



Use of Pesticides on Council Land

Report Author

Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director – Leisure, Culture and Place

 karen.whitfield@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

To consider a recommendation from a joint meeting of the Environment and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees following a Motion to Council to eliminate the use of pesticides on Council land.

Recommendations

In noting the recommendations made by the joint meeting of the Environment and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 March 2025 Cabinets is recommended to:

- 1. Thank the Members of the Joint OSC for their work and consideration in relation to the use of glyphosate on Council owned land.**
- 2. Agree that the Council should continue with a strategy of reducing the use of glyphosate on its land where it is safe to do so and does not present a health and safety concern or impact of the aesthetics of an area.**
- 3. Request that a review of the Council's use of glyphosate is undertaken following the renewal of the licence by Central Government in December 2025.**

Decision Information

Is this a Key Decision?	No
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Sustainable South Kesteven
Which wards are impacted?	All Wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 The use of glyphosate on Council land is a cost-effective method of controlling weed growth and unwanted regrowth from tree stumps. The annual costs of purchasing glyphosate are relatively low, and these costs together with the appropriate level of labour resource are currently being met within existing budgets.
- 1.2 The alternative methods of weed control identified within the review undertaken involve the purchase and maintenance of additional machinery. The costs associated with additional labour, maintenance, equipment and vehicles are not factored into the Council's budget for the current financial year. Therefore, any change to the current method of controlling weeds would result in a budget increase proposal for the next financial year.

Completed by: David Scott – Assistant Director of Finance (deputy s151 officer)

Legal and Governance

- 1.3 The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to consider the recommendations made at the joint meeting of the Environment and Rural and Communities and Overview and Scrutiny Committees held on 4 March 2025. The Cabinet Procedure Rules State that the Chairman of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee is entitled to speak prior to debate on this item (paragraph 7.3(e)).

Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

Health and Safety

- 1.4 The use of glyphosate by the Council's Street Scene team is covered by a risk assessment and operating procedures. The glyphosate used is classed as a hazardous material and is currently used and stored in accordance with the manufacturers recommendations and industry best practice guidelines. The guidelines also state how to dispose of any excess product safely.
- 1.5 The risk assessment details appropriate mitigation measures which include following the product instructions, the use of appropriate personal protective equipment, washing hands after use, and being mindful of potential spray drift whilst in use.
- 1.6 The Council has a statutory duty of care and a moral obligation to protect both the public, and its employees and contractors from unreasonable foreseeable harm. Any alternative method of weed control would need to be independently risk assessed to identify, mitigate and control any risks arising from the activity. The hierarchy of control requires the review and reduction of risk so any change must always be to a substance with a reduced risk of harm.
- 1.7 Employers must conduct their work in a way that ensures, as far as reasonably practicable, that its staff, contractors and the public are not exposed to risks. Under UK health and safety law, the "reasonably practicable" test involves weighing the level of risk against the time, cost, and effort required to control it. Other factors, such as environmental sustainability, may be relevant but must not compromise safety.

Completed by: Phil Swinton, Emergency Planning and Health and Safety Lead

Climate Change

- 1.8 The use of glyphosate can have a direct and indirect effect on the environment. The eradication of weeds impacts birds and other animals by destroying a food source and adversely impacting their habitats. As glyphosates are water soluble, if they are not applied properly, they can enter water bodies and impact species which underpin the aquatic food chain. They have also been found to have adverse effects on earthworms, insects and bees.
- 1.9 The majority of glyphosate applied directly by the Council is currently limited to hard surfaces in mainly urban areas for the purpose of controlling weed growth. The product currently being used by the Council, according to the manufacturer, is not harmful to animals or aquatic life if diluted and applied according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- 1.10 When used responsibly glyphosate may have a lower environmental impact when compared to alternative herbicides which may require more frequent applications or have a higher toxicity.

- 1.11 The Council's Tree Officer works within the Sustainability and Climate Change team and is responsible for the delivery of the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy (2024 – 2034). It has been identified that the delivery of the Strategy, and the protection and enhancement of the district's tree population, will play a key role in the Council's ambitions to increase biodiversity and help tackle the impact of climate change. It is therefore important to consider the impact a ban of glyphosate across the district would have in relation to tree and woodland establishment. Without the ability to efficiently control herbaceous vegetation around the base of newly planted trees, which compete with the trees during their establishment phase, the scale and ambition of tree planting may need to be reviewed.
- 1.12 Whilst the concerns around the use of glyphosate are understandable, this substance can play a vital role in managing invasive species which may prevent tree planting, damage infrastructure and degrade natural habitats (e.g. Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed, rhododendron). A complete ban could hinder the Council's efforts to maintain tree populations, protect biodiversity and ensure successful amenity tree establishment and woodland creation.
- 1.13 In arboriculture, the use of pesticides is currently very limited. However, insecticides and fungicides can be used to control non-native pests and diseases, and a blanket ban on their use could impact the Council's ability to deal with any current or emerging threats. For example, the distribution of the oak processionary moth has been spreading Northwards in recent years and could soon be present within our district. Synthetic insecticides are used to control this pest in its larvae and caterpillar stage.
- 1.14 The benefit of using glyphosate responsibly is that its use can be targeted and localised, therefore limiting the impact on surrounding wildlife and plants. This is extremely important in areas where species beneficial to biodiversity are present such as pollinators. Glyphosates also enable a quick response to any outbreaks which could damage or limit tree growth.

