



Report to Policy Committee

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Report of: Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services

Report to: Waste & Street Scene Policy Committee

Date of Decision: 14th February 2024

Subject: Glyphosate Reduction Trial Update: Highways

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No		<input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? Ref: 2340					
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No		<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No		<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Purpose of Report:

As per section 10.2, subsection 3 of the decision taken by the Waste and Street Scene Committee on 27th September 2023, it was resolved unanimously that a report should be brought back to the Committee in February 2024 setting out next steps for the Authority in phasing out the use of Glyphosate in highway areas.

Recommendations:

That the Waste and Street Scene Policy Committee agrees:

- to the continuation of the city-wide reduction in the use of Glyphosate as was agreed unanimously on 27th September 2023.
- Officers to supplement efforts to reduce the use of Glyphosate by carrying out limited operational trials of the FoamStream system during 2024.
- Officers to use the FoamStream trials as the basis to calculate both cost and environmental implications of the system and present this to Committee in December 2025.
- that the Waste and Street Scene Committee shall retain the option in December 2025, to instruct the commencement of a further three-year trial of maintaining trial areas of the highway using alternative measures which are Glyphosate free from 1st January 2026 to 1st January 2029.
- that if the legislative position on Glyphosate changes in the intervening period, officers commit to return to Committee within 3 months of any legislative change announcement with a revised position for the Committee to consider.
- that, regardless of the legislative position, officers will return to Committee by December 2025 to advise on the total usage of Glyphosate products throughout the current trial of reduction measures, alongside detailed cost implications to enable the Committee to decide whether they wish to progress to the next phase of trials.

Background Papers:

Committee Decision of 27th September 2023:

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/g8812/Decisions%20Wednesday%2027-Sep-2023%2010.00%20Waste%20Street%20Scene%20Policy%20Committee.pdf?T=2>

Committee report of 27th September 2023:

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s63337/Glyphosate%20Highways%20Report%20FINAL%20SENT.pdf>

Report to Co-operative Executive, September 2021

Reduction in use of Glyphosate pesticide on land managed by Sheffield City Council:

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s46368/6%20-%20Form%202%20-%20Executive%20Report%20Glyphosate.pdf>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/community-driven-action-pesticide-free-balerno-edinburgh>

[Item 3 - Appendix A.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28374158/>

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2023/2023-was-second-warmest-year-on-record-for-uk#:~:text=The%20five%20warmest%20years%20in,have%20all%20occurred%20since%202003.>

<https://www.localgov.co.uk/Second-council-U-turns-on-pesticide-use/58779>

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: Adrian Hart
		Legal: Rita Collins
		Equalities: <i>Louise Nunn – EIA Completed</i>
		Climate: Davina Millership (Head of Service)
<i>Legal, financial/commercial, equalities & climate implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>		
2	EMT member who approved submission:	<i>Ajman Ali</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted:	<i>Cllr Joe Otten</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Decision Maker by the EMT member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: <i>David Wain</i>	Job Title: Acting Service Manager (Highways)
	Date: 14th February 2024.	

1. PROPOSAL

Background

- 1.1 Glyphosate is used to control weed growth as weeds rupture highway surfaces making them unsafe and grow over structures such as signs and benches making them unusable or impede visibility.
- 1.2 The management of the Council's highway network is undertaken by a contractor, Amey, as part of a PFI (Private Finance Initiative) contract (the **Contract**) which runs from 2012 to 2037. The contract includes an initial 5-year intensive construction and repair phase to deliver an uplift in quality of the highway network (known as the Core Investment Period), followed by a 20 year maintenance phase, (known as the Lifecycle Investment Period) where the highway network is required to be maintained in a manner which is it retained at that higher standard before being handed back to the Council in 2037.
- 1.3 Sheffield City Council declared a Nature Emergency in June 2021 part of which concerned the use of Glyphosate. Following this, a petition was presented to Full Council in July 2021 to ask Sheffield City Council to ban the use of Glyphosate on Council land. The petition triggered a debate on the plan to reduce and remove use of Glyphosate where possible and received cross party support.
- 1.4 Despite significant media publications about Glyphosate, the current stance in legislation and guidance from the UK's relevant regulatory bodies is that the product is deemed to be safe and efficacious for use as a herbicide and is licensed in the UK until December 2025 for both food production and treatment of broad-leaved weeds in the public realm.
- 1.5 However, academic studies such as Tarazona et al (2017) suggest that the positive implications of reducing Glyphosate could include benefits such as healthier populations of invertebrates, birds and mammals including bees (and other pollinators) which are fundamental to the health of ecosystems.
- 1.6 Therefore, the Council is recommending a continuing effort to decrease the use of Glyphosate where viable.

