

**REPORT TO:** Policy and Performance Review Committee

**MEETING DATE:** 14 December 2023

**BY:** Executive Director for Place

**SUBJECT:** Use and Management of Glyphosate Across the County

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To inform Members of the current use of Glyphosate by the Council, the context for this, and the work underway to reduce the use of Glyphosate and enhance nature networks.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Members are requested to note the contents of this report, including the measures already taken by Amenity Services to reduce use of Glyphosate and balance this with the Council's range of duties and responsibilities.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Glyphosate is a substance that is widely used in a number of herbicide products and its use in Europe is subject to strict regulation.<sup>1</sup> Glyphosate-based pesticides are used in agriculture and horticulture to combat weeds that compete with cultivated crops, and in the maintenance of hard infrastructure<sup>2</sup> such as railway lines, footways and hard-standing areas, amongst other uses.

### **The Council's statutory duties relating to weed control**

- 3.2 East Lothian Council currently has an integrated weed control programme, which includes the use of Glyphosate where this is necessary to enable the Council to continue to meet its duties to keep specified areas including public footways and other hard surfacing free of weeds.
- 3.3 There are statutory duties on the Council, and all local authorities, to keep specified land and public roads clean and litter-free. The Council is

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<sup>1</sup> [Glyphosate: no critical areas of concern; data gaps identified | EFSA \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [EFSA explains the scientific assessment of glyphosate | EFSA \(europa.eu\)](#)

independently audited annually using local environmental quality surveys to monitor and inform our compliance with the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse (Scotland) 2018. These annual audits use a range of local environmental indicators including presence of “weeds”.<sup>3</sup>

- 3.4 The Council must also ensure it meets equalities and outdoor access duties and responsibilities in maintaining our public infrastructure so that pavements and footways do not become damaged or overgrown and become an obstruction for users including buggies, pushchairs, wheelchair users and those with less mobility, by keeping these areas of public infrastructure weed free.
- 3.5 Landowners, including the Council, have statutory duties to prevent the spread of invasive non-native plant species. In relation to Giant Hogweed, use of Glyphosate is necessary to remove this invasive plant, as explained by the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative; and is also necessary for public health as Giant Hogweed causes serious skin burns.<sup>4</sup>
- 3.6 While Glyphosate is used in certain locations, it is only one aspect of the Council’s integrated weed control programme around East Lothian, which also includes hand-pulling and encouraging communities to participate in weed control, as set out below.

### **The use and management of Glyphosate by the Council**

- 3.7 Glyphosate used by the Council for weed control has been certified as safe for use. The Council receives regular updates from the Amenity Forum,<sup>5</sup> which is the leading organisation within the UK amenity sector for promoting best practice and the safe and sustainable management of weed control. In recent years following extensive testing, reviews and commissioned research, primarily in Europe, it was concluded that Glyphosate continued to be safe for use. The European Food Safety Authority also arrived at the same conclusion.
- 3.8 On that basis, the Amenity Forum have stated that the chemical is ‘able to be used without unacceptable risks to people or the environment’. The Council through appropriate staff and service continue to engage with wider sector intelligence on this and continue to monitor accordingly.
- 3.9 Our ongoing monitoring of best practice around weed control includes carefully considering any evidence to suggest that working practices could have a detrimental effect on the health of our communities and wildlife.
- 3.10 Management staff within the Council’s Amenity Services team take an active role in a number of advisory groups, including APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) and APSE Scotland, to share best practice, monitor Glyphosate use by councils across the UK, monitor new developments in delivery and prepare for any changes in legislation that may impact on service delivery.

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<sup>3</sup> [LEAMS | Keep Scotland Beautiful](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Giant Hogweed | Scottish Invasive Species Initiative](#)

<sup>5</sup> [The Amenity Forum - Promoting Best Practice](#)

- 3.11 These information-sharing sessions have revealed that there is no suitable alternative to Glyphosate for councils to use which is as effective, resource effective, cost effective and sustainable. Alternative methods of weed control by Amenity staff are considerably more staff- and resource-intensive, with repeat treatment being required more frequently to be effective and meet public demand and statutory duties. Nevertheless, we continue to monitor and trial alternative methods of weed control, as set out below.
- 3.12 Currently, Amenity Services generally undertake two applications of Glyphosate per year to shrub beds, grass channels/edges, road/footpath edges and other hard landscaped areas within public open and civic spaces. These applications are applied as a 'spot-treatment', to control any weeds present at the time of the visit.
- 3.13 All Amenity Services staff that are required to apply any chemicals have received specialist training for this purpose and hold the relevant Certificate of Competence (PA1 PA6). Staff strictly follow product label recommendations and safe methods of working to ensure correct dosage to target vegetation and safeguard themselves, the public and environment.
- 3.14 It is important to balance operational need with our environmental responsibilities. The following alternative working methods have been trialled on a pilot basis in other local authority areas:
- thermal treatment (hot water)
  - acetic acid (vinegar)
  - flame
- The trials identified thermal treatment as the most effective of the alternative methods; however, this method is significantly more labour intensive and costly. None of the alternative methods of weed control provided any sustained results, although acetic acid has been identified as a potential alternative for use in preventing prostate grass growth over path edges. The trials confirmed that currently Glyphosate is the most effective method of weed control currently available.
- 3.15 A recent study (in 2021) by Cardiff Council and its weed control contractor<sup>6</sup> trialled three pavement weed control methods across the City of Cardiff to find out how effective and sustainable each method was: Glyphosate-based herbicide, acetic acid-based herbicide and hot foam herbicide. The results showed that Glyphosate was the most sustainable, being cost effective, with low environmental impacts and high customer satisfaction and quality. The study concluded that the most effective and sustainable weed control method currently available for pavement weed control in the UK involves the use of Glyphosate-based herbicide.
- 3.16 It is also important to advise that for every enquiry received in respect of use of weed-killer the Council receives significantly more complaints from members of the public in respect of enhanced weed control; and we have to balance the requirement for weed control in public places alongside public perception.