Completed by: Andrew Igoea, Tree Officer

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1. The Council's Corporate Plan (2024 – 2027) outlines the Council's priority for a Sustainable South Kesteven. This includes the ambition to ensure the district is a safe, clean and pleasant place to live, work and visit and to protect and enhance the natural environment.
- 2.2. A motion was agreed at the meeting of Council on 21 November 2024 to investigate the feasibility of phasing out the use of synthetic pesticides on Council owned land. Subsequently a report was presented to a Joint Meeting of the Environment and

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Joint OSC) on 4 March 2025 (**See Background Papers**).

2.3. Following consideration, the Joint OSC made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- That the Council should continue with a strategy to reduce the use of glyphosate on the land it is responsible for without having a detrimental impact on safety, and work towards identifying trial sites where the use of pesticides or herbicide is withdrawn.
- A public consultation, including town and parish councils, should be held on the use of pesticides and herbicides on Council owned land.
- A further joint meeting of the Environment and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be held in December 2025 or January 2026.

Council Use of Glyphosate

2.4. The main synthetic product currently used on Council land is Round Up Pro Active 360 (active ingredient: glyphosate) which is used to kill and suppress herbaceous weeds on hard surfaces and, when necessary, perennial invasive weeds (e.g. Japanese knotweed) and tree stumps in other areas. The products are only used in strict accordance with best practice guidelines and manufacturer recommendations. Although these products are classed as hazardous to humans, they are not considered directly harmful to animals or aquatic life.

2.5. The district of South Kesteven covers 365 square miles and the total amount of land the Street Scene team is responsible for equates to 1.04 million square metres. Within this total 146,251 squares metres of land is scheduled to receive proactive treatment for weed control over 237 sites. However, these areas are only spot treated as necessary, and typically the percentage of a site receiving treatment varies between 2% and 10%. Treatment of invasive perennial weeds and tree stumps only occurs when it is necessary, and due to the methods of application used in these scenarios (e.g. targeted spraying, stem injection, plugs), the amount of glyphosate applied is negligible compared to its use on hard surfaces.

2.6. Of the sites receiving treatment, 187 are Housing Revenue Account owned sites and the specification for maintaining these sites is agreed with the Council's Housing Team. Other key sites include the Council owned parks in Grantham which are Green Flag award winning facilities, and where weed control is applied to paths and hard surfaces to maintain the aesthetics.

2.7. The Council has already taken a proactive approach to reducing the amount of glyphosate used on its land. In financial year 2022/23 a total amount of £490.00

was spent on glyphosate, with a significant amount of stock remaining at the year end. In 2024/25 the associated expenditure was £1,582.00. However, 200 litres was used to treat the Turnpike Close site as part of the pre-construction site preparations. The Street Scene Team will proactively continue to identify ways to reduce the use of glyphosate.

National Picture:

- 2.8. The Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) promotes banning the use of glyphosate but advocates a phased approach. Furthermore, they advise against eliminating its use without undertaking consultation with local residents and stakeholders.
- 2.9. It has been identified that whilst some Councils have ceased the use of glyphosate, several have since reversed this decision. The issues cited include public dissatisfaction, challenges in managing weed growth, and health and safety concerns on pavements and roads.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1. The Council has not received any complaints relating to its use of glyphosate or around the prevalence of weed growth across the district. As a large rural district, the use of glyphosate on Council owned land is very low and the Council has no control over the use of glyphosate or other products on land managed by other organisations, or on residential properties, privately owned or agricultural land.
- 3.2. For these reasons, and that no other cost-effective method of controlling weeds has been identified, it is not recommended at this time to undertake a full district wide consultation on the Council's use of glyphosate.
- 3.3. The use of glyphosate is crucial for controlling non-native or invasive species and therefore it is recognised that the targeted use of glyphosate helps to protect native ecosystems.
- 3.4. The use of glyphosate is an important, cost-effective tool to control competing vegetation around newly planted trees. These trees will provide amenity and biodiversity value and increase our resilience to climate change. Cabinet approved the Tree and Woodland Strategy for South Kesteven in May 2024, which includes a significant focus on establishment of new trees.
The licence for the use of glyphosate is due to expire in December 2025. Currently there is no indication from the Government whether the licence will be renewed or whether there will be a requirement to switch to other methods.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. A range of alternative options for controlling weed growth across the district were presented to the meeting of the joint OSC on 4 March 2025. There was consensus that none of the options identified were a suitable alternative.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1. As detailed within the body of this report the Council's use of glyphosate is already low considering the size and rurality of the district of South Kesteven. The Council has already adopted a strategy of reducing its use where this is possible.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1. [Report to Joint OSC 4 March 2025](#)