2. TRIALS

Previous trials relating to reduction of use of Glyphosate on non-hard surfaces

- 2.1 To further understand the impact of reducing Glyphosate use across the city, a two-phase plan was agreed at the September 2021 Policy Committee for roll out in 2022.

- i) The first phase of the plan was the planned cessation of use of Glyphosate across the city in shrub beds, rose beds, planted areas as well as in the formation of “mowing strips”.

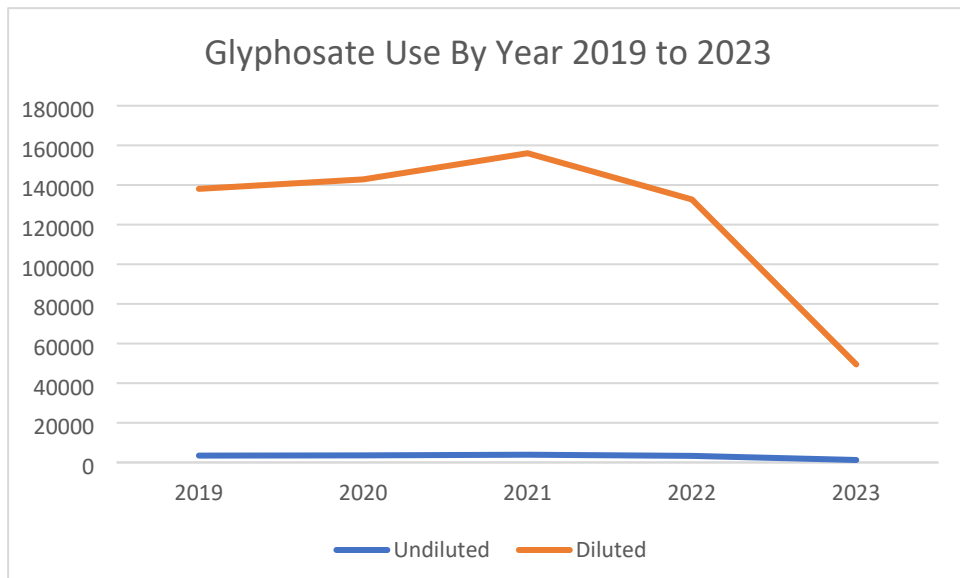
Mowing strips are areas around obstacles such as trees, street signs, street furniture such as benches as well as along the edge of grass verges to reduce the amount of strimming required as part of the grass cutting operation on residential streets.

- ii) The second phase was to implement a “Weed Killer Free Neighbourhood” which was undertaken in a defined area of Brincliffe for a full year in 2022.

2.2 The trials relating to the cessation of the use of Glyphosate in 2022 were also rolled over into 2023.

2.3 The outcome of the above phase 1 plans concluded that complete cessation was not economically viable but reduction of the use of Glyphosate was possible.

2.4 Annual usage figures of Glyphosate decreased from 140,000 litres of diluted product being used across this city in 2020 (pre-trial) to currently less than 50,000 litres of diluted product being used in 2023, representing a huge overall reduction in use of Glyphosate based products in the public realm. See graph below:



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Undiluted	3451.5	3570.95	3901	3317.5	1236.5
Diluted	138060	142838	156040	132700	49460

- 2.5 In relation to phase 2 of the plans, unfortunately, the 2022 trial in Brincliffe was inconclusive. It is believed that the area was likely to be subject to active third-party intervention. Our monitoring would strongly indicate that regular mechanical or chemical removal of weeds was deployed by residents and or business owners given the immaculate aesthetic achieved outside some premises.
- 2.6 At Waste and Street Scene Committee on 27th September 2023, it was unanimously resolved that a further 2-year trial until December 2025 be implemented. Given this decision was timed in a way which rolled into Autumn time, no further spraying activities of note have been undertaken since that decision was taken, hence officers are unable to comment on the impact of that decision and continuation of the trials at present.
- 2.7 Furthermore, at the same Committee on 27th September 2023, it was resolved that officers should go away and consider further concepts for reducing Glyphosate usage with a view as to how the Council can continue phasing out - and return in February 2024 to present this.
- 2.8 Very high-level indicative costings for a complete cessation in the use of Glyphosate were presented in September 2023 to the Committee. Although further trials and a number of procurement exercises will need to be run before the full extent of cost implications are understood.

3. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

3.1 **The continuation of the city-wide reduction in the use of Glyphosate as was agreed unanimously on 27th September 2023.**

Given the significant reductions in Glyphosate usage attained to date as shown in the table at point 2.4, the Committee is recommended to approve a continuation of the Glyphosate reduction strategy agreed as was agreed on 27th September 2023.

3.2 **Officers to supplement this strategy by carrying out limited operational trials of the FoamStream system during 2024.**

It is also recommended that a limited trial of the FoamStream system be undertaken during 2024 season to in order for officers to be able to fully ascertain realistic daily work outputs, efficacy as well as calculating the environmental and climate impacts of the system.

3.3 **Officers to use these trials as the basis to calculate both cost and environmental implications of the system and return to present this to Committee in December 2025.**

As work outputs in published national studies by peer Local Authorities cite wildly different cost implications, work outputs for teams, environmental impacts and efficacies of the use of such Glyphosate-free alternatives, it is important that officers have sufficient time to fully understand the full suite of implications of a transition from our present Glyphosate reduction strategy to greater reliance on alternative technologies before presenting this to Committee in December 2025.

3.4 **The Waste and Street Scene Committee shall retain the option in December 2025, to instruct the commencement a further three-year trial of maintaining areas of the highway using alternative measures which are Glyphosate free from 1st January 2026 to 1st January 2029.**

3.5 Subject to the financial, environment, and operational work outputs and quality attained by the trial being satisfactorily reported back to Committee in December 2025, the concepts and principles to underpin a further three-year trial have been agreed with Amey as follows:

- i) Glyphosate would no longer be used for routine maintenance of the highway and footpaths in these areas.
- ii) Officers will undertake procurement exercises seeking to pull together a scheme of weed management by alternative means, such as mechanical weed ripping, hot foam application and/or additional road sweeping. This which will be costed over the coming months and provided to Committee in December 2024.
- iii) Glyphosate based weed killers will continue to be used during construction of new footways and resurfacing / microasphalting schemes to manage the risk of emergent weeds within these surfacing materials causing damage to newly installed or repaired highway infrastructure.
- iv) A contract change notice would be negotiated with Amey, moving to an input specification (i.e. scheduled number of visits per street, per year) for manual weed interventions rather than a general aspiration to attain weed free highways and footways.
- v) A relaxation of the contractual requirements around FNS surveys (Footway Network Surveys) and general footway condition is likely to also need to be explored to facilitate an acceptance of low-level damage (bumps, lumps and cracking below the defined intervention / defect level) to footway surfaces through weed growth and the more aggressive removal techniques being employed.

- vi) Structures such as bridges will continue to be treated with Glyphosate so as not to endanger their structural stability, as vegetation such as small trees and buddleia can very quickly establish in small cracks or gaps in the pointing of bridges or their supporting elements and cause issues as their roots expand. Glyphosate will not be used in elements of bridges which are either underwater or in contact with watercourses.
- 3.6 A period of three years is being suggested for these trials based on the variability in climate we have seen over the last few years making it very difficult to get firm data on the wider impacts.
- 3.7 2023 was the second warmest year on record in the UK and was exceptionally wet - the Met office records show it to be one of the wettest years on record, with many areas of the UK recording one-third more rainfall than normal.
- 3.8 Conversely 2022 was the warmest year since records began and sixth driest summer, with drought conditions experienced across many areas of the UK.
- 3.9 These kinds of dramatic shifts from very dry and arid conditions to very wet and warm conditions have a significant impact upon weed growth in the highway, and this juxtaposition of weather extremes means we simply cannot get firm enough data on the longer-term condition impacts to highway infrastructure through short trials.
- 3.10 Other Authorities such as Brighton and Cambridgeshire who were early adopters of Glyphosate free strategies have recently returned to their previous operating models. Although officers fully appreciate the desire to stop using Glyphosate altogether, a phased reduction and ongoing trials to develop a holistic strategy and approach and fully understand all of the impacts arising from this decision is deemed to be more effective than a complete cessation and then having to reverse the decision down the line.
- 3.11 Outside of the large trial area, works will still continue on the basis of the current trial methodology to ensure that Glyphosate use is still minimised in those areas.
- 3.12 **Should the legislative position on Glyphosate change in the intervening period, officers commit to return to Committee within 3 months of any announcement with a revised position for the Committee to consider.**
- 3.13 This will provide surety that the Authority continues to operate in a way which meets all relevant legislative requirements.
- 3.14 **Irrespective of legislative position, officers will return to Committee by December 2025 to advise on total usage of Glyphosate products throughout the current trial of reduction**

measures, alongside detailed cost implications to enable the Committee to decide whether they wish to progress to the next phase of trials.

4. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

- 4.1 The declaration of a Nature Emergency (alongside the Climate Change Emergency) is a key priority in the Council's One Year Plan.

5. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 5.1 Consultation on the reduction of Glyphosate and the Glyphosate free zone was undertaken by Citizenspace throughout all of 2022.

- 5.2 Consultee feedback indicated that the financial and staffing challenges faced by the Council were understood and there was an appetite for action at a neighbourhood level, on a voluntary basis, to help reduce the amount of Glyphosate the Council uses even further.

6. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

6.1 Equality of Opportunity Implications

- 6.1.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the overarching 'Reduction in use of Glyphosate on land managed by Sheffield City Council' report as approved by the Cooperative Executive in September 2021.

- 6.1.2 This has been updated in September 2023 under EIA reference 2340. This will be updated further in December 2025 prior to Committee once the full implications of any contract and/or methodology change are fully agreed and understood.

6.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 6.2.1 Following the Committee Decision in September 2023, a contract variation has agreed and put in place until December 2025 with no financial implications as a result of the variation. The variations have a Performance Requirement relief in order to achieve this cost neutrality.

Looking to the concepts being proposed to be presented in December 2025, although all parties are comfortable that this can be delivered operationally, there will clearly be purchasing costs as well as a likely uplift in operational staffing numbers which will be calculated following the proposed 2024 trials should these be agreed by the Committee.

6.3 Legal Implications

- 6.3.1 Glyphosate was approved for use in the EU until 15 December 2022 (Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/2324).
- 6.3.2 Following the UK leaving the European Union, the Health and Safety Executive now regulate pesticides in the UK and the licence has been extended until December 2025 for both food production and treatment of broad-leaved weeds in the public realm.
- 6.3.3 A Contract Change Notice has been negotiated for the 2024 and 2025 elements of the trial under the guidance of Commercial Services and has no financial impact. These changes are made in accordance with the terms of the Contract and comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.
- 6.3.4 Under the **Weeds Act 1959**, instances may occur where Amey, on behalf of the Council may legally have to deviate from the above proposals to manage specific dangerous or invasive species or injurious weeds which have the potential to cause harm (for example instances of Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam or Giant Hogweed). The Council will mitigate this risk by agreeing the use of Glyphosate by Amey on a case-by-case basis with appropriately qualified Technical Officers from within the Authority.
- 6.3.5 As the Highway Authority, the Council have a legal duty under **Section 41(1) of the Highways Act 1980**, to maintain the highway. This requires the Council to keep the fabric of the highway in such good repair as to render its condition safe for ordinary traffic to pass at all seasons of the year. Weeds growing through the surface of the highway or between paving slabs may create highway defects which need to be acted upon in the interests of public safety and fulfilling this duty. Across the rest of the city, the continued use of Glyphosate in “spot treatment” of weeds which have already emerged is deemed to be sufficient to manage this risk.

6.4 Climate Implications

- 6.4.1 A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed and approved by the Head of Service
- 6.4.2 A reduction in the total number of treatments using chemical weed killers will in turn yield a net reduction in vehicle travel, water usage, and the amount of herbicide produced and delivered to Amey’s depot in the first place – all of which will achieve an overall reduction in carbon footprint for this element of the operation.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 The option to 'do nothing' was considered and discounted considering both the declaration of a Nature Emergency and the support received for the petition against the use of Glyphosate.
- 7.2 The option to cease the use of Glyphosate on *all* land immediately was considered but discounted due to high level of cost/expenditure. Sheffield has 1,064,045.03 square metres of high usage footways and 8,77,757.67 square metres of lower use footways in the city.

Based on a "worst case scenario" of around 10% of the footway network failing between 2023 and 2037 due to weeds and vegetation this is estimated to cover around £116 million pounds in resurfacing.

Additional Street Cleansing Costs have also been modelled based on 42 additional operatives, additional road sweepers, and other vehicles, and plant machinery being brought into the operation to uplift street cleansing service to manually remove weeds has also been costed at around £2.4 million per year – circa £32 million over the remainder of the PFI contract.

Therefore, the total potential cost implication of complete cessation in a worst-case scenario could be as high as £150 million of additional expenditure. This may however be mitigated should there be a legislative change.

8. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Approval of the recommendations will allow:
- A continuing reduction in the use of glyphosate in highway areas across all of Sheffield.
 - Establishing better baseline data around longer-term impacts of cessation.

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