

## **Use of Glyphosate in Weed Control**

**Report by Derek Oliver, Chief Officer, Place**

### **1 Recommendations**

Council is recommended to note the targeted application and continued managed usage of glyphosate in weed control across Midlothian.

### **2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary**

In March 2021, Council approved the use of glyphosate on a restricted spot application basis, on Midlothian's streets and pavements; agreed the continued reduction in usage in Midlothian's parks and open Spaces, with the exception of invasive species, e.g. giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed and dangerous road junctions and areas of highways that are key to maintaining visibility for the safety of all road users, e.g. laybys and the inside of bends; and agreed information on spraying locations be published as soon as possible.

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the managed and controlled use of glyphosate since March 2021.

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### **3 Background**

- 3.1 On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2019, Midlothian Council determined that glyphosate would be prohibited from use on Council owned land, with the exception of invasive species. This followed an initial moratorium on glyphosate use agreed by Council in May 2019 due to concerns for the environmental impact on bees.
- 3.2 On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020, there was cross party agreement to permit the use of glyphosate on an emergency basis during the pandemic.
- 3.3 On 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021, a cross party meeting was held to discuss the use of glyphosate and the practical alternatives as due to the restrictions on workforce and working practices during the pandemic, significantly less quantities of glyphosate were used in 2020 compared to previous years.
- 3.4 On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021, Council approved the use of glyphosate on a restricted spot application basis, on Midlothian's streets and pavements; agreed the continued reduction in usage in Midlothian's parks and open Spaces, with the exception of invasive species, e.g. giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed and dangerous road junctions and areas of highways that are key to maintaining visibility for the safety of all road users, e.g. laybys and the inside of bends; and agreed information on spraying locations be published as soon as possible.

### **4 Main Report**

- 4.1 Since March 2021, the managed use of glyphosate by Neighbourhood Services (specifically Land & Countryside Services) delivered a significant reduction in volume of glyphosate used to control weeds, aligned to the spot treatment application process and Council approved direction.
- 4.2 Table 4.5.1. below illustrates the trend of glyphosate usage and corresponds to the narrative in section 3. Contractor usage volumes from 2015-2019 are included (circa 898 litres per annum 2015-2018, 449 litres in 2019, as per prohibition as detailed in section 3.1). Application of weed killer has all been undertaken internally since 2020.
- 4.3 On 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023, cross party agreement was sought for an increased use of glyphosate that would impact the demonstrable downward trend of usage since the 2020 Council approved position. The reason was that 2021 and 2022 had dry summer periods where application and volume was able to be restricted. However, in 2023, a much wetter summer period was experienced, providing optimum conditions for extensive weed growth. By September, Land & Countryside Services had spot treated all identified areas once and three quarters of Midlothian a second time. At that time, 600 litres had been applied, with the west of the county requiring to be spot treated for a second time. It was estimated that 80-100 additional litres would be required. Blanket application would require 450 litres, by comparison.

- 4.4 This agreed additional volume therefore resulted in a slight increase in volume by comparison to 2022, which, although higher than the previous two years, is significantly less than prior to the change in working practices from blanket to spot treatment.
- 4.5 Cost comparison for the additional spot treatment to undertaking a delayed weed control programme in Autumn 2023, when grass cutting concluded, in order to free up personnel to utilise plant on urban streets alone (not including rural areas), was calculated to be £69,000 in staff time. This was utilising four ride on sweepers from Waste Services, impacting Waste operations, over an 18 week period. This calculation was based on previous internal trials. This compared to a cost of £15,201 to undertake the final 80-100 litres spot treatment outlined above.

