Report of the Director of Place Management

HERBICIDE AND PESTICIDE USE IN STOCKPORT

1.0 Purpose

1.1 To provide the Economy, Regeneration and Climate Change (ERCC) Scrutiny Committee with an overview on the use of herbicides and pesticides in Stockport, highlighting environmental and health impacts, assessing viable alternative options and reductions in use whilst maintaining efficient service delivery.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Neighbourhoods Service regularly review the use of herbicides which includes reaching out to benchmark against near neighbours and horizon scanning to understand different approaches nationally and whether there are opportunities to improve practice. Currently, all other Greater Manchester (GM) councils are using glyphosate to control plants in the wrong place/ weeds. However, some councils have increased the use of mulch to reduce the use of glyphosate and we are looking into whether this could be used to reduce our usage here further still.

2.2 Glyphosate-based herbicides are the most widely used weed killers and are utilised worldwide. Local council's across the United Kingdom regularly use glyphosate in grounds maintenance operations.

2.3 Stockport Council and our contractors use glyphosate to control weed growth on the highway network, on verges and in our parks and greenspaces. It is also used in more specialist applications, including the control of invasive species (e.g., Japanese Knotweed).

2.4 The Council is very keen to minimise the impact of herbicide and pesticide use on biodiversity, working within the principles under our Climate Action Now strategy. We regularly review our practices to ensure this is the case. A briefing note on glyphosate use was previously collated in June 2022, which was considered by the Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services and the Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment. The Council has continued to consider further reductions in the use of Glyphosate and this latest report expands and updates on the position set out in 2022 report as well as setting out our pesticide approach to pesticide usage.

3.0 Glyphosate

3.1 Glyphosate is a herbicide that has been used in the UK since 1976 to effectively control weeds, including perennials and invasive species. Its main uses are in farming but it is also used by many local authorities to maintain the public realm.

3.2 Concerns have been previously raised about the impact of glyphosate use on human health, public health, biodiversity and local eco-systems. In March 2015, the World Health Organisation's International Agency categorised glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans" but has since clarified this in a further report in May 2016 by stating that glyphosate is unlikely to pose a risk to anyone who eats food contaminated with it.

3.3 Glyphosate is an organophosphate. However, it does not affect the nervous system in humans in the way that other, now restricted, organophosphate chemicals do. [Health & Safety Executive, 2021]

3.4 Glyphosate is not a neonicotinoid so there is therefore no direct effect on pollinators, such as bees. [Health & Safety Executive, 2021]

3.5 Glyphosate is subjected to regular testing and reports of related LD50 toxicity tests and the results are available online. These indicate that the chemical, as applied in amenity settings, is less toxic than the instant coffee many of us drink [Alison Bernstein, 2017]. The results of these tests related to short exposure rather than any long-term accumulative effects. However, according to available reports, amenity use will not result in any long-term negative cumulative effects [CA Rolando · 2017].

3.6 Verges are only sprayed once a year, not repeatedly (very much one off) meaning there is no build-up of chemical with any residue cleared by the rain. Our contractors use the correct PPE and are trained in handling glyphosate and other chemicals.

3.7 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.

4.0 **Current Position - Highways**

4.1 All adopted routes are treated annually. Treatment is normally undertaken during the spring and summer months to have a maximum impact when the weed growth is most pronounced. Additional targeted sprays are undertaken as required to address particular issues with kerbs, gullies, channels and footways. This means glyphosate is carefully applied around obstacles on verges once per year, so that the wider grassed areas are not unnecessarily sprayed. Highways are also treated in this way once a year, just spraying the area where the weed growth is as precisely as possible to avoid blow off, etc. The treatment can take several weeks to have full effect and for weed growth to die off.

4.2 There have been changes to working practices over recent years and rather than a blanket spray of herbicide, spraying is now much more targeted, with spraying taking place where weeds are seen to be growing.

4.3 Specially adapted all-terrain vehicles (Quad Bikes) are used on the highway that are equipped with a handheld lance and spray bar at the front of the vehicle. The spray bar can be adjusted to spray full width of the ATV or limited to certain sections along its length. Glyphosate is only effective when in direct contact with weeds. It is understood there is no residual effect to this approach though there will inevitably be some low-level pollution until the chemical breaks down when it gets washed into the water course. These changes have however seen the volume of Glyphosate used reduced.

4.4 Around 2640 litres of Glyphosate (1,320 x 2 treatments) is used annually to treat approximately:-

- Roadways – 975 Km
- Footways – 1500 Km
- Back Passageways – 18 Km

This usage equates to approximately just 1.06 Litres of Glyphosate produce being used per kilometre to treat weeds present on roads and footways.

