

SALISBURY CITY COUNCIL

Report

Subject : Weed Control 2025/26 Option Paper
Committee : Environment & Climate Committee
Date : 14 October 2024
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1. Report Summary:

1.1. This report gives an overview of options for weed control for consideration.

2. Background

- 2.1. The responsibility for weed control in Salisbury was delegated from Wiltshire Council to Salisbury City Council, in April 2017. Although delegated, there is no statutory minimum standard that Salisbury City Council has to comply with.
- 2.2. Wiltshire Council continued to use glyphosate on the highway up to and including 2022, so Salisbury City Council had no need to take further action.
- 2.3. In 2023, Wiltshire Council made the decision to stop weed spraying, however, this decision was not communicated to Salisbury City Council. This meant that the Streetscene Team could only offer sporadic hand weeding across Salisbury. This drew a significant number of complaints from residents as the team were not able to meet demand.
- 2.4. In September 2021, Salisbury City Council voted to halt the use of glyphosate. This decision was amended in October 2023, to allow the use of glyphosate to treat invasive species.

3. 2024/25

- 3.1. In Spring 2024, a non-glyphosate treatment was trialled across the City with limited success and further treatments halted.
- 3.2. In the summer of 2024, the Streetscene Team took delivery of a sweeper attachment, to assist with the removal of curb side weeds. The limitation of this, includes parked cars and unable to access narrow pavements.
- 3.3. In addition to this the Streetscene Team made staff available for hand weeding duties when possible. However, due to long term sickness and staff vacancies this was limited. It is important to note that even without these staffing issues, hand weeding across an area the size of Salisbury is ineffective with the size of team on hand (if the aim is for a weed free city).
- 3.4. Ultimately, all of the above has resulted in increased weed growth and complaints from residents.
- 3.5. Towards the end of summer 2024, Wiltshire Council announced that to help protect its infrastructure, that it would be using glyphosate on the roads and pavements of Salisbury. Under the terms of delegation they are entitled to do this.

3.6. Wiltshire Council have confirmed that at this stage, this is a one off treatment and does not intend budgeting for yearly treatments going forward.

4. Further Information for Consideration

- 4.1. In recent years, many councils across the UK have taken the decision to stop using glyphosate, reacting to public pressure and citing concerns over its safety as a possible carcinogenic. However, as reports of overgrowing weeds and safety hazards mount, some councils are now reconsidering these bans, opting to reintroduce glyphosate-based weed control methods.
- 4.2. [Brighton and Hove City Council](#), was amongst the first to enact a glyphosate ban in 2019 and has faced significant challenges since then. Council leader Bella Sankey acknowledges the difficulties caused by uncontrolled weed growth, leading to unsafe pavements. Despite exhaustive efforts to explore alternatives, including manual weeding and community engagement, the council found no effective substitute for glyphosate. Instead, they propose a “controlled droplet method” reducing the concentration of glyphosate and minimises environmental biodiversity impacts.
- 4.3. Similarly, [Cambridgeshire County Council](#), prompted by overwhelming complaints and safety concerns, reversed its glyphosate ban after just one year of implementation. The decision, fuelled by reports of damaged infrastructure and public dissatisfaction, reflects a broader shift in understanding the practical challenges of weed management without glyphosate. Simon Bywater, a county councillor, criticised the initial ban as short-sighted, emphasising the need for balanced decision-making considering both budgetary concerns and public safety.
- 4.4. The reconsideration of glyphosate bans also aligns with recent research findings. A study conducted by an independent research consultancy, in collaboration with Cardiff City Council and PCA member, Complete Weed Control, concluded that glyphosate remains the most effective and sustainable weed control method available. The study compared glyphosate with alternative eco-friendly methods and found glyphosate to have a smaller environmental footprint, lower cost, and higher customer satisfaction as detailed below:
 - Across 18 different environmental impact categories, hot foam had the highest impact in all but one category, with the environmental impact of glyphosate being lowest in all but two categories.
 - Total product usage was lowest, at 0.33 litres per km for glyphosate, compared to 4.06 litres of acetic acid (12 times more herbicide), and 5.38 litres of hot foam (16 times more than glyphosate) required to treat one kilometre of pavement.
 - Hot foam required 629.64 litres of water per kilometre - 62 times more water than glyphosate, which required 13 litres per kilometre. Acetic acid required 8.44 litres per kilometre.
 - Applying glyphosate used less fuel - just 0.18 litres of diesel per km treated, compared to 0.19 litres for acetic acid, and 12.33 litres of diesel, plus 2.13 litres of petrol for hot foam – that’s 63 times more diesel and 100% more petrol than required for glyphosate.
 - It took 0.16 hours of labour to treat one kilometre with glyphosate, compared to 0.23 hours for acetic acid, and 4.89 hours for hot foam.
 - Glyphosate was also the product that worked best – generating only four complaints, compared to 22 for acetic acid, and 29 for hot foam.

4.5. It is important to note that some Councils are continuing to move away from using glyphosate - [Newton Abbot Town Council](#) & [Flintshire Council](#) are two recent examples and have decided to move to the Hot Foam treatment.

5. 2025/26 Options

Option	Additional Cost	Comments
Weed Spraying (Glyphosate)	Estimated £25,000-£30,000 for a contractor to deliver 2 sprays	<p>This figure is based on coverage of the area previously sprayed by Wiltshire Council i.e. 260km of kerb edges</p> <p>Would need to amend policy on use of glyphosate but is known to be effective in weed treatment.</p> <p>It is important to note that Glyphosate is fully licenced by the UK Health and Safety Executive as safe to use, but concerns have been raised about its impact on human health, pollinators and the planet.</p>
Hot Foam Weed Control	Estimated £100,000 for contractor to deliver 2 treatments across the city	Hot foam requires significant volumes of water compared to glyphosate and takes longer to apply.
Additional 2xStreetscene Operatives & Van	Estimate £80,000 for Operatives, Van, Fuel etc	<p>Dedicated to weed control in the spring/summer and can be utilised on enhancing Streetscene activity in the autumn/winter.</p> <p>Important to note that this option is akin to painting the Forth Road bridge and that 2 Operatives alone will never produce a weed free city.</p>
Accept weeds as other options are either too expensive or not acceptable from Environment/Health perspective.	£Nominal Comms Budget	Communications required to residents explaining Council position.

6. Recommendations

- It is recommended that the Committee consider how weeds should be tackled in the city and make a recommendation of the preferred option, so that this can be considered as part of budget setting for 2025/26

1. **Wards Affected:** All

2. **Background Papers:** Nil

3. **Implications:**

3.1. **Financial:** As outlined above.

3.2. **Personnel:** As outlined above.

3.3. **Environmental Impact:** As outlined above.

3.4. **Equalities Impact Statement:** Nil in relation to this report.