

## Communities Scrutiny Panel

<b>DATE</b>	27 February 2025
<b>REPORT OF</b>	Kath Jickells – Assistant Director Environment
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Weed Control
<b>STATUS</b>	Open

### CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

North East Lincolnshire's Council Plan 2024-25 sets out our vision to create stronger economies and stronger communities.

To support this, we want to manage our land to ensure all residents have access to inspiring green and open spaces to protect health and enhance lives. Clean up and maintenance work will be targeted to areas of need and complemented by working with the community, local volunteers, local businesses, and partners. We will ensure we have the capacity to keep our streets clean and maintain our parks and open spaces for everyone to enjoy.

The Council's contribution to the Place Based Outcomes Framework and the wider development of North East Lincolnshire relevant to this report are:

All people live in a safe environment, can have their say about things that are important to them and participate fully in their communities.

All people benefit from a green economy and high quality environment.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At Full Council on the 26th September 2024 a petition was received by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Net Zero regarding the use of Glyphosate as a treatment for weed control. Full Council debated and the following resolution was agreed by Council *"That officers investigate the possibility of the Council phasing out the use of Glyphosate with possible alternatives and report back to Scrutiny"*.

### MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

That the following options are considered by the panel and the preferred options be recommended to Cabinet:

1. Do nothing and continue to use glyphosate.
2. Fully phase out glyphosate in parks and open spaces but retain use on highways and paths until a cost-effective option is available.
3. Instigate a trial to phase out in a specific area for highway and report back to Scrutiny

4. Commit to phase out glyphosate using the Pesticide Action Network UK 3-year plan, see appendix 1

## 1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1 At Full Council on the 26th September 2024 a petition was received by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Net Zero. Full Council debated and the following resolution was agreed by Council *“That officers investigate the possibility of the Council phasing out the use of Glyphosate with possible alternatives and report back to Scrutiny”*

1.2 The petition requested that North East Lincolnshire consider the following

- Join the growing list of pesticide-free towns and phase-out the use of glyphosate in favour of non-chemical alternatives that put nature and our health first.
- Work with “Pesticide Action Network UK” who are a leading organisation supporting Local Authorities on their pesticide free journey.
- Start to progress its commitment in its Carbon Road Map to “work with local community groups and provide increased access and connection to nature and encourage a healthy, sustainable lifestyle”
- Agree Action Plan for Change with Annual Reviews of progress, publicising and promoting solutions.

1.3 According to their website Pesticide Action Network UK is a UK charity focused solely on tackling the problems caused by pesticides and promoting safe and sustainable alternatives in agriculture, urban areas, homes and gardens. They work with councils and landowners to reduce the amount of glyphosate. They don't however recommend that glyphosate use is stopped overnight, suggesting that such an approach can be counterproductive.

1.4 PAN UK believe the journey towards becoming pesticide-free requires a well-planned phased approach under which pesticide use is gradually but steadily reduced until it is eventually stopped entirely. Whilst the time frame can vary from case to case, a three-year phase out period is considered realistic for most councils, see appendix 1. We have contacted PAN UK to find out more about the support they offer to councils considering reducing their use of glyphosate.

1.5 Glyphosate was previously only authorised for use in the EU until 15 December 2023, following an extension to the renewal assessment process in 2022. In the UK, the current expiry date is December 2025, following a three-year extension as the UK's post-Brexit pesticides regulatory regime is developed. We have contacted DEFRA to better understand the likely future policy direction and await their feedback.

1.6 The council currently uses a chemical herbicide containing glyphosate, which has been subject to extensive testing and regulatory assessment in the EU. Glyphosate is approved for use by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and is

marked as safe to its users and the public. For the majority of time herbicide containing 360 grams per litre of glyphosate is used for the control of weeds. Occasionally there will be a requirement to use herbicide which contains 480 grams per litre of glyphosate where heavy infestations of weeds and briars, Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed are present.

1.7 In considering potential future options for phasing out glyphosate it is important to understand the reasons for weed control and review the financial and environmental implications alongside the quality of weed control, regrowth and public perception of the different approaches.

1.8 Weeds are controlled for the following reasons: -

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

1.9 The council treats approximately 1200km of the highway network each year and numerous public open spaces. Public open spaces include a mix of green space and include paths and paved areas.

1.10 The council currently, administers 2 to 3 applications per year across the highway network and some open spaces. This is carried out predominately by a team of three who administer glyphosate using lancers on quad bikes. Some other grounds maintenance operatives also undertake weed spraying as an integral part of their wider duties using knapsacks and a lance. The number of applications is influenced by the weather conditions and nature of the area and surface. We consider that our current approach is successful with only 61 customer requests/complaints received for weed spraying to be carried out in the last year.

