

Subject:	Pesticide reduction and weed management review		
Date of Meeting:	16 March 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director – Economy, Environment & Culture		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 On 26 November 2019, the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee:
- Agreed to end the use of glyphosate by City Environmental Management services with immediate effect, other than in exceptional cases to kill invasive plant species, such as Japanese Knotweed or to kill tree stumps.
 - Agreed that City Environmental Management will not engage with contractors to use glyphosate on any land managed by these departments.
 - Approved for City Environmental Management to work with other departments to phase out glyphosate use across the council and to work towards phasing out other pesticide use by 2022.
 - Noted that the removal of weeds in parks and on hard surfaces will be undertaken manually as an alternative approach to using pesticides.
 - Agreed that an update report should be brought back to committee to update Members on progress and the results and to review this approach to weed removal.
- 1.2 This report is an update to Members on pesticide reduction and weed removal during 2020 following these approvals.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee note the report.
- 2.2 That Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee approve for City Environment and City Transport to explore options to reduce weed growth on footways and highways during construction works and bring a report back to Committee with findings for a decision, where appropriate.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hard surfaces: footways and highways

- 3.1 The weeding season for hard surfaces takes place between March and October. No glyphosate was used for weed removal during 2020. When adopting the manual approach, Cityclean were open and clear that they would not be able to

remove the weeds to the same extent and therefore, there would be more weeds. However, this also brings some benefits of encouraging insects and increased biodiversity. Indeed, many residents have asked us not to remove weeds when they have seen the insects flourish.

3.2 In low footfall areas, the intention was to employ six additional operatives to complete manual weeding, which involved using hoes and by brushing and ripping weeds. In high footfall areas such as the town centre where roads and pavements are swept daily, existing operatives continued to manage and sweep weeds.

3.3 A review of the weeding season has been completed by Cityclean:

- The deployment of additional operatives and the weeding schedule was deeply impacted by Covid 19 pandemic, lockdowns and issues with recruitment. For a time, operatives were diverted to more urgent frontline duties to cover for colleagues self-isolating
- Existing Cityclean operatives began weeding in March, with the additional seasonal staff joining in July and working through to October, when the focus changed to leaves
- The plan was to have six additional staff however, on average this was about four per week due to supply issues and the pandemic
- Operatives visited 472 roads across the city, which includes sections of roads and full completion of roads
- Areas targeted were based on feedback and complaints received, observations by Street Cleansing operatives and Team Leaders and experiences from previous years; of the areas that were cleared, they were visited once
- Five stage one complaints concerning weeds were received between 1 March 2020 and 12 February 2021; further reports were received directly by Cityclean
- Cityclean also received several informal complaints about removing weeds as residents were enjoying the wildflowers and insects that came with them
- The pandemic has meant that the patterns of people using pavements has been different to a usual year; in some areas there may have been higher footfall and in others, lower

3.4 Feedback from staff has been:

- Removing weeds without pesticides is much harder
- The preferred method is using the weed ripper and more appropriate to use than hoes, as the latter can damage pavements. However, small stones can be caught and so the area must be clear of debris to use this machinery
- It is not possible to do all day long; operatives cannot sustain the same task all day for health & safety reasons therefore operatives worked in crews taking it in turns to complete certain tasks and use particular equipment
- A new brush attachment for sweepers was trialled, however the brush was not strong enough to clear the weeds

3.5 For 2021, the following changes will be made:

- Recruitment of weeding staff will be included in the seasonal recruitment campaign (which is usually for additional litter pickers in the beach), rather than rely on agency staff to ensure supply of operatives

- Weed removal will be rotated so crews are using the equipment for limited periods of time
- Using Cityclean's better understanding of where weeds are kept down by footfall and where more attention is required, areas can be targeted and resources deployed accordingly

City Parks

- 3.6 A review of the weeding season has been completed by City Parks:
- Weed removal has not been affected to the same extent as Cityclean as a result of Covid and changes in footfall
 - The service was helped by a hot and dry summer which meant weed growth and removal was not an issue
 - It should be noted that the volume of hard surface work for City Parks is considerably less compared to hard surface weed removal carried out by Cityclean
 - The volume of complaints and feedback received by the service is comparable to previous years
- 3.7 Feedback from staff has included comments concerning the wire brushes used. As a result, the service is no longer using these. Staff have also highlighted the additional time involved in weed removal and the difficulty in controlling some perennial weeds, notably bindweed in shrubberies.
- 3.8 While there has been little adverse feedback from service users on this year's approach, sports organisations are concerned about the potential of a future total ban, and the ability to provide good quality grass playing surfaces.
- 3.9 For 2021 no changes are currently planned. However, if this summer is wetter problems may arise and City Parks will manage accordingly.

