

REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 JANUARY 2021

REVIEW OF USE OF HERBICIDES ON GREEN SPACE ASSETS

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive

Author: Sarah Valdus, Head of Environmental Services
Colinda Le Gall, Urban and Greenspace Service Director,
Medway Norse

Summary

As requested by Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 December 2019 this report reviews the results of the last year of not using glyphosate in parks and play areas and the impact of reducing the cutting of an area of 3 feet around tree bases in public parks to once during the season.

1. Budget and policy framework

1. The ongoing use/ partial use or reduction of use of chemicals and glyphosate was agreed by Cabinet on 14 January 2020 and ongoing adoption is a decision that is within the council's policy and budget framework including the Council Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 August 2019 asked officers to review the policy on herbicides usage.
- 2.2. Recommendations were agreed by Cabinet on 14 January 2020.
- 2.3. Decision number 8/2020, the Cabinet agreed that:
 - 2.3.1. Due to conflicting opinion, glyphosate would no longer be used in children's play areas.

- 2.3.2. As the current product has been deemed safe to use by independent scientific experts working for the EU and UK Government, the service continue the adopted practice on all other green space assets.
- 2.3.3. The service continue to review usage of glyphosate herbicides in greenspace / public areas within legislation guidelines.
- 2.3.4. It was agreed that for a period of one year, an uncut area of approximately 3ft be left untreated around the base of trees in public parks, with one cut during the season.

3. Options

- 3.1. The options for the Committee to consider are:
 - 3.1.1. Continue to not use glyphosate in play areas
 - 3.1.2. Extend the long grass verge programme in areas on highways where road safety permits, to minimise spraying roadside assets.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1. Medway Norse stopped using any Glyphosate products in play areas in spring 2020, utilizing non-toxic chemicals where needed for moss treatment or foam stream (A hot water/vegetable oil product). Both base products are vegetable oil based.
- 4.2. Fence line spraying was replaced by manual strimming or leaving grass longer where suitable.
- 4.3. It should be noted that following advice from industry specialists, the current view of the UK Government body and HSE remains that the use of glyphosate, when used as instructed, is safe.
- 4.4. The new methods proved successful in 2020, in that long grass verge/asset programme has reduced glyphosate usage and resulted in no complaints about the change of asset maintenance, and has led to the programme being an adopted approach for assets on all open green space sites, not just restricted to play areas.
- 4.5. Medway Norse will continue to research and test these new products for effectiveness on weed growth and is working towards a year on year reduction of glyphosate.
- 4.6. In 2020 Medway Norse used 60% less glyphosate based products than in 2019, with a 100% reduction in play areas.
- 4.7. Tree bases, and long grass around the tree bases, has been a less successful programme in the highway areas as small areas around trees in some locations did not look as attractive, with sporadic grass circles around

trees. We will continue to review suitable sites for larger grass areas underneath trees, but we did stop all tree base spraying in these areas.

- 4.8. Tree bases/long grass around parks. It was agreed that we would leave long grass as an alternative to spraying. Where there were groupings of trees we increased larger swathes of grass areas, incorporated some sites such as Kings Frith with bulb planting, and this had positive feedback via customers and Friends of groups, to the extent some Friends of groups have also provided support with bulb planting and plant life surveys.



5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Option 1: Continue with no use of glyphosate in parks and play areas	We continue with no glyphosate spraying in play areas	Manual weeding and use of natural products	F4
Option 2: Extend long grass on highway sites where safe	Areas will have an integrated managed assets, but some areas may seem long and unkempt and risk of litter.	Promotion about use of non chemicals and visual impacts. Waste service litter collection integration when cutting the grass	D4

6. Consultation

- 6.1. No formal consultation took place, but discussions and routes for long grass verges were agreed with key stakeholders/portfolio holders.

7. Climate change implications

- 7.1. The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019 - item 1038D refers, and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 7.2. With the reduction of glyphosate spraying combined with the long verges / meadows, both of these work towards meeting targets in climate change, specifically less chemicals and less CO2 in grass cutting.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1. As there is no planned spraying of alternative chemicals on the assets, it is envisaged there are no financial implications. However, should we move to spraying assets with non-biological herbicides, such as vegetable based products, there would be a cost in delivering that programme of £7,800 per year

Proposal	Resources	Additional cost
Option 1: No glyphosate use in parks and play areas	Labour already budgeted via reduction of grass cutting	Nil
Option 2: Extend long grass / naturalised areas to parks and highway sites where safe	Machinery adaptable for longer grass	Nil, this was purchased in previous year

9. Legal implications

- 9.1. There are no anticipated legal implications

10. Recommendations

- 10.1. It be noted that Medway will continue with the integrated approach of no glyphosate use in parks and play areas
- 10.2. It be noted that Medway Norse will continue its research and testing of alternative non-chemical products for other areas that do need weed control management, shrub beds and pathways.

Lead officer contact

Sarah Valdus
Head of Environmental Services
Tele no. 01634 331597
Email: sarah.valdus@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background papers

None