1.11 Our weed control programme already seeks to minimise the areas we actively manage with glyphosate. Appendix 2 details the 25 areas where the green open space is currently not controlled by the application of glyphosate. There remains some application of glyphosate to hard surfaces i.e. paths, play areas and car parks.

1.12 To understand the implications of phasing out glyphosate and learn from others a review of current evidence and operational alternatives was undertaken. There has already been significant work carried out by councils across the country to reduce or eliminate glyphosate. Research has shown that 49 Council's previously committed to ban or phase out the use of pesticide/glyphosate-based weed killers in recent years. [Pesticide-Free Towns - success stories - Pesticide Action Network UK \(pan-uk.org\)](https://pan-uk.org).

1.13 Appendix 3 contains updated research conducted in December 2024 by officers and shows that of the 49 Council's, previously pledging to ban or phase out

glyphosate

- 45% have not kept the pledge
- 22% have kept the pledge
- 14% have partially kept the pledge
- 18% no further updates have been provided

1.14 Pesticide Action Network UK state there are two key issues that impact on the success of phasing out glyphosate and they encourage councils to ensure they address these. The first is the need for effective planning and the second is the need for greater acceptance of weeds by residents.

1.15 Other councils have already trialled a range of different solutions during their investigations to phase out glyphosate. The table in Appendix 4 sets out some brief information about alternative methods, application and the advantages and disadvantages of each. North East Lincolnshire Council has also previously trialled the use of a vinegar based solution around the Doughty Road Depot site in 2019. The solution caused odour complaints from the workforce, and it did not sufficiently control the weeds.

## **2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

2.1 There will be several risks and opportunities associated with phasing out glyphosate, many of which are referenced within the report. In preparing the future plan for phasing out glyphosate the council will need to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the risks and opportunities associated with the alternative approach, and this will support our decision making.

## **3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

3.1 Paragraph 1.14 sets out the importance of effective planning and recognises that our communities will need greater acceptance of weeds to enable a reduction in the use of glyphosate. Depending on the options chosen there are both positive and negative reputational implications for the Council and any change will need to be effectively communicated.

## **4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 The transition to alternative methods of weed control or no weed control is likely to have significant financial capital and revenue consequences depending upon the options chosen. Indicative costs associated with options in appendix 4 provide some context to the significance of this decision. It is envisaged that strimming would require an additional 30 staff at a revenue cost of £1.3M per year. The capital cost of additional mechanised sweeper vehicles is estimated at £950K, with additional annual revenue costs of £260K. Foamstream, which may be suitable for play areas will require equipment at an annual cost of £17K. Implementation of any change will

therefore need to be supported by a comprehensive business case, including detailed cost information.

## **5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Our environmental strategies aim to improve the environment for the benefit of current and future generations. Children and young people are especially concerned about our environment, and it is essential to engage with them on environmental matters. This will feed into the workstreams in our Natural Assets Plan, which promote opportunities to engage with children and young people.

## **6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The petition is seeking to encourage operational change which will have a positive impact on the environment, increase biodiversity and support wildlife.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Implementation of the alternative options in relation to methods of weed control would result in costs being incurred above the current approved budget envelope, and therefore result in a budget pressure. Future changes would need to be considered and approved alongside a full business case.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The future legal position regarding the use of glyphosate is unclear as it is not known at this stage whether the legal obligations regarding glyphosate under EU Law will be incorporated into UK domestic law.
- 8.2 Glyphosate is approved for use in the UK until December 2025.
- 8.3 Guidance on the use of glyphosate is widely available and should be adhered to.
- 8.4 Recommendations on options from Scrutiny will be made to Cabinet for decision-making, as per the usual governance process.

## **9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

There are no HR implications within the report.

## **10. WARD IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The Council carries out weed control throughout the Borough and this will impact all wards.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[7.-Petition-for-Debate.pdf](#)

## **12. CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

Lisa Logan, Head of Open Spaces

Dee Hitter, Head of Sustainability

**Kath Jickells**

**Assistant Director Environment**

## **Appendix 1 – framework for a three-year phase-out plan**

This is a rough outline of what a three-year Pesticide-Free plan could look like in order to deliver an effective programme of pesticide reduction and eventual cessation of use across the borough of North East Lincolnshire council managed land. The information below has been taken from [Phase-out-plan.pdf](#).

It has the council as the driving force but looks to involve multiple stakeholders to broaden the initiative and make it as comprehensive as possible. Potentially this could be the basis for a weed control policy document.