Year	Volume of Glyphosate (Litres)
2015	2398
2016	1238
2017	1823
2018	1843
2019	1374
2020	450
2021	650
2022	605
2023	680

**Table 4.5.1.**

- 4.6 Neighbourhood Services continues its commitment to minimise use of glyphosate, so far as is reasonably practicable, and as detailed on our website: [Glyphosate weed killer | Midlothian Council](#). The Service will continue to explore alternative methods to further reduce volume of glyphosate.
- 4.7 There can be extenuating circumstances where there will be a managed increase in use on the previous year, such as outlined in relation to optimum weed growth weather conditions in 2023. Furthermore, the service has taken on the maintenance of three additional housing sites for the 2024 season. These sites will require weed control and therefore glyphosate use. As such, a target for 2024 of 680 litres would represent a comparative reduction in glyphosate use, taking into account additional adopted areas (footways, carriageways, verges and shrub beds). This presents an annual challenge to the service with the development across Midlothian.
- 4.8 The service is also responsible for the delivery of private grounds maintenance contracts where chemical use is required as part of the agreed specification. As part of the Council's commitment to reduce

glyphosate use, we encourage our private clients to reduce the amount of chemicals used as part of the contract, where possible.

- 4.8 As part of the ongoing Neighbourhood Services review, the Land and Countryside service and the Street Cleaning service have merged to create a Neighbourhood Environment Team which now forms part of the new Greenspace Service.
- 4.9 The design and implementation of the Neighbourhood Environment Team is expected to result in improvements to service delivery, which will raise the quality of the local environment in a number of ways, including the way the service controls weeds.
- 4.10 The Neighbourhood Environment Team will therefore be responsible for weed control as follows;
- Neighbourhood Operatives will carry out hand removal of weeds while carrying out street cleaning duties where practical, reducing the need for glyphosate
  - A targeted winter work programme will see a deep clean of key routes targeting the removal of detritus at wall bases and around obstacles such as traffic islands
  - Improvements to the way mechanical sweepers are deployed will see a reduction in detritus which will result in a reduction in weed growth
  - A removal of poor quality shrub beds, to be replaced by grassed areas with native trees planted, will increase biodiversity and reduce the need for glyphosate use to control weeds within the beds. Thirteen shrub beds have been identified for removal in 2024.
- 4.11 The Greenspace Service will continue to build on the partnership with community based volunteer groups to jointly tackle weed growth across Midlothian without the use of glyphosate, where practical. The service has agreed to cease or reduced by consequence glyphosate use where community groups have adopted specific locations in the following areas:
- Bonnyrigg
  - Newtongrange
  - Woodburn
  - Roslin
  - Danderhall
  - Dalkeith
  - Gorebridge
- 4.12 The spraying programme is detailed on the website, as approved by Council in 2021.

## **5 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)**

### **5.1 Resource**

Delivery of current weed control processes is contained within existing budget allocation to Neighbourhood Services. Any reduction in the use of glyphosate will require additional financial allocation to manage weed control, dependent upon the proposed and agreed methods to undertake this function.

### **5.2 Risk**

Within current service resources, the standard of weed control across Midlothian will deteriorate without the use of glyphosate, presenting a risk to residents and infrastructure as well as the reputation and image of the authority.

## **6 Ensuring Equalities (if required a separate IIA must be completed)**

Less ambulant residents can be impacted by poor weed control, specifically in relation to slips, trips and falls.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A – Report implication**

## APPENDIX A – Report Implications

### A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

This report does not impact on the key priorities of the Single Midlothian Plan.

### A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement
- One size fits one
- None of the above

### A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious
- None of the above

### A.4 Delivering Best Value

Current methods of weed control represents best value.

### A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

There is ongoing engagement with community groups and residents with regards to weed control.

### A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The report directly impacts on Midlothian Council's performance and outcomes.

### A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The report highlights the preventative approach to detrimental impact on infrastructure and the management of slip, trips and falls hazards that would otherwise result in claims costs for the Council.

### A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Weeds need to be removed to prevent damage to infrastructure and control risks associated with slips, trips and falls. Removal of shrub beds will reduce the use of glyphosate and encourage biodiversity with grass and native tree substitution.