

Post Project Review

Project Title	Opt-out Volunteer Weed Maintenance
Author	Fenella Lillywhite
Date	04/11/2022
Version	0.1

Purpose of This Document

To collate and review the information and feedback from the trial of the Opt-out volunteer weed maintenance undertaken through the weed maintenance season of 2022.

To understand the successes and issues faced by volunteers undertaking weed maintenance on select roads.

To present the outcome and conclusions made from this trial.

Trial Overview

The opt out approach gives streets the option to 'opt out' of glyphosate weed spraying. This is done with the expectation that a minimum of 60% of residents of that street agree to be part of the trial and that volunteers would in place undertake some sort of weed maintenance. An agreement and guidance are included outlining safety and expectations. Training and PPE were provided as well as template documents to be completed by the volunteers to let ESCC know when they are going to carry out the works and when they have been completed.

This was only an option on cul-de-sacs or residential roads with low-speed limits. See **Appendix A1** for list of Opt-out roads.

This approach is already being used by Manchester City Council and Exeter City Council.

Benefits Noted

- Brings communities together and creates more community cohesion.
- No Glyphosate used.
- Appeases residents against use of glyphosate.
- Gives residents opportunity to influence what happens to their road.
- Volunteers self-scheduling, rather than relying on ESCC to schedule.

Issues Noted

- Insurance requirements /volunteer resistance to completing the documentation.
- Variation of quality of works (See **Appendix B1** for images).
- Large amounts of admin and supervision by ESCC officers and associated costs.
- Restrictions on where volunteers can weed e.g. not in road / has to have a pavement, meaning some areas left un-weeded.
- Summer 2022 was a dry season which means the effect of weeds cannot be fully understood.
- Public perception of volunteers weeding e.g. Highways are not undertaking works they are responsible for.

- Weeds may not have been fully removed e.g. roots may still be intact meaning they come back worse or weeds are allowed to seed and spread.

Insurance

This trial was the first time ESCC Highways had insured volunteers under ESCC insurance. The standard highways volunteering process requests volunteer groups and/or Parish and Town Councils to obtain their own £10million Public Liability Insurance instead.

Documentation

Therefore, to undertake this trial and insure volunteers under ESCC insurance, volunteers had to meet the requirements of East Sussex County Council insurance provider including certain aspects of the process which needed to be documented.

An agreement had to be signed by all volunteers which outlined expectations, what can and cannot be done and provided a standard risk assessment. Training was carried out via a PowerPoint presentation, narrated by ESCC Officer.

Initially the ESCC insurance provider requested an ESCC officer to be onsite at all times whilst the volunteers undertook work. However, there was not enough officer resource to meet this expectation and it was agreed that completing a notification and completion document would meet that requirement, however ESCC officers would need to undertake ad-hoc inspections.

See **Appendix C1** for template documents volunteers must complete.

Weeding Restrictions

Although the roads selected were low-speed, low-traffic roads, volunteers were not allowed to work within the carriageway or anywhere there was not a footpath. This therefore created an imbalance of weeds in some places which had to be rectified using Highways contractors.

Officer Time

Resource for the trial was utilised from the ESCC Highways Contracts Management Group. The following officer time was calculated, from the 13th of April 2022 until 30th September 2022, of 24.5 days. Which may reduce as the process becomes more embedded over time.

Additional Officer Resource

The trial included 8 roads, if this approach was to be rolled out more widely across the county, it would be beneficial to have a specific allocated resource.

Consultation has been undertaken with other County Councils (see **Appendix D1** for list of other councils) it has been noted that all other Highways Services have at least one specific officer resource to manage and support volunteers.

If a volunteer officer was allocated, they could undertake both the admin and supervisory role and potentially work on other volunteer projects within Highways.

Feedback from Volunteers

See **Appendix E1** for full feedback.