### ***Overall objectives***

- To reduce and possibly end the use of all pesticides (for the most part herbicides) by the council, on all land that is directly under its control.
- Encourage residents to stop the use of pesticides in gardens, allotments and other areas.

### ***The pathway to Pesticide-Free***

It is not recommended that pesticide use is stopped overnight – in fact this approach is often counterproductive.

The journey towards becoming pesticide-free requires a well-planned phased approach under which pesticide use is gradually but steadily reduced until it is eventually stopped entirely. The timeframe can vary from case to case but, in general, a three-year phase out period is realistic for most councils.

Councils can share experiences and best practice. In addition, non-chemical technologies are constantly evolving and improving, making the transition to being pesticide-free increasingly easy and affordable.

PAN UK has produced a comprehensive guide for local authorities that looks at some of the key issues related to going pesticide-free. It covers areas such as designing trials of non-chemical alternatives and bespoke pesticide policies and dealing with contentious issues such as invasive species and cost implications. 'Going Pesticide-Free: A Guide for Local Authorities' can be found at the PAN UK website at [pan-uk.org/pesticide-free](http://pan-uk.org/pesticide-free).

This outline below provides an overview of a three-year plan which a town or city may follow to reduce, and ultimately end, pesticide use:

**Throughout the entire duration of the plan, communication with the public about what you are trying to achieve and why, progress made, problems and successes is vital. There are useful guidelines for achieving good public communication in the PAN UK Toolkit for Local Authorities - <http://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free-workshop-resources/>**

## **Year 1**

It's vital that councils have in place a clear strategy for going pesticide-free that sets a clear direction of travel and allows all actors (concerned residents and local businesses) to play their part. It will help not only those involved in reducing the use of pesticide but also assist residents and the wider public to understand the benefits of going pesticide-free.

Devising, and ideally publishing a strategy, is a vital first step and something that PAN UK can help with. Other measures to be implemented in year 1 are as follows:

- Undertake an audit of current pesticide / herbicide use across all sectors including, but not limited to, parks and cemeteries, streets, housing and schools.
- Devise a bespoke pesticide policy which sets out a clearly the conditions under which pesticides are being used in its area – how, where, when and why, and what measures are being taken to end or reduce pesticide use.
- Publicise the initiative through local media and other channels so the public are aware of what is planned for the coming three years.
- End the use of herbicides in public parks and green spaces by the end of year one.
- Begin at least one trial of alternatives, and ideally more, for hard surface areas such as streets and pavements.
- Initiate a stakeholder forum for land managers from across the city / borough. These can be from hospitals and other medical facilities, schools and universities, retail and shopping areas etc (see below for more detail)

### **Stakeholder Forum**

The stakeholder forum is an important part of the process that will help the council meet its pesticide-free objective in a number of ways;

- Draw in other land managers in the area so that the council will not be operating in isolation.
- An opportunity to share experiences and learnings with others who might already be successfully implementing pesticide reduction strategies.
- It presents the possibility of cost sharing– this could be particularly useful in terms of initial capital outlay for non-chemical alternative technologies.

The Forum should meet semi-regularly and have a clear agenda for discussions.

## **Year 2**

This is the time to consolidate the work of year one and take things further.

- Commit to halving the kilometres of streets and pavements that are sprayed by the end of year two.



- End the use of pesticides / herbicides in properties owned or controlled by the council.
- Work in partnership with members of the stakeholder forum, ensure that other land managers are working to reduce and ultimately stop the use of pesticides / herbicides in areas outside council control.
- Ensure there is an ongoing dialogue with the public about progress of the project

### **Year 3**

The final year and time to deliver the final objective.

- End the use of pesticides / herbicides on the remaining kilometres of streets and pavements.
- Continue to encourage other key stakeholders to follow suit on land and areas under their control.
- Organise a public event to announce your success.
- Write up your experiences including problems overcome, successes, involvement of stakeholders and anything else that is pertinent. This will be a valuable resource for other areas wanting to adopt a similar approach
- On the back of your work launch a public campaign to encourage homeowners, amateur gardeners and allotment holders to follow suit in reducing and stopping their use of pesticides / herbicides.

## Appendix 2

List of the 25 areas where the green open space is currently not controlled by the application of Glyphosate. There remains some application of Glyphosate to hard surfaces i.e. paths, play area and car parks.

