



Portsmouth CITY COUNCIL

TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL

Reducing the use of pesticides on council land.

Date published: 10 November 2023

Under the terms of the Council's Constitution, reports prepared by a Scrutiny Panel should be considered formally by the Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member within a period of eight weeks, as required by Rule 11(a) of the Policy & Review Procedure Rules.

PREFACE

This TECS report is about the reduction of use of pesticides on land owned and managed by Portsmouth City

There is a more ambitious report to be done in three-five years' time to investigate the elimination (or very near) of the use of pesticides across the whole city and some of our recommendations pave the way for that.

We can say with certainty that the last two years have seen a very significant reduction in the use of pesticides across the city departments / directorates that use pesticides. The Housing Estates team have led the way and have almost eliminated the use of pesticides with no addition to budget and great benefit to the environment and biodiversity. Their approach is commended to landowners and managers across the city.

Large reductions have also been achieved by the Parks Teams and the Highways contract with Colas we had hoped to be able to measure the reduction in the use of pesticides across all 3 departments. And provide predictions on future predictions for the city council. However, meaningful combination of the data cannot yet be done and remain a recommendation of this report.

There are recommendations for Parks & Highways that take into account the particular challenges of each, not least the considerable range of different places maintained by the Parks Department e.g. no pesticides are used in the country parks but bowling and golf greens remain a significant challenge where we may need to wait for more effective products or planting schemes to be available.

The report builds on the TECS scrutiny report on biodiversity and the 22 March 2022 Cabinet report. We have relied on these and they are important source documents. We are grateful for all the work done to produce these reports. We recommend that future reporting and accountability is at least aligned and probably incorporated with reporting and accountability for increasing biodiversity.

Many people have helped us find evidence for this report. We have been interested in in opinion too and taken it into account e.g. in our proposals about communication and public education about pesticide use. We are grateful for their help.

Particular thanks are due to Philip Bentley, Head of Estates Services, Adrian Rozier, Parks Development Manager and Richard Stocks, Highways PFI, Deputy Contract Manager who have worked tirelessly to answer our questions. We are also indebted to Jane Di Dino, Local Democracy Officer who has given invaluable support throughout. Thank you all.

Councillor Judith Smyth
Chair, Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel.

Date: 10 November 2023

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Background

In July 2022 Full Council agreed the following notice of motion:

- To ask Cabinet, utilising the TECS Scrutiny Panel as appropriate, to commission trials of a wide range of nonchemical and mechanical alternatives for weed treatment and management and to request council officers report back the findings within six months.
- To ask Cabinet to involve local communities in becoming a pesticide-free city, including ensuring the council communicates the benefits of stopping pesticide use and invites residents to take part in trialling other methods of weed management.
- To request that Portsmouth City Council, through Cabinet, delivers a phased withdrawal from the use of all pesticides, including glyphosate, over a period of three years, using methods tested in the aforementioned trials. This includes all of the council's subcontractors, such as Colas.
- To ask Cabinet to take the opportunity of the best-value review of its contract with Colas in 2024 to both improve community liaison and identify ways in which Colas can change its practices to help the council achieve its environmental objectives. For example, not spraying where residents have opted out, allowing for larger and non-sprayed tree pits and other opportunities for allowing wildflowers to flourish.
- To request that the Leader of the Council provides biannual updates to members on the progress of this initiative.

On 16 January 2023, the Scrutiny Management Panel allocated it to the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety scrutiny panel (henceforth referred to in this report as the panel)'s work programme.

At its first meeting of this review on 13 March 2023 the panel comprised:

Councillor Gemma New (Chair)
Dave Ashmore
Simon Boshier
Charlotte Gerada
Mark Jeffery
Russell Simpson

The Standing Deputies were Councillors Ryan Brent, Stuart Brown, George Fielding, Graham Heaney, Ian Holder, Abdul Kadir and Benedict Swann.

From 8 June it comprised:

Councillor Judith Smyth (Chair)
Charlotte Gerada (Vice Chair)
Simon Boshier
Chris Dike
Jason Fazackarley
Mark Jeffery

The Standing Deputies are Councillors George Fielding, Graham Heaney and Leo Madden.

At its meeting on 23 March 2023, the panel agreed the terms of reference for the review:

Purpose of the enquiry including potential outcomes.

