or buildings are also treated when necessary. Only areas where weeds are growing are sprayed.

Where will the Council not Treat Weeds?

We are not responsible for treating private land or property owned by other public bodies or private organisations. We will not treat highways which have not been adopted by the Council.

How are Weeds Controlled?

Weeds are controlled by the use of Glyphosate, an environmentally approved herbicide. When the herbicide is applied to a weed it works its way through the plant killing it completely. On contact with soil the herbicide breaks down into harmless substances.

The herbicide has a very low toxicity and can be used in areas open to the public and their pets.

Other Areas where Glyphosate is Used

In addition to highways, Glyphosate is used in the following areas:

Parks and Green Spaces

- An area around the base of young trees to prevent damage by mowers or strimmers.
- An area around obstacles such as litter bins, lamp columns, base of fence lines to achieve more effective maintenance and help prevent damage to obstacles and machinery.
- Hard surfaced areas around the base of pavilions, on footpaths and around the edge of car parks.

Cemeteries

- An area around the base of obstacles and memorials to prevent damage to the headstones by machinery and to make the operation more cost effective.

Volume of Glyphosate used

In recent years the volume of Glyphosate used on parks, green spaces, cemeteries and highway verges has reduced from 205 litres in 2018 to 150 litres in 2021.

The volume used as part of the Highways Weed Contract remains constant and is in large, determined by the length of highway network. Additional roads added to the contact in the last few years only have a minor impact on the amount of chemical used. Total volume used 750 litres.

Way Forward

Whilst accepting that Glyphosate remains a cost effective tool for the Council and with the chemical approval for the use until at least 2025, there are options where a reduction in its use has potential and would be complimentary to the Meadow Planting and Wildflower Corridors strand in the Climate Change and Green Futures Programme.

It is therefore proposed that for 2022 the following changes will be made.

- Consultation with the chemical manufacturers and look to reduce the dilution rate where appropriate in line with their guidelines. This will reduce the volume used.
- Do not spray around mature trees.
- Do not spray edges of tarmac paths where the width can be maintained by mechanical means. Continue to spray the edges of stone surfaced paths where necessary, to prevent encroachment.
- Look to increase sweeping frequencies on Parks car parks to suppress weed germination.

- On Local Nature Reserves do not spray around the base of young trees or along fence lines allowing the grass to grow long and then cut back once in the Autumn. On sites where this approach is adopted, signage will be displayed explaining the reasons behind this revised maintenance regime. There may be property boundaries where weed control is necessary and these will be assessed on a site by site basis.
- Continue to replace bark play areas which are a problem for weeds, with rubber surfacing avoiding the need to spray.
- Additional staff training to highlight these changes and to emphasise the importance of spraying minimal widths around obstacles.

It is proposed that these initiatives are monitored over summer 2022 and comments, both positive and negative, from the public noted. The changes will then be reviewed in 12 months' time.