

Meeting of the Joint Meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Tuesday, 4 March 2025, 10.00 am

Committee Members present

Councillor Emma Baker
Councillor Pam Byrd
Councillor James Denniston
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Nikki Manterfield
Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Habibur Rahman
Councillor Rhea Rayside
Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Vanessa Smith
Councillor Mark Whittington

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Rhys Baker
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Phil Dilks

Officers

Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director –
Leisure, Culture and Place
James Welbourn, Democratic Services
Manager
Cameron Greene, Street Scene Manager
Patrick Astill, Communications Officer
Andrew Igoea, Tree Project Officer
Joshua Mann, Democratic Services
Officer

31. Election of Chairman

It was proposed, seconded, and AGREED that Councillor Nikki Manterfield be elected Chairman of the meeting.

32. Election of Vice-Chairman

It was proposed, seconded, and AGREED that Councillor Ian Selby be elected Vice-Chairman of the meeting.

33. Public Speaking

There were no public speakers.

34. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Paul Wood, Richard Dixon-Warren, Barry Dobson, and Steven Cunningham.

Councillor Steven Cunningham was substituted by Councillor Tim Harrison.

35. Disclosures of interest

There were none.

36. Use of Pesticides

The Uses of Pesticides Across South Kesteven report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste.

A motion was agreed at Full Council on 21 November 2024 to look into the feasibility of phasing out the use of all synthetic pesticides on Council owned land.

The district of South Kesteven covers approximately 365 square miles. In terms of grounds maintenance activities, the total amount of land which the Council's Street Scene Team were responsible for equated to 1,044,004 square metres. At the time of the report's publication, the Street Scene Team used Round Up Pro Active 360 to kill and suppress weeds on identified areas across the district. This was a glyphosate herbicide recommended for the total control of annual and perennial grasses and broad-leaved weeds in non-crop areas and was the only chemical application which was routinely applied by the Council. The product was used under strict spraying conditions and only at the recommended dilution rates. When used under the correct conditions, although the neat (undiluted) substance was identified as being hazardous, in its diluted form the manufacturer claimed that it was not harmful to animals or aquatic life.

The amount of glyphosate used by the Council had already decreased over recent years. In financial year 2023/24 a total amount of £490 was spent on glyphosate with a significant amount of stock being left unused at the end of the financial year. Year to the date of the report's publication, the total amount expended was £1,582. However, 200 litres of glyphosate was applied to the whole of the Turnpike Road site on two occasions to prepare the land for the build of the new depot.

The report listed the advantages and disadvantages of the following alternative options for weed control:

- Manual labour – removal of weeds via hand or non-mechanical tools,
- Mechanical – use of weed ripper machinery,
- Mechanical – use of foam stream machinery.

It was also identified that the Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) promoted banning the use of glyphosates and transitioning to alternative methods of controlling weeds. They advocated a phased approach to stopping the use of glyphosate and did not advise eliminating its use overnight, suggesting that such action would be counterproductive.

Research identified several challenges associated with transitioning to alternative methods of weed control. The potential implications include out of control weed growth, public safety concerns and resident dissatisfaction. Some of the Councils who had made the decision to ban glyphosates have since reversed this due to public pressure. Appendix One of the report outlined the list of Council sites receiving treatment.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- The Assistant Director of Leisure, Culture and Place agreed to look into the amount of pesticides being used in neighbouring authorities and feed this information back as an **ACTION**.
- A method was queried by which alternative seeds were dispersed within the pesticides. The Tree Officer noted that this was not a common practice in the UK.
- Members vocalised their support for the reduction of pesticide usage, however, noted the lack of efficient alternatives. A Member suggested implementing trial sites where no pesticides were used to establish the scope and impact. To accurately conduct these then a HRA site would need to be selected amongst the full trial site cohort. The Assistant Director of Leisure, Culture and Place noted that this would require renegotiation of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) contracts to ensure standards outlined within the contracts were adhered to.
- The Assistant Director of Leisure, Culture and Place acknowledged that trial sites were an option but would require a robust consultation process to establish the appropriate sites, particularly including HRA residents impacted. It also needed to be considered that there may be significant cost implications of restoring these trial areas if the uncontrolled weed growth causes damage.
- Reassurance was sought regarding the safety of children and animals who came into contact with glyphosate. This was confirmed to be safe when used in the correct dosages.
- A Member questioned the positive impact that further reducing the glyphosate usage would have considering the minimal amounts already used by the Council. The amount used by the Council could be considered a drop in the ocean considering the potential use of glyphosates by individual residents and town and parish councils.
- Another Member noted the role of weeds in pollination and highlighted a 76% decrease in flying insects since the 1990s.
- It was suggested that although some councils reversed their decisions to eliminate the use of pesticides there were a number of councils that had persisted with ceasing to use glyphosate.

- Whilst a Member acknowledged the difficulty in finding natural alternatives for dealing with plants such as Japanese Knotweed, they did suggest several natural alternatives for dealing with common weeds such as salt, vinegar, soap, corn gluten meal, and mulching.

Councillor Phil Dilks left the Chamber and did not return.

- Confirmation was sought to the approach of North Kesteven. The Street Scene Manager agreed to feed this back as an **ACTION**, but did note North Kesteven's usage of contractors for their grounds maintenance service.
- It was noted that glyphosate was no longer available to purchase domestically as part of the Government's approach to phase out its use. The Member suggested strimming where possible as neglect was not a viable option.
- The Street Scene Manager confirmed that the pesticide was administered 3-4 times a year under specific warm and dry conditions. It was suggested reducing this to administer the pesticide biannually. However, it was noted that this could have the reverse effect as glyphosate was essentially a growth stimulator and failing to stimulate enough growth to kill the plant would consequently only stimulate enough growth to enlarge the plant.
- The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste noted that the Council's usage of glyphosate had already been reduced due to mulching and that the salt option was compromised by rainfall diluting and washing it away. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the Government had extended the use of glyphosate for large organisations such as South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) until December 2025.
- It was the view of a Member that the word 'aesthetics' within the recommendation was inappropriate as safety and biodiversity should be SKDC's priorities in the context of pesticide usage. The Member also noted that whilst the report suggested that the Green Flag status of particular SKDC parks could be risked by reducing pesticide use, the Green Flag website endorsed pesticide-free methods.
- The Assistant Director of Leisure, Culture and Place confirmed that SKDC was not yet aware of the stance of central Government following December 2025.
- It was agreed for the matter to be revisited with an update provided by December 2025.

Following discussions, it was proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** to:

1. Recommend to Cabinet that the Council should continue with a strategy to reduce the use of glyphosate on land it is responsible for maintaining where this is possible without having a detrimental impact on safety or environmental impact, with a look towards identifying trial sites that did not use pesticides or herbicides.

2. Recommend to Cabinet that a public consultation, including town and parish councils, be held on the use of pesticides and herbicides on Council owned land.

3. Hold a further Joint Meeting of Environment and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2025 or January 2026.

The Chairman concluded the meeting at 11.33 am.