

Use of Glyphosate update

Report by Derek Oliver, Chief Officer, Place

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1 Recommendations

Council is recommended to approve an expansion of the time period with which glyphosate can be applied, in order to improve the visual appearance of the local environment in the public realm across Midlothian.

2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to request permission from Council for the Recycling and Greenspace service to apply glyphosate to control weeds from the beginning of March 2025.

The report will also update Council on the managed use of glyphosate which was approved in March 2021 when Council approved the use of glyphosate on a restricted spot application basis.

The application of glyphosate to target weed growth in March, rather than from June, would significantly improve the visual quality of the local environment and would result in resource savings, which would be reinvested in the Recycling and Greenspace service.

Date: 25th February 2025
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3 Background

- 3.1 In March 2021, following a decision by Council, the managed use of glyphosate by the Greenspace service has resulted in a significant reduction in the volume of glyphosate used to control weeds.
- 3.2 The managed usage approved by Council applied to the following areas;
- Restricted spot application of glyphosate on Midlothian's streets and pavements
 - The continued reduction of glyphosate use in Midlothian's parks and open spaces
 - Essential treatment, as required, of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed
 - Continued use, where essential in road safety, to ensure visibility for pedestrians and road users at key locations
- 3.3 The table below shows the ongoing downward trend in the use of glyphosate over the last ten years. The most significant principle which has reduced glyphosate usage is the concept of spot treatment, targeting weed growth, rather than blanket weed spraying of all streets and park paths, even if weed growth was not visible.

Table 3.3.1

Year	Volume of Glyphosate (Litres)
2015	2398
2016	1238
2017	1823
2018	1843
2019	1374
2020	450
2021	650
2022	605
2023	680
2024	570

- 3.4 While the Recycling and Greenspace service has been committed to continue with the reduction of glyphosate use as directed by Council, there are circumstances where there will be a managed increase in use.

- 3.5 For example, the service has taken on the maintenance of three additional housing sites in 2024. These sites will require an element of weed control and therefore glyphosate use.
- 3.6 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. **The Neighbourhood Environment Team**

- 4.1 As part of the Recycling and Greenspace service review, the grounds maintenance and street cleaning teams merged to create the Neighbourhood Environment Team,
- 4.2 The creation of the Neighbourhood Environment Team in August 2024 has already resulted in improvements to service delivery which have seen an increase in the quality of the local environment in a number of ways, including the way the service controls weeds.
- 4.3 In relation to weed control, the Neighbourhood Environment Team improves the local environment 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 involves 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 to reduce detritus which will result in a reduction in weed growth
 - A removal of poor quality shrub beds, to be replaced by grassed areas with trees planted, which increases bio-diversity and reduce the need for glyphosate use to control weeds within the beds.
 - The Neighbourhood Environment Team continues to build on the partnership with community based volunteer groups to jointly tackle weed growth across Midlothian which has mitigated the use of glyphosate. The service has also agreed to reduce glyphosate use where community groups have adopted specific locations.
- 4.4 A major challenge for the Neighbourhood Environment Team in 2024 was the amount of weeds already in the road gutters and footpaths. This was due to the restrictions on the timing of the first application of glyphosate in Midlothian.
- 4.5 In addition to this, the effects of climate change have seen an increase in the growing season to include March, October and even November, due to the longer periods of wet and warm weather which have now

become the norm in the UK. This means that there is now a longer period during which weeds require treatment.

- 4.6 Currently, the qualified staff responsible for applying glyphosate in the Greenspace teams are unable to treat weeds until the beginning of June. This is essentially three months into the growing season and results in significant weed growth that the service then has to manage through intensive hand weeding or following an initial spot treatment and then removal.
- 4.7 It is therefore proposed that the period during which spot treatment of glyphosate is applied commences at the beginning of March. This will give the service an additional three months to manage weed growth in Midlothian resulting in an increase to the visual quality of the local environment.
- 4.8 It is expected that while there will be an increase in glyphosate usage, this will be minimal due to the targeted work of the Neighbourhood Environment Team to remove detritus which effectively remove the seed base in which weeds germinate. It is estimated that the increase in glyphosate will be around 300 litres which means that the estimated usage will remain well below the 2019 figures.
- 4.9 The new working practices, in addition to the proposed extension of the period during which glyphosate can be applied, will result in a significant increase in the visual quality of the local environment in Midlothian.

5 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)

5.1 Resource

The operational efficiencies from a reduction in the requirement to hand remove weeds through the summer months will result in a savings of £17,800, which is the equivalent of one Seasonal Gardener post that would no longer be required.

Approximately £9,000 of this saving will be spent on training additional staff within the workforce, additional spraying equipment as well as an increase in glyphosate for the targeted spot treatment of weeds which will be in the region of around 300 litres.

The remaining £8,800 will be reinvested into the Recycling and Greenspace service as part of an ongoing transformation programme of service improvement.

The alternative to increasing the period during which the application of glyphosate can take place is the additional deployment of mechanical sweepers.

The use of machinery to remove weeds would cost approximately £69,000 in staff time and would require the re-allocation of mechanical sweepers. This would divert the machines from essential work to support the prevention of flooding by keeping road channels clear of detritus, which would instead block road gullies.

The additional use of glyphosate in March is the most cost effective way to ensure weed growth is controlled which will improve the visual amenity of Midlothian.

5.2 **Digital**

There are no Digital Services issues associated with this proposal.

5.3 **Risk**

The risk of not approving the decision is that the reputation of the council will suffer as a result of increased weed growth which will have a detrimental effect on the visual amenity of Midlothian for residents and visitors.

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

No equalities issues identified.

Appendices

Appendix A – Report implication

A.1 Key Priorities within 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

Not applicable

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Not applicable

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The proposed earlier seasonal use is to improve the impact on the public realm.

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Not applicable

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not applicable