

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET5 DECEMBER 2024REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTREVIEW OF EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL'S USE OF GLYPHOSATE**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. This report presents an update to Cabinet following a trial exploring alternative methods for reducing glyphosate usage for weed control.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that cabinet:
 - a) Acknowledge the reduced use of glyphosate for weed control and the protective measures in place where it is still used;
 - b) Note initial findings from testing of alternative weed control solutions, with glyphosate being the currently preferred pesticide for continued effective weed treatment;
 - c) Note that Council officers are engaged with other local authorities and are continuing to review alternative weed control approaches; and
 - d) Note resource implications for wider rollouts of alternate approaches to weed control.

BACKGROUND

3. In response to a motion from the 13 September 2023 Council meeting, which highlighted public concerns regarding the use of pesticides, particularly glyphosate-based pesticides, a review was initiated. The Council agreed to evaluate alternative weed control practices, with findings to be reported to the Cabinet.
4. Glyphosate remains a widely used pesticide for weed management by local authorities, including East Renfrewshire Council. In 2024, Neighbourhood Services conducted trials on alternative weed treatments, while the Roads Service reviewed and adapted its glyphosate usage.
5. Considerations in evaluating alternative methods included general safety for staff and the public, efficacy, cost, and environmental impact.
6. Glyphosate is used by the Council for weed control on roads, pavements and open spaces. Notably, as part of the Green Flag certification process, Rouken Glen Park has been designated a pesticide-free zone. Use of glyphosate in Cowan Park will also be stopped as part of working towards Green Flag status.
7. In areas where pesticides are applied, only trained and certified personnel with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are permitted to use glyphosate. Officers carrying out treatments require appropriate certification and to be wearing PPE. This is a well-regulated area.

TESTING OF ALTERNATIVE WEED CONTROL APPROACHES

8. As part of the trial process, the Road Service reduced pesticide treatments along roadsides from three applications annually to two; to understand the effects as part of a potential mitigation strategy. The first application was a general spray, and the second a targeted treatment. The second application uses technology to ensure that only areas with weeds / growth are treated. There has been a reduction in the use of glyphosate by approximately 160 Litres annually (circa 27%) in light of the targeted treatment and reduction in applications.
9. Reductions in use of glyphosate on roadsides demonstrated a greater occurrence of weeds growing back when compared to the normal process of three treatments per year. Because of the reduction to two sprays, the Road Service have carried out an additional 13 manual treatments of weeds. This has been in response to service requests. The total staffing cost of this has been approximately £1,600.
10. Neighbourhood Services has also scaled back its glyphosate usage, restricting applications to targeted locations. Where glyphosate is used to deliver treatments, a controlled drop applicator is used, limiting the treatment area. Glyphosate, or any other pesticides, are not used in Rouken Glen Park, there may be a limited exception to this if a treatment was required for an invasive species. There is also no use of pesticides on children's play equipment. As Cowan Park seeks Green Flag status, the use of all pesticides will end there.
11. Within Rouken Glen Park, with no pesticides used, manual interventions to treat weeds typically takes place every other week (averaged across the year). Relevant staff are essentially in the park every day over summer, where growth is prominent. In contrast, where a Glyphosate pesticide treatment is carried out – there are only three treatments per year; totalling approximately three days of staff time per site.
12. In September 2024, a trial of WeedStriker (hot water treatment) took place near the Thornliebank Depot and on rough grass areas at Cathcart Cemetery. WeedStriker initially scorched the treated areas within a day or two, but regrowth appeared within four to five days, providing no lasting benefit.
13. Testing of additional weed killing products was undertaken at the walled garden of Rouken Glen Park, as a control site, using Katoun Gold, which used pelargonic acid (naturally occurring fatty acid) and New-Way weed spray, which is predominantly acetic acid (vinegar) contains no glyphosate. As the walled garden is closed to allow treatment of an invasive weed, this section is exempt from Rouken Glen Park's Green Flag status.
14. Initial testing highlighted that Katoun Gold was an initially effective treating the visible weeds in the controlled area. However, it is only surface level scorching that takes place, and there are quicker periods of regrowth than would be seen with glyphosate. This would suggest that there would be a need for more frequent and additional treatments. New-Way weed spray was significantly less effective, particularly when compared to existing glyphosate controls. In both instances, however, there would be benefit in allowing testing results to be fully considered after a year.
15. Across Neighbourhood Services & the Roads Service, approximately 685 litres of glyphosate will be used in 2024/25. The current costs the trialled treatments are:
 - Glyphosate - £48.87 for 5 litres
 - New Way - £28.00 for 5 litres
 - Katoun Gold - £140.00 for 5 litres