Feedback	ESCC Response/Next Steps
----------	--------------------------

Complicated documented process	As noted previously, the process is in place to meet ESCC insurance requirements. The process will be reviewed if rolled out further to see if it can be simplified. Additionally, consideration needs to be given to whether alternate parties could insure the volunteers like Parish/Town Councils.
Issues disposing of weeds.	Requests for bags to dispose of weeds, due to some residents not having a brown bin. A review should be carried out into alternative possibilities of weed disposal or whether provision of sacks is applicable.
Want to carry out unplanned maintenance.	To meet ESCC insurance requirements works need to be planned and documented.
Volunteers only want to undertake weed maintenance outside their door.	The whole street needs to be included in the weed maintenance to ensure those areas with residents who may not be able to undertake maintenance are covered.

Customer Cases

Year	Number of cases to do with weeds in trial areas.
2022	9
2021	4
2020	6
2019	8

From the 9 cases in 2022, 2 were in unadopted areas and 1 asking a general question. There has been no noted increase in customer cases due to the trial.

Highway Steward Feedback

The Highway Stewards responsible for inspecting the trial locations have not noted any problems or safety issues due to the trial.

Contract and Commercial Supervisor Visits

The Contract and Commercial Supervisors responsible for inspecting the trial locations have not noted any problems or safety issues due to the trial. However, have stated that it does look untidier. See **Appendix B1** for images.

Other Costs

PPE

Sixty-one sets of PPE were purchased over the course of the trial for volunteers. PPE sets included gloves, googles and hi-vis. The total cost for this was £255.44.

The minimum number of volunteers to undertake works on a road is 2, meaning the current cost of PPE for each road at a minimum would be £9.

Consideration also needs to be given to the storage of PPE, once returned, as well as the costs of any lost items or items not returned.

Other work

Due to volunteers being unable to weed in the road or non-paved areas weed maintenance had to be undertaken by East Sussex Highways contractors.

An example is Tackle Way in Hastings (see **Appendix F1** for images) strimming and hand pulling works had to be undertaken to ensure the weeds did not affect the drainage network. These works cost: £556.71

There is potential for these situations to become more frequent if weeds are not maintained appropriately, year on year.

Outcome & Conclusion

Currently, there are no safety issues observed with this approach.

The impact of not using glyphosate to maintain weeds will take several years to understand. Incorrect weed removal, for example hand pulling and leaving a part of the root behind, can cause weeds to keep coming back and therefore has a potential overtime to affect the highway infrastructure.

In addition, summer 2022 was not a typical season as it was abnormally dry, meaning the effect of weeds cannot be fully understood. A suggestion would be to extend the trial another year and implement lessons learnt to improve the process.

It should also be noted that this approach relies on the time and effort of volunteers, signing up each year, and whose enthusiasm and availability to help could change and leave a street unable to carry out the opt out option.

Appendix A1 – Opt-Out Road Locations

- Leicester Road – Lewes
- Lower South Road – Hastings
- New Road – Lewes
- South Street – Lewes
- South Way – Lewes
- St Thomas – Hastings
- Tackleway – Hastings
- Talbot Terrace – Lewes (with Pelham Terrace, Toronto Terrace)