4.5 Treatment of highway surfaces is considered important for the following reasons:

- Weeds significantly detract from the overall appearance of an area and can collect litter.
- Extensive weed growth can interfere with visibility for road users or obscure street nameplates, markers or other Utility covers.
- Weeds in road channels and around gullies can disrupt the drainage of surface water.
- Weeds in footways can move paving slabs, disturb highway walls, open channel edges and grow through gaps in tarmac surfaces causing further damage
- Growth can spread from publicly maintained areas to private land causing damage

4.6 A reduction in either coverage or areas treated may have a detrimental impact on other maintenance budgets. Damage caused to highway surfaces, other minor structures or drainage would need to be addressed and would add pressure to the reactive maintenance fund. Other longer-term impacts may translate to an increase in accident claims and insurance costs. Weed growth will increase the risk of trips and falls on the highway and could lead to additional insurance claims.

4.7 The Public Rights of Way Team do not use any kind of herbicide or pesticide on Stockport's Public Rights of Way and the works specified for vegetation removal is limited to mechanical or manual clearance. We are unable to confirm what treatments and substances adjacent private landowners may use.

5.0 Current Position – Grounds Maintenance

5.1 The use of Glyphosate on highway verges has reduced significantly over the last few years and the volume used has been reduced by 35% since 2016 levels.
This has been achieved by the supervisors targeting selected areas where spraying is beneficial, as opposed to a blanket spray of all verge obstacles and edges. Glyphosate is applied sparingly under controlled conditions to eliminate excess product being spread and to avoid it being washed into watercourses as described above.

5.2 This reduced application means that around 80 litres per annum of Glyphosate are used for this function boroughwide.

5.3 Public acceptance of grass growth around mowing obstacles on verges is generally low.

5.4 We usually spray verges in February/ March as part of a maintenance rounds, if we receive further complaints later in the year we strim when this is necessary on an ad hoc basis Whilst strimming does not have any polluting effect, it is resource intensive and would need to be repeated regularly drawing staff away from other priority/ necessary work. As such a balanced approach is taken to minimise environmental impact whilst utilising resources to create best value for residents.

6.0 Current Position – Countryside Sites, Parks and Cemeteries

6.1 As per the highway network glyphosate is used in parks to control the encroachment of grassed areas adjacent to paths and in ornamental shrub beds etc. Traditional methods, (e.g. hoeing) are more labour intensive and detrimental to hard surfaces.

6.2 The use of glyphosate on grass edges reduces the need for labour intensive operations such as edging-off. Edging off is a very labour-intensive process and as described above we have to prioritise resources to ensure the best results are achieved whilst minimising any detrimental effect.

6.3 The browning of grass by glyphosate can be unsightly. This is minimised by the application in controlled conditions using experienced staff to ensure that only necessary vegetation is treated.

6.4 Glyphosate is regularly used to initially clear plant species that would naturally outcompete species that are utilised when creating species rich meadows. It is also used to spot treat tenacious weeds in sensitive habitats.

6.5 Glyphosate is used for invasive species management (e.g. Japanese Knotweed) as unfortunately there is no alternative which is financially viable and shown to eradicate the species.

6.6 Usage of Glyphosate by the Arboriculture Team has been reduced to as little as possible but occasional usage is necessary in relation to the effective removal of certain, more invasive tree species.

6.7 Approximately 240 litres of Glyphosate is used annually in Parks and Cemeteries

6.8 Glyphosate is used to keep the gravestones and footpaths clear of grass encroachment. There are many obstructions to mowing within cemeteries and the application of Glyphosate does not always necessitate the removal of tributes etc.

6.9 Glyphosate has not been used at Willow Grove Cemetery this year, with additional maintenance being undertaken by the Community Payback Team and the Friends of Stockport Cemeteries group. - This location was unique in that we had additional labour available from volunteers and the Community Payback Team. Whilst this approach is very low impact, this additional resource is not available at most locations in borough.

6.10 There is an expectation from visitors to Stockport Cemeteries that grave plots are kept in a clear and tidy condition and the application of Glyphosate is an efficient means of clearing growth around obstructions. Where Glyphosate is not used, additional labour is required to undertake the necessary weed removal (e.g. as at Willow Grove). Glyphosate and other chemicals are generally not used in areas earmarked for rewilding. The council is continuing to grow the number of “rewilded” areas across the borough.”