16. Within Neighbourhood Services, the staffing costs for Glyphosate treatments are approximately £400 per day. Trials in Midlothian Council identified that replacing the use of glyphosate with Katoun Gold resulted in a more than doubling of the number of required treatments (from two per annum, to five) - because of the quicker regrowth of weeds. In addition to the higher product costs, there would be a significant increase in staffing costs. Additionally, the safety sheet for Katoun Gold outlines a restricted use to natural surfaces – meaning it could not be used on roads.
17. Other alternative approaches to reducing use of pesticides include mechanical sweeping of roadsides and strimming. No additional mechanical sweeping was trialled over and above the routine sweeping programme however, it has been noted that mechanical sweeping while initially effective can create the environment for greater weed re-growth. Due to the time and cost required for manual intervention this was not considered as part of the trial however, this remains a low tech, no pesticide option.

Approaches by Other Local Authorities

18. At the time of writing, there is no consistent approach by Local Authorities for weed control with a range of views and approaches about removing or reducing the use of glyphosate. Many Councils do not use pesticides in their Green Flag parks; which is consistent with East Renfrewshire's approach within Rouken Glen Park. However, within this feedback many Councils that applied this approach highlighted a requirement for increased manual staff interventions e.g., strimming, to continue to maintain their open spaces and parks to a good standard.
19. Several Councils have reported challenges after halting or limiting glyphosate use, including increased customer complaints regarding weed growth and higher costs related to manpower requirements or alternative treatments. Feedback from other authorities indicates that many alternative treatments either have greater environmental and health impacts, are less effective and more expensive when compared to glyphosate.
20. In Scotland, Highland Council have a partial ban upon glyphosate usage, but have found that using alternative products takes longer, requires more applications and is more expensive. Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in complaints and Freedom of Information requests. Edinburgh City Council has proposed a phased reduction over three years. Most neighbouring councils continue to use glyphosate while monitoring potential alternative products.
21. In 2019 and 2023, the European Union (EU) carried out an assessment on glyphosate; with both the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) concluding that there is currently no scientific or legal justification for a ban. Consequently, the EU renewed its approval of glyphosate to 2033. While a standalone UK regulation regime on pesticides is still anticipated, post-Brexit, the relevant DEFRA minister indicated at the time of EU approval that glyphosate would continue to be approved for use in the UK.
22. A full briefing can be provided for Elected Members, by Neighbourhood Services and the Roads Service on the use of glyphosate and treatment of weeds.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

23. Should alternative methods for weed control be favoured, a comprehensive cost analysis will be required to assess their economic feasibility and any indirect impacts, such as increased staffing needs.

CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

24. The review process included consultations with neighbouring councils and relevant UK-wide professional networks, providing a broader perspective on glyphosate use across local authorities.

IMPLICATIONS OF PROPOSALS

25. At the time of writing, there are no property, legal, IT, Subsidy Control, equalities, sustainability or climate change implications associated with this report. East Renfrewshire Council will continue to consider alternative weed killing options, as well as the effectiveness of the products trialled – which may lead to future implications.

CONCLUSIONS

26. While several local authorities in the UK have stopped using glyphosate there are challenges that have presented from this that have increased the cost of weed control from a need for increased manual interventions and the cost of some alternative products, with in many cases a reduction in weed control effectiveness.
27. Alternative methods of weed control in East Renfrewshire, including mitigation through reduction in usage, has shown that reducing the frequency of usage in roadsides provides a poorer outcome through greater weed growth compared with normal treatment protocols and that hot water treatment was largely ineffective. However, there will be a continued consideration of the approaches undertaken in other areas and if alternate products can deliver the same outcomes as glyphosate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

28. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
 - a) Acknowledge the reduced use of Glyphosate for weed control and the protective measures in place where it is still used;
 - b) Note initial findings from testing of alternative weed control solutions, with glyphosate being the currently preferred pesticide for continued effective weed treatment;
 - c) Note that Council Officers are actively engaged with other local authorities and are continuing to review alternative weed control approaches; and
 - d) Note resource implications for wider rollouts of alternate approaches to weed control.

Director of Environment

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