

Report to: Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 28 September 2020

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: The use of Glyphosate based herbicide to control weeds on the Public Highway

Purpose: To consider the response to petitions calling on the County Council to ban the use of Glyphosate along Hastings roadsides and green spaces and in Eastbourne, Jevington and Willingdon

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended:

- (1) To inform the Petitioners that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) will continue to safely use a Glyphosate based herbicide until a suitable alternative becomes available; and**
 - (2) To note that Glyphosate is on the list of European licenced and registered products and that ESCC is actively researching alternatives.**
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1 Background Information

1.1. At the County Council meeting on 7 July 2020, Councillor Charman presented a petition to the Chairman calling on the County Council to ban the use of Glyphosate along Hastings roadsides and green spaces. At the same meeting Councillor Stephen Shing asked the following question: *“Confirmation as to whether Glyphosate is used by East Sussex Highways and if so what research there is in relation to the negative impact this has on health and the environment and what action is to be taken to minimise the use of Glyphosate”*. In addition, on 6 August 2020, ESCC received a petition to ban Glyphosate spraying in Eastbourne, Jevington and Willingdon from local residents. The Petition Scheme provides that where the Chairman considers it appropriate, petitions are considered by the relevant Committee. The Chairman has referred these petitions to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

1.2. Weed growth in road gullies and channels can slow down and prevent the highway drainage systems from working. Weeds can damage paved surfaces, displace kerbstones and crack walls making maintenance difficult and costly. Weeds can also give the general perception of untidiness and in some circumstances, weeds have been considered to have safety implications for pedestrians. The Well Managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice states that *“weed treatment should therefore be undertaken according to traffic and pedestrian usage and to a level of usage that takes account of local concerns. The use of weed-killers should be the minimum compatible with the required results”*.

1.3. ESCC carry out one weed spray a year on 3081km of channels, footpaths, central reservations and islands to manage and maintain vegetation on the highway network, using a herbicide that contains Glyphosate. Spraying is carefully controlled and limited in use to only where weeds are found. Alternatives to Glyphosate have and continue to be reviewed but an effective alternative has yet to be found.

2 Supporting Information

2.1. In line with County Council Highway Verges and Vegetation Policy, a Glyphosate based herbicide from the Health and Safety Executive’s Pesticides Register of UK Authorised Products

suitable for use on highways is used. The herbicide is also a European licenced and registered product.

2.2. The total cost of weed control in the Highways contract is approximately £55,000 per year as a lump sum fixed price that is fixed for the period of the current highways contract.

Current Application and Usage

2.3. Glyphosate herbicide is widely used by Local Authorities to maintain weeds on the highway network.

2.4. The herbicide application is currently carried out using a bespoke spraying machine based on a mini tractor, with a knapsack sprayer used in the difficult to reach areas. The weed spraying is only carried out by NPTC (National Proficiency Test Council) pesticide application competent operators. The average output is 22km in an 8-hour working day.

2.5. The herbicide is applied to weeds in channels and on footpaths at a ratio of 5% herbicide to water on the highway network. At this approved rate of application, it is harmless to all mammalian species and birds. It is also approved for use near watercourses.

2.6. The type of spray used enters the plant through its leaves and breaks down the weed's cell structure rather than killing it on contact. The spray makes sure that all parts of the plant are broken down and slows down any regrowth. Once the weeds have been sprayed it can take between 10 and 14 days for the herbicide to take effect.

2.7. Weed spraying is not undertaken on rainy or windy days to reduce wastage and the travel of the herbicide and treatments within high foot traffic or high sensitivity areas are carried out in accordance with Guidelines for Herbicide Application in Neighbouring Areas. See Appendix 1 for full risk assessments and method statements.

Alternatives

2.8. Alternatives to Glyphosate have been investigated including: FoamStream, hand weeding, Acetic Acid (Vinegar), and Thermal and Mechanical methods. See Appendix 2 for further details. These alternatives have been found to be too costly, not suitable for need, less effective and/or inefficient for highways use at the present time.

2.9. For example, Sussex Rail (the sub-contractor for weed control) provided an estimate for using FoamStream, a low-pressure process, combining heat with biodegradable foam, in the Hastings area of £90,340 per application. This is five times the current cost for Hastings weed control of approximately £18,000. Appendix 3 includes information from other authorities about how they treat weeds and some alternative methods they have trialled. Kent County Council trialled hot foam (Foam Stream) but noted that it required more frequent visits to effectively treat weeds. It is therefore likely that 2-3 applications would be required in Hastings to have the same effect as the current treatment. The cost therefore would be between £180,000 to £270,000 to treat weeds in Hastings for two or three treatments. Scaling this across the County weed control using this method could cost between £540,000 to £810,000 for two or three treatments respectively. It should be noted that it is unclear if there is sufficient capacity within this industry at this time to deliver such a large programme of works.

2.10. Acetic Acid and thermal lancing have produced worse results and have shown to be even less effective than the hot foam method. Hand pulling is very labour intensive, and whilst no direct figures are currently available for this method, clearly this is likely to have an even higher cost per metre than hot foam as productivity will be limited and there are additional costs not associated with the current method including collection and disposal.

2.11. However, ESCC are working with neighbouring authorities to continue to explore alternative options and working towards introducing new methods as part of the next highways maintenance contract in 2023.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. At present using a Glyphosate based herbicide is the most effective and efficient weed control measure and is an approved licenced product applied in accordance with best practice.

3.2. The Lead Member Transport & Environment is asked to note the concerns of residents and that ESCC will continue to use licensed and registered Glyphosate based herbicides, whilst also actively continuing to review alternatives.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Petitions

Highway Verges and Vegetation Policy