Appendix B1 – Images

South Street, Lewes



New Road, Lewes



South Way, Lewes



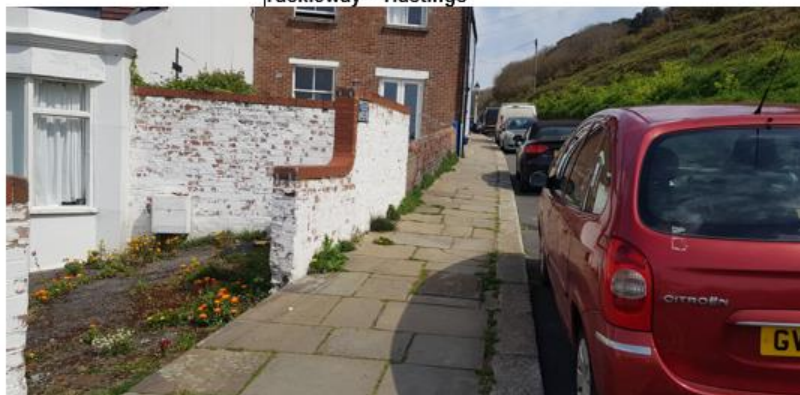
Leicester Road, Lewes



Talbot Terrace, Lewes



Tackleway – Hastings



St Thomas Road – Hastings



Lower South Road - Hastings



Appendix D1 – Volunteer Officer Resource

Council/Team	Resource
ESCC Rights of Way Team	1 Dedicated Officer
Oxfordshire County Council	2 Dedicated Officers and Budget for Volunteering
Surrey County Council	1 Dedicated Officer

Appendix E1 – Full Feedback

South Way Feedback

All volunteers happy to continue the weeding, and we've not received any negative feedback from anyone on the street (amazingly) - the response has been overwhelmingly positive - people are relieved that the weeds are being dealt with in a timely and eco-friendly fashion - so people seem happy that this has happened

All volunteers happy to continue maintaining the pavements on south way, for the rest of this year and beyond into next year, and we'll do another session at some point in the next few months, which i'll let you know about in advance, obv's

My only feedback in terms of the council would be is it possible for this to happen with less paperwork? I know how complicated these things are, insurance etc etc, i run a business so i know how much stuff one has to fill out, but it's a bit of a disincentive for some people to get involved in this kind of thing if they feel they've suddenly got to deal with loads of paperwork - it's not really a criticism, i know that you're constrained by all sorts of health and safety rules, and i totally support health and safety, i'm not a 'bonfire of red tape' person at all, health and safety is there for a reason, i just wonder if there's some way of making it a bit easier for this to happen? Could we maybe say we're going to do 6 weeding days over the year, with the same volunteers, then not have to alert you to when those days are, we just do them and submit the right works form once we've done each day? Or could it just be the one lead volunteer who signs up to be in charge, and they're responsible for everyone, so we don't have to get every volunteer to fill out forms etc?

South Street

*Overall positive reaction from residents of street not to use pesticides and therefore work/action of group

*Many took opportunity to participate unofficially and weed outside their own houses - lightened load on long a long street

*Helpful that some of volunteers had green waste removal - so we could use as not everyone had car to take to 'tip'

*For weeding group was opportunity to meet and work with others in street and after first sessions meeting in pub afterwards was enjoyed and strengthen neighbourliness

*Paper work: if it could be streamlined good, but overall everyone understood necessity - (it was mainly common sense)

* Good to have had over a 12 residents to join group so we had enough people to form small teams (especially as we are a long street) and lots of our team had holidays and commitments over summer

* street looks tidier and cleaner

Leicester Road

The two weeding sessions were approached with enthusiasm by the residents, it was a good community event and everyone understood the rules needed to be followed and respected for Health & Safety. The orange gilets were good as our pavements are busy & pedestrians & drivers could see something "official" was going on. On reflection I would organise 2 or 3 sessions of two and a half hours each rather than all day which is too tiring for some people.

We are pleased the pavements are clear & safe and gutters clear for heavy rain (many people chose to keep plants at the base of their front garden walls- which if kept cut back seems fine) & of course that we are pesticide free..

It was agreed by everyone that we do need some support from the Council with removing the non-plant material that gathers in the gutters ie soil & grit (it may especially collect due to the steep sloping nature of the road). This debris is heavy and does not count as 'garden rubbish'. We would like to request that the Council removes this debris in future.

We managed to do the weeding using our own garden tools but if there are any larger long handled tools the Council could lend that would be appreciated. I still have the box of gloves, gilets & goggles, where should I return them to?(We didn't think we needed the goggles as no power tools were allowed)

The residents have agreed to continue with the Project, as we are very pleased that no chemical weed killer is being used. I've suggested some sessions in spring, although some residents are now keeping their own path & gutter clear . The main areas I will have to organise will be the steep slopes which have the long garden walls belonging to Valence Road, de Montfort Road & Prince Edwards Road properties.

Appendix F1 – Tackleway Hastings