7.0 Glyphosate Considerations

7.1 Weed growth on the highway network, if left uncontrolled, can cause damage to the surface and substructure of the highways. For this reason, it is considered that having no weed control is not an option in this environment.

7.2 This is a position supported by research, including long term research from Sweden. The study conducted by the Swedish company SKF found that after ten years of restricted use and in some cases total bans, the situation in some areas was so severe that either weed control needed to be increased severely or long-term removal of hard surface was required i.e. hard surfaces were beyond repair and needed to be replaced. More than 40 UK councils have banned or partially banned the use of glyphosate, according to Pesticide Action Network UK including Brighton and Hove Council which has been the subject of mixed press reports recently and according to an article in The Argus, are due to submit an updated plan to tackle weeds in the new year.

7.3 There is no clear evidence that the use of Glyphosate in a municipal or an amenity environment is harmful and its continued use is permissible under UK law. Its continued use therefore remains a viable option. We currently take the same approach as the majority of local authorities across the country, The risks are low according to relevant studies referred to in this report and we comply with Government advice from DEFRA.

7.4 Whilst the impact of Glyphosate usage will have a minimal impact on the environment and the biodiversity of the borough, there will inevitably be some impact and it is recognised that it is beneficial to reduce the amount of Glyphosate used far as possible.

7.5 Alternative methods of weed control do exist and these are detailed in the table below, with relative advantages and disadvantages set out.

Method	Use	Advantages	Disadvantages
Hot Foam	Weeds in hard surfaces Moss on hard surfaces and play area safety surfacing, Grass growth around trees	Foam holds hot water against plant. Pesticide free but uses plant oil extracts in foam. Can be used in all weather. Kills 95% of targeted weeds.	New technology – needs refinement. Expensive to purchase (£25,000+) Additional cost of plant oil extract, Diesel consumption and pollution.
Hot Water / Steam	Weeds in hard surfaces, play area surfacing, graffiti removal, chewing gum removal.	Lower initial purchase cost.	Requires more treatments as heat is not held onto plant. Diesel consumption and pollution.
Propane / Flame gun	Weeds on hard surfaces	Relatively cheap to purchase	Health and Safety Risks (banned in the domestic market). Not particularly effective.
Manual Weeding	Weeds in general	Very effective if done well. Low set up costs (excluding labour).	Very time consuming. Requires large amount of labour.
Vinegar	Weeds in hard surfaces	No licence required for application.	Has been trialled, but has not been effective. Strong smell, can give operator headache.

7.6 Options available for the use of alternatives are limited by resource availability, including funding and the availability of suitably qualified operatives. Some of the

alternative treatments available have only a limited effect, whilst others involve the use of large amounts of water or generate significant carbon emissions or pose a fire risk. For these reasons it is considered that that there is not currently an effective, viable alternative to the use of Glyphosate.

7.7 The are options available to consider limited or more sustained cessation of use in a geographical area. These would need to be supported by local communities and it is likely that such trials will incur additional costs, either in both the short and long term. Growth will need to be removed by non-chemical means at some point and the presence of additional year on year growth will result in damage to infrastructure.

8.0 Pesticide use

8.1 The Pest Control Team have 6 x qualified Officers with Level 2 of the British Pest Control Association (BPCA) qualification. During the course of the year, they attend a minimum of 12 on-line learning sessions to ensure that they are kept up to date with changes in legislation as well as techniques & methodology. The BPCA have a Code of Conduct that encourage Pest Control Officers (PCOs) to look at alternative remedy rather than using pesticides. The PCOs will only use pesticides if they believe that the pest problem cannot be managed by an alternative method. Officers risk assess every job and explain any risks and health and safety concerns with “customers”. Training allows officers to minimise any risk to the local population and environment.

8.2 Officers have been issued with a licence to dispense and use the pesticides in **Table 1**, in controlled measures and wherever possible, deploying an environmentally less impactful alternative to dealing with the pest problem. This will be assessed during the initial treatment. The PCO will only treat the pest if there is an infestation and a risk to the neighbours/local community. If the situation is declassified by the PCO as a nuisance only, then advice will be given to the Customer on how best to deal with the pest.

8.3 All pesticides are procured from a company who supply only qualified and licenced PCOs with pest control products. This includes rodenticides, contact and residual poisons. The company carry out workshops, training sessions and regional seminars in order to educate and promote best practice in the use of rodenticides in order to protect the operative as well as the surrounding vegetation and wildlife which are attended by officers.

8.4 The Officers control of pests outdoors is restricted to direct contact methods only or by enclosing baits and treatments in contained bait stations.