- Jubilee Park Perimeter
- Peaks Parkway (Bridge to roundabout)
- Boating Lake car park and green areas
- Pennells Garden Centre grassed area
- Belvoir wild areas
- Cleethorpes Country Park (perimeter and car park)
- Ainslie Rec and Katherine Street (Gas Alley)
- Highfield Avenue
- Weelsby Avenue wild area
- Former Scartho Baths site
- Westwood Ho (Ambulance Field)
- Augusta Street grassed area
- Bradley Hollow and copse area
- Duke of York gardens perimeter area
- Corporation Road along the wall line
- Railway side perimeter fence line (Willows Estate)
- Copse area Mayfair Drive East and West (Wybers)
- Ampleforth and Wingate green spaces
- Longitude Woods (Freshney)
- Cromwell Road open space
- Cromwell Road estate verges
- Kingston Gardens green spaces
- Capes Recreational
- Laceby Bypass verges
- Achille Road wild area

### Appendix 3

Updated research conducted in December 2024 by officers and shows that of the 49 Council's, previously pledging to ban or phase out glyphosate.

<b>Council</b>	<b>Kept to Pledge</b>
Erewash, Derbyshire	No
Cowes, Isle of Wight	No
Frensham, Surrey	No
Cambridge, Cambridgeshire	No
Lyme Regis, Dorset	No
Chichester, West Sussex	No
Petersfield, Hampshire	No
Faversham, Kent	No
Hexham, Northumberland	No
Hadleigh, Suffolk	No
Wirral, Liverpool	No
Waverley, Surrey	No
Warminster, Wiltshire	No
Manningtree, Tendring, Essex	No
Renfrewshire, Scotland	No
Guildford, Surrey	No
Chelmsford, Essex	No
Marlow, Buckinghamshire	No
Worthing, West Sussex	No
Portsmouth, Hampshire	No
Trafford, Manchester	No
Folkestone & Hythe, Kent	No
Derry, Londonderry	No update available
Shetland, Scotland	No update available
Bilbrook, South Staffordshire	No update available
Reading, Berkshire	No update available
Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire	No update available
Newcastle, Tyne and Wear	No update available
Westminster, London	No update available
West Suffolk District, Suffolk	No update available
Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland	No update available
Lewes District, East Sussex	Partial
Shaftesbury, Dorset	Partial
Midlothian, Scotland	Partial
Highland, Scotland	Partial
Greater London Authority	Partial
Colchester, Essex	Partial
Flintshire County, Wales	Partial
Glastonbury, Somerset	Yes
Wadebridge, North Cornwall	Yes
Hammersmith & Fulham, London	Yes

Peterlee, Durham	Yes
Frome, Somerset	Yes
Lambeth, London	Yes
Balerno, Edinburgh	Yes
Bath and North East Somerset	Yes
East Devon, Devon	Yes
Devon County, England	Yes
Newton Abbot, Devon	Yes

## Appendix 4 Alternative Methods

Method	Use	Advantages	Disadvantages
Glyphosate treatment	Highways, paths and some open spaces administered by lancers on quad bikes and knapsacks	Considered very effective against all weeds and cost effective	Potential for Glyphosate to be phased out by December 2025
Strim	Highways, paths and some open spaces administered by personnel with a strimmer	May be more environmentally friendly than Glyphosate, however, the fuel for transport staff across locations may have an impact.	Hand Arm Vibration (HAVs) only able to use a strimmer on average for two hours then would not be able to use any other handheld equipment. To implement this method would require in the region of £1.3m additional revenue funding, this would cover at least another 30 staff members, transport along with additional machinery. Aesthetically damaging.
Cease weed control	No weed control would be carried out	More wildflower areas forming in open spaces	Health and safety, trips and falls along with not aesthetically pleasing to the eye. May have increased complaints from public. Could damage reputation and see a decline in investment

Large and small sweepers	Highways and paths only	Potential reduced manpower	Will not remove roots of weeds, time consuming in terms of delivery, access. Health and safety for road traffic and pedestrians. Damage to footpaths/ kerbs and possible private assets i.e. walls/fences. The cost to deliver this method would include capital costs for vehicles of approximately £950k plus annual revenue costs of £260k
Vinegar based solution	Using a vinegar-based solution to control weeds on hard surfaces only	No licence required for application	NELC trialled this for a period in a selected location around Doughty Road Depot and considered it ineffective. The smell can also give operatives a headache. Other councils have reported complaints from residents over smell.
Propane/flame	On hard surface only	May be cheaper than foamstream	Health and safety issues for operatives and residents
Foamstream	System uses high temperature water and foam to kill weeds.	Effective on moss/weeds on hard surfaces i.e. play areas	Only useful for play areas. Rental cost, if procured for a minimum of 12 months is £16,800 p.a. plus solution