To evaluate the council's delivery of a phased withdrawal from the use of all pesticides¹, including glyphosate, over a period of three years by understanding:

- The current procedures for weed removal in the different areas: parks and public open spaces, communal areas surrounding council housing stock and citywide highway infrastructure (roads, pavements and other public realm areas).
- The steps the council is currently taking to reduce and minimise the use of pesticides.
- The trials of alternative methods of weed removal.
- How other local authorities have reduced their use of pesticides.

The scoping statement describes the topic of our work as "Reducing the use of pesticides on council land". Note also that question 2 and 3 are about herbicides rather than all pesticides.

In practice we have focussed on land that is both owned and managed by Portsmouth City Council (henceforth referred to as the council). We have not been able to get detailed responses from agencies that manage our land on a long lease - such as Crookhorn Golf course. In addition to agencies managing council land, we have also tried to learn from other landowners in Portsmouth by asking them about their use of pesticides since we think that the overall aim of the council should be to reduce/ stop the use of pesticides across the city as far as possible. However, with some exceptions the responses have been few and thin. More responses were obtained by the panel when it reviewed biodiversity and reported in March 2022, including one from the University of Portsmouth, which is useful context for this report.

The scoping document has focussed our attention on five questions. These questions are answered in our report separately below. Note that question 1 specifically refers to a three-year phased withdrawal so that our report is essentially an assessment of progress in the first year of a three-year programme. We have also taken evidence about what is likely to be achieved by March 2025 and likely exceptions that are likely to prevent the total withdrawal of the use of all pesticides on council land until new less harmful remedies are available to us.

The scoping document is attached as appendix two.

The panel met formally on five occasions to receive evidence from a number of internal and external witnesses and to consider evidence. A list of meetings held by the panel, details of the witnesses and the written evidence received can be found in appendix one. The minutes of the panel's meetings and the documentation reviewed by the panel are published on the council's website [Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel meetings](#).

¹ Pesticides includes chemicals that eliminate insects and other unwanted creatures as well as unwanted plants. Herbicides are a subset of pesticides. The most frequently used pesticide contains glyphosate.

A site visit was undertaken to see the effect of the reduction of the use of pesticides and herbicides on the appearance and management of the Buckland estate where the Housing Estates team have been changing how they work for three years.

A questionnaire was sent to 42 landowners² to find out how they manage their land and to seek their views on the council's management of its own land. Another questionnaire was sent to 22 local organisations³ seeking their views on the council and other landowners' approach to the use of pesticides. Completed questionnaires were returned from:

- Durrants Allotments Association.
- CESSA Housing Association.
- Hants & loW Wildlife Trust.
- Portsmouth Friends of the Earth.
- Baffins Pond Association.
- Milton Neighbourhood Forum.
- Portsmouth & Southsea Tree Wardens.

EVIDENCE RECEIVED

A report on the use of pesticides on council land that came to Cabinet in March 2022 (attached as appendix five) stated that in 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) identified glyphosate, the world's most commonly used herbicide, as a probable human carcinogen. Although this finding has been contested by the manufacturers of glyphosate who maintain the product remains safe to use there is general agreement that it is unsafe to use and that it reduces bio - diversity.

Regardless of whichever timescale applies to authorised use of glyphosate, there is a will by all council services to continue reducing dependency on pesticides and using alternative methods to chemical control where these are available and demonstrated to be reasonably effective. It is also understood that the appearance and functionality of places where pesticides have long been used will change. Many people will welcome these changes if they are well communicated but perhaps not all.

The national context

A Pesticide Action Network (PAN)'s Going Pesticide-Free: a guide to local authorities states that pesticides are chemicals used to control a variety of pests in a range of situations. Agriculture is the largest user of pesticides in the UK, but they are also used for amenity control of pests and weeds and by the public in their homes and gardens.

Pesticides include:

- Insecticides that kill insects
- Herbicides that kill plants
- Fungicides that kill fungal problems.

² 36 housing associations, Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth Football Club, Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust, University of Portsmouth and H&loW Wildlife Trust,

³ 8 allotment associations, Baffins Pond Association, Portsmouth & District Bowling Association, Lakeside Estate Management, Port Solent Residents Management Committee, Portsmouth Friends of the Earth, Portsmouth Cycle Forum, Portsmouth Disability Advisory Group, Portsmouth Pensioners, Milton Neighbourhood Forum, Portsmouth Tree Wardens, Portsmouth Climate Action Board, Greenpeace Portsmouth, Friends of Victoria Park and Sustrans.

A report on the use of pesticides on council land that came to Cabinet in March 2022 stated that:

3.3.1 'In 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) identified glyphosate, the world's most commonly used herbicide, as a "probable human carcinogen". This report has been contested by the manufacturers of glyphosate who maintain the product remains safe to use. Whilst there has probably been more scientific scrutiny of glyphosate than any other weed control product, the evidence relating to this remains both complicated and conflicting.

3.3.2 All products containing glyphosate have previously had to be registered and approved by the European Pesticides Commission having been subjected to a rigorous scrutiny process. From 1 January 2021, an independent pesticides regulatory regime is in operation and new decisions taken under the EU regime will not apply in Great Britain, with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) the national regulator for the whole of the UK.

3.3.3 Authorised use of glyphosate has a current EU expiry date of 15 December 2022, but the legislation introduced post-Brexit means active substance (glyphosate) approvals due to expire before December 2023 now allows extension for 3 years to allow time to plan and implement the GB review programme. Should this extension be applied to glyphosate, it will remain authorised for use until December 2025 unless the Health and Safety Executive exercises its power to review this approval at any time, should new evidence identify any concerns to human health or the environment.'

The local picture

The report also explained that:

'3.1.1 Pesticides are used by three council services in the maintenance of parks and public open spaces, communal areas surrounding council housing stock and citywide highway infrastructure (roads, pavements and other public realm areas)

3.1.2 [...] Parks and Open Spaces (Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services), Green and Clean (Housing, Neighbourhoods and Building Services) and Highways PFI Team (Regeneration). Parks and Housing operations are largely undertaken by in-house teams and highway maintenance work undertaken under our PFI contract by COLAS.

3.2.1 Strict controls are applied by the council on the pesticides that are applied to sites, with alternative methods being researched and trialled as they become available.

3.1.4 Pesticides, also known as 'plant protection products' are used to control pests, weeds and diseases. Examples include insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, molluscicides, and plant growth regulators. They can exist in many forms, such as solid granules, powders or liquids and consist of one or more active substances co-formulated with other materials. The active substance or substances within a pesticide has the controlling effect on the pest, weed or disease.

3.3.4 Regardless of whichever timescale applies to the authorised use of glyphosate, there is a will by all council services to continue reducing dependency on pesticides

and using alternative methods to chemical control where these are available and demonstrated to be effective.'

Context

The council has already reduced the use of pesticides considerably as the report shows below. A very important context for this activity and this report is the report 'A Review into Biodiversity Enhancement in Urban Portsmouth dated March 2022⁴). The report is long and detailed and describes the many ways in which many agencies are improving biodiversity across Portsmouth. We are taking the whole report, the officers' response to it at the meeting on 26 July 2022 and the minute of the Cabinet resolutions⁵ as evidence.

It is somewhat surprising that the report mentions the use of pesticides very little although recommendation 9 states '*Pesticide use be banned on council allotments*'.

Recommendation 15 is 'Phase out the use of pesticides and encourage businesses, residents and organisations to do the same too.' The conclusion was that '*Evidence was given that pesticide use by the council is not excessive or extensive, but the Biodiversity panel believes a continuing ambition to reduce it to zero is desirable. The programme for doing so should be reported to the appropriate Cabinet member on an annual basis*'.

The report on biodiversity also includes some recommendations about strategy and communications and on joint working (see below) with which we agree. In particular our recommendations recognise that the reduction of pesticide use and improving biodiversity need to be approached together in terms of monitoring results, accountability and leadership. For example, rather than recommending separate reporting and communication for pesticide use, we will propose that the reporting and communications are combined for pesticide use and biodiversity.

Recommendation: A Biodiversity Strategy be developed to cover all areas of the council's operations and the whole city.

Officers' response:

The response to developing the approach to biodiversity in Portsmouth is inextricably linked to other agendas around our approach to sustainability and the environment, including carbon reduction and the response to climate change; greening; air quality; the nature emergency; energy reduction; ocean management.

As noted by the scrutiny panel, there is now a significant opportunity as we act on the findings of the review to reassess how we are approaching these areas of work and ensure that we are reducing duplication and identifying the linkages. This will ensure that we are targeting resource at those areas of highest priority and impact, including in relation to biodiversity.

We will therefore undertake a mapping exercise to bring together the current activities focused on environmental sustainability and identify where there are opportunities to reshape resource to ensure that all priorities are being addressed, strategically and operationally. This will include bringing together the various

⁴ [Biodiversity scrutiny report.](#)