8.5 Pest Control Officers support the campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU) UK 2017 which is chaired by HSE and the Government Oversight Group (GOG) to establish the UK Rodenticide Stewardship Regime. Products containing rodenticides have received Biocidal Products Regulation (BPR) authorisation for professionals to use them, including outdoors.

8.6 Stockport Council recognise that it is imperative that best practice is always sought in terms of environmental low impact practice. It is also recognised that there is some risk to aquatic organisms in the use of some pesticides. Officers are setting up a Greater Manchester Pest Control working group in order to benchmark, share best practice and seek alternative solutions. Ecologist colleagues will be called on to advise on this issue alongside relevant partner agencies.

8.7 **Table A** below shows the pesticides used by Stockport Council, whether there are viable alternatives available, risk mitigation of health issues for operatives and risk to the

environment. All the chemicals in the table form part of a comprehensive COSHH assessment.

Table A

Pest Type	Treatment used- Pestcide	type	Process	Alternative treatment?	Risk mitigation for operative	Risk to environment
Wasps	Ficam D Bendiocarb 1,2%	powder	Apply around nest entrance	n/a	Wear respiratory PPE	Toxic to aquatic organisms
Rats	Difenicoum, difethialone	blocks	Apply around nest area	Place in bait boxes	Prevent ingestion. Wear gloves	Toxic to aquatic organisms
Rats & mice	Brodifacoum fresh bait	Loose grain	Use in covered boxes	n/a	Prevent ingestion. Wear gloves	Toxic to aquatic organisms
Fleas, Cockroaches Beetles, Moths, Booklice, Ants, Wasps Bristletails, Earwigs, Bedbugs, Spiders, Mites & Ticks	Tetramethrin, d-phenothrin Piperonyl Pyriproxyfen butoxide, Kerosene, Permethrin Polyakylneoxide Cypermethrin deltamethrin	Spray/ droplet	Apply to furniture/soft furnishings in each room. Leave room ventilated for 1 hour	Wash bedding, clothes, soft furnishings at high temperature. Use hoover to suction pests & dispose outside bins	Wear respiratory PPE	Toxic to aquatic organisms
Cockroaches Ants, Fleas, Woodlice, Houseflies Wasps	Cypermethrin	Powder/dust	Apply around edges of furniture	Wash bedding, clothes, soft furnishings at high temperature. Use hoover to suction pests & dispose outside bins	Wear respiratory PPE	Toxic to aquatic organisms
Ants	Fipronil Phenyl Sulfinyl indoxacarb	gel	3 x drops per metre of ant run	Place in bait box	Ingestion & respiration PPE	Toxic to aquatic organisms
Cockroaches silverfish	clothianidin	gel	2 x spots per m2	n/a	Ingestion & skin PPE	toxic to aquatic organisms

9 Summary

9.1 General scientific opinion on the use of glyphosate is that is safe to use and that any impact on the environment or health is minimal.

9.2 Glyphosate enters the food chain through widescale use within agriculture and is not limited for use in a municipal /amenity setting. The Council continues to risk assess the use of glyphosate in line with the most up-to-date information available and will continue to look for ways to reduce the amount of Glyphosate that we use.

9.3 Reducing the use of glyphosate will result in more weeds and greater resource inputs devoted to alternative methods of weed control.

9.4 Herbicide has essential beneficial uses such as the control of invasive species, management of conservation areas, creation of habitats and maintaining safe public spaces.

9.5 There are currently no affordable or practical alternative treatment methods. Reduction and non-use are available options, but neither are sustainable long term without additional resources being applied to control successive growth or public acceptance of increased weed growth.

9.6 The Council and its contractors will continue to explore ways to further limit the usage of Glyphosate and the volume of this product used in the borough. This will include continuing to work closely with Friends of Parks groups and other community organisations to undertake as much maintenance of greenspace through valuable volunteer input as possible.

10 Recommendation

10.1 That the Economy, Regeneration and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee note this report.

10.2 Stockport Council will continue to seek ways to further reduce the amount of glyphosate currently used in the maintenance of highways, parks, greenspaces and cemeteries whilst understanding that the overall level of maintenance needs to remain at existing standards.

10.3 Concurrently, the local authority will prioritise exploring alternative methods of weed control and their feasibility, looking for best practice across the industry and working with community volunteers wherever possible.

10.4 Stockport Council will work with GM and partner colleagues to understand best environmental practice around pesticides and seek to minimise any detrimental effects to health or environment, and in particular, watercourses.