

<i>REPORT TO:</i>	Scrutiny Commission
<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Glyphosate-Based Herbicides in Open Spaces, Playgrounds and Parks
<i>LEAD OFFICER:</i>	Matthew Bradford – Head of Contracts (Leisure, Waste and Environment)
<i>CABINET LEAD MEMBER:</i>	Cllr Jenny Bokor – Lead Member for Loughborough and Open Spaces
<i>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</i>	Scrutiny Commission Forward Programme
<i>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE</i>	To provide the Scrutiny Commission with an update on Glyphosate use and any potential alternatives identified by the Council following the review (October 2021)

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The Council's contractor, idVerde, uses glyphosate to manage weeds within its contractual areas including on hard surfaces, in hedge bases and shrub beds, along wall and fence lines and around obstacles in grass areas and tree bases. Operatives using glyphosate are required to obtain the appropriate licences.

1.2. The use of glyphosate was considered by on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The Cabinet made the following decisions:

- that the continued use of Glyphosate be approved.
- that the use of Glyphosate be monitored on an ongoing basis.
- that a further review of the use of Glyphosate is conducted prior to the extension or renewal of the Management of Open Spaces Contract; the initial term of the current contract expires in March 2024.

1.2 The recent levels of glyphosate usage are:

2019	285 litres
2020	245 litres
2021	230 litres
2022	180 litres (current year running to Dec 2022)

## 2. PURPOSE

2.1. That the Scrutiny Commission considers the use of Glyphosate, and its alternatives, on the Council's Parks and Open Spaces

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Glyphosate is the most frequently used herbicide worldwide. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the national regulator for the UK, via its specialist Chemical Regulation Division (CRD). The Plant Protection Products (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 states that active substances which were due to expire in the EU within 3 years of the end of the transition period will be granted a 3-year extension. This means that the use of glyphosate is approved in the UK until at least 15 December 2025.
- 3.2. All companies wishing to obtain approval for their pesticides are required to submit substantial data dossiers to support their applications. The extensive range of studies undertaken on pesticides is aimed at establishing acceptable safety for people, animals and the wider environment. This process has been applied to glyphosate which has been approved as safe and efficacious for a number of years now. The risks associated with the use of pesticides in amenity areas such as parks are specifically considered as part of the authorisation process. Legally enforceable conditions of use are imposed on the way products can be applied, to ensure the public are not exposed to levels of pesticides that would harm health or have unacceptable effects on the environment.
- 3.3. There has been much debate in recent years regarding its safety to humans and the environment. Opponents such as the Pesticide Action Network UK claim that long term exposure to pesticides is linked to the development of many serious illnesses and diseases such as: cancer including leukaemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma; Parkinson's; asthma; depression and anxiety; and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The International Agency for Cancer Research (IARC), a division of the World Health Organisation, classified glyphosate as a carcinogenic substance in Group 2A as "probably carcinogenic to humans" based on studies published in the Lancet Oncology journal in March 2015. However, a subsequent peer-review of the IARC assessment in September 2016 concluded that glyphosate is "unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans."
- 3.4. Glyphosate has been thoroughly assessed over many years by organisations such as the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations and US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and there is an extensive body of research including more than 800 scientific studies confirming that glyphosate and glyphosate-based formulated products can be used safely and do not cause cancer when used as directed. Glyphosate has been considered to be very safe toxicologically and environmentally, because it does not leach through soil and has low mammalian toxicity.

- 3.5. Despite the reassurance of safety from these competent institutions, some local authorities in the UK are coming under pressure from members of the public to reduce the use of glyphosate and are therefore choosing to trial alternative methods of weed control for their parks, open spaces, streets and housing areas. There are few alternatives to glyphosate and even those which are considered to be alternatives are often still in a pilot phase and are much more expensive to use. Considering the budget constraints we are working under, this does not make them a very attractive proposition.
- 3.6. Last year, officers investigated the use of a variety of alternative chemical treatments, including acetic acid. The alternative chemical treatments are considered to be much less effective than glyphosate and much more expensive. Glyphosate application is considered to cost in the region of £35 per hectare, and the alternatives all ranged between £165 and £562 per hectare. Some of the alternative treatments were considered to be more harmful to the environment than glyphosate.
- 3.7. Several thermal methods of weed treatment have been investigated including hot water foam, electric shock treatment and flame weeding. These methods all had significant compromises in effectiveness, safety and for the environment. For example, hot water/foam treatment required a vehicle mounted petrol/diesel powered water heater. This provided poor access to harder to reach areas and has a negative impact on our carbon management.
- 3.8. Officers have investigated the use of non-chemical treatments (manual removal). These methods combined would cost an additional £250k per annum and residents would be required to have an additional tolerance for weeds as they would not be as effective as the methods currently deployed. The additional costs cannot be absorbed into the Council's existing or future budgets. A summary of the additional resources required for manual removal is provided below.

Application	Resources
Grass perimeter areas	Additional seasonal strimmer operatives with each of the grass cutting teams (three mowing teams, two open spaces teams and two cemeteries teams: seven in total) from April to September, to maintain growth around obstacles, fence lines
Shrub beds	For the shrub beds and other planted areas, deployment of two teams of two seasonal operatives from March to October, each team using a 3.5t single-cab tipper vehicle and hand tools.

Hard Surfaces

Increased sweeping regime of two teams working from March to October, with each team consisting of two operatives, one 3.5t tipper vehicle and Powered

#### 4. RISK MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION

4.1. The risks and mitigation actions are identified below

Risk Identified	Likelihood	Impact	Overall Risk	Risk Management Actions
Excessive use of glyphosate	Unlikely (2)	Significant (2)	Low (4)	Planned Glyphosate usage monitored Operatives carry the appropriate licences
The use of glyphosate is prohibited in the future	Unlikely (2)	Significant (2)	Low (4)	A review of the use of glyphosate is carried out prior to the renewal or extension of the existing contract.
Litigation by a park user or grounds maintenance operative	Remote (1)	Minor (1)	Very Low (1)	No cases have been brought in the UK. Litigation in the USA has been against the manufacturer.

*Appendices:*

None

Background Papers:

None

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