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<sup>6</sup> Reference: [10095\\_Cardiff Council Weed Control Trial Report\\_v6 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/10095/Cardiff-Council-Weed-Control-Trial-Report-v6)

- 3.17 Striking the balance is very important in respect of not over-using Glyphosate but use to control in respect of public requirements and the Council's duties and responsibilities.

### **Reduction in Glyphosate use and use of alternative methods of weed control**

- 3.18 While Glyphosate is used in certain locations, it is only one aspect of the Council's integrated weed control programme around East Lothian. Wherever viable and effective opportunities exist to reduce our reliance on chemicals we have trialled and, where appropriate, adopted alternative working practices, including mulching and manual weed control. We use manual weed control (hand-pulling of weeds) in our parks and greenspaces, particularly in shrub beds to remove areas of weeds amongst shrubs where spot-treatment is not feasible.
- 3.19 We also encourage communities to participate in weed control. There have been examples of pilots and trials in some areas of our villages where Glyphosate was no longer sprayed as the communities engaged with this and were supportive, actively participating in weed control.
- 3.20 Where viable and efficient opportunities exist to reduce the Council's reliance on chemicals, alternative working practices have been adopted to utilise these and contribute to the overall aims and objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy. Glyphosate is used in such small quantities (compared to alternative options), significantly reducing plastic packaging and carbon emissions resulting from transportation, contributing to reaching the Council's Net Zero target. We do not use other alternatives such as hot foam and burning of weeds as these have a significantly larger carbon footprint associated with their use.
- 3.21 The quantities of Glyphosate we have used since 2014 have reduced. We continue to take opportunities across the county to reduce the use of Glyphosate. For example:
- Next year in the Musselburgh area Amenity Services will trial not spraying path grass edges with Glyphosate, spraying only wall edges, invasive species and hard standing areas;
  - We have used Glyphosate around the bases of trees in our parks to protect the trees from our ride-on mowers, preventing them from coming too close during grass-cutting and damaging the trees. As an alternative we have also used woodchip laid around the bases of trees to prevent weed growth and we are further considering how we could roll this out more widely as an alternative;
  - Countryside Service have trialled a device which is a chemical-free technique to target and eliminate individual weeds including invasive species on our countryside sites. This is also being trialled by Amenity Services, although it may not be suitable for larger-scale amenity areas. The cost and environmental consequence (carbon footprint) versus the use of such a machine still needs to be considered. However, we will continue to investigate and trial new methods as they come forward.

## **Our positive amenity grassland management measures and our intent going forward**

- 3.22 With respect to the environment and nature, the Council has a Climate Change Strategy and Green Networks Strategy in place to help tackle the Climate and Nature Emergency and policies supporting the enhancement of biodiversity, and we continue to undertake work to support and enhance biodiversity around East Lothian.
- 3.23 The Council's Amenity Depot Managers have been working for many years across East Lothian and continue to lead the way in changing how we manage amenity open space to ensure positive benefits for both nature and people:
- In many of our public parks and greenspaces we have actively planted wildflower areas to enhance parks and greenspaces for nature including pollinators such as bees and butterflies;
  - We leave areas of amenity grass long, until the wildflowers have flowered and produced seeds before cutting at the end of the season; this is part of our active management to encourage wildflower growth in subsequent years, and we aim to expand these areas with community support;
  - Amenity Depot Managers undertake nature-friendly grassland management options, including use of the plant Yellow Rattle, which naturally parasitises grass reducing grass growth, encouraging wildflower growth, benefitting nature including pollinators, and reducing maintenance requirements. They also advise private developers on these types of measures to encourage others to participate and enhance nature networks;
  - We undertake extensive tree planting in our parks and greenspaces, including as part of the 'Queen's Green Canopy' and 'TreeTime East Lothian'<sup>7</sup> tree-planting initiative in our communities, working in partnership with Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust.
- 3.24 We are currently underway with a 'Nature Networks in East Lothian's Parks and Greenspaces' project, to enhance and extend our nature networks and boost biodiversity in our parks and greenspaces. We undertook a public consultation to gather people's views and identify the nature network enhancements which are supported by the public in our local communities,<sup>8</sup> and we are now implementing these. This includes public engagement and signage to explain alternative amenity greenspace management and encourage acceptance by the public.
- 3.25 We work closely with and support community organisations who are actively involved with enhancing our open spaces and countryside sites to benefit nature and people, including Countryside Volunteers, Path Wardens, In Bloom Groups, 'Friends of' Groups, Litter Groups, all of whom help to enhance our communities and add value to the core works of the Council on the ground.

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<sup>7</sup> [TreeTime East Lothian - TreeTime Edinburgh : TreeTime Edinburgh \(tree-time.com\)](https://www.tree-time.com/)

<sup>8</sup> [Nature Networks in our parks and greenspaces | Nature Networks | East Lothian Council](#)

3.26 The Council's Corporate Communications promote and publicise the positive nature enhancements we are underway with across the county, and our Nature Networks web page includes ways people can be involved in supporting nature recovery. We encourage people in our local communities to assist by joining a community group to help look after a local area, such as by committing to hand-pulling weeds to assist us in reducing the need for Glyphosate to keep areas weed-free.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no policy implications directly arising as a result of this report.

#### **5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Financial – None

6.2 Personnel – None

6.3 Other – None

#### **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1 None

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