Impact on footways and highways

- 3.10 It must be acknowledged that weeds will result in trip hazards where they grow around slabs and will lead to an increase in claims against the council, as the council has a statutory duty to maintain the highway. Feedback from the Highway Asset & Maintenance Team on the impact of the manual weed removal programme on footways and highways indicates that the Inspectors have been identifying more issues.
- 3.11 Increasingly, footways are being replaced and repaired using tarmac, rather than paving slabs. It has been noted that by not treating the ground during construction works, that weeds grow through the tarmac. This presents challenges for manual techniques as it is not so easy to use the equipment to remove them compared to gaps in pavement slabs. This means hoeing is not possible as it can damage the tarmac and puts the investment in new footway surfaces at risk.
- 3.12 There is also a risk that if weeds are not removed (by whatever means) this is likely to lead to increased insurance claims and increased deployment of contractors to deal with the trip hazards, both leading to increased costs.

- 3.13 City Environment and City Transport will continue to explore what options exist to reduce weed growth on footways and highways during construction works. This will support the continued programme of manual weed removal and reduce the need for additional remedial work to structures that should last 15 to 20 years.

Impact on biodiversity

- 3.14 The City Parks' Conservation Team, in collaboration with the Living Cost Programme, recently commissioned an ecological survey of the 19 Bee Banks which were introduced to the city in 2003, with most of them put in place in recent years. This study has shown that 745 species have been found in just 1.26 hectares across the city, including a species of new bee to Sussex. The study also found that 58 invertebrates had a conservation status. This is an incredible success for Brighton & Hove.
- 3.15 While it's not possible to prove a link between ending the use of glyphosate and the impact it has on biodiversity, it is known that glyphosate presents a risk to bees and other insects so is likely to be a contributing factor in enabling them to thrive.
- 3.16 The council is aiming for another 12 areas of wildflower planting for pollinators as part of the Greening the Cities Changing Chalk to further encourage biodiversity and enable it to flourish.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Consideration has been given to other non-pesticide removal techniques. However, there are no products on the market that are pesticide free or effective enough to tackle weeds across the city. Strong salt water will kill weeds but there is a risk that the salt will cause damage to other highway structures and vehicles.
- 4.2 Cityparks are continuing to mulch beds with woodchips produced during pruning operations, which deals with annual weeds, but generally, not perennial weeds.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The council is aware of a growing concern from residents about the use of pesticides in the city which is demonstrated by many enquiries via councillors, MPs and residents themselves.
- 5.2 In the report in 2019, it was noted that a survey would be carried out to seek the views of residents. Because this year's weed removal programme was so disrupted by the pandemic, this was not undertaken. Instead, a public consultation will take place next autumn to obtain the views of residents.
- 5.3 In September 2020, the council launched a campaign to keep Brighton & Hove Tidy, starting with a cleaning blitz on some of the city centre's dirtiest streets and pavements. As part of the campaign, communities across the city were asked to consider joining the cleaning effort. Over 300 people took part over the two weeks of activities carrying out graffiti paint-outs, sticker removal, beach and park

cleans, litter picking and weed removal. A further campaign is being planned for 28 May to 13 June.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 In 2020 the pandemic impacted on Cityclean's ability to deliver the manual weeding programme because of the difficulties recruiting and other pressures in the service. In addition, there has been abnormal patterns of footfall across the city meaning that weed growth in a typical year could be very different. Consequently, it has not been possible to accurately assess the impact of manual weed removal, nor the associated resourcing requirements.
- 6.2 Recruitment has started for this year's weeding programme, acknowledging the recruitment issues from last year. Arrangements will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and another end-of-season review will be completed and shared with Members.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations of this report. It is assumed that any costs will be met from existing service resources. This will be reviewed as part of monthly budget monitoring and reporting, if required, a pressure funding bid will be made for a future financial year.

Finance Officer Consulted: Jess Laing

Date: 03/03/2021

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

Lawyer Consulted: Hilary Woodward

Date: 03/03/2021

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Feedback from residents and stakeholders, including from groups representing residents with disabilities, will be sought to inform the 2021 review, and included in the next update to committee.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 The sustainability implications are included in the main body of the report and the November 2019 report which is available in Background Documents below.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

None

Background Documents

1. Report to Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee on 26 November 2019: [Reducing the use of pesticides](#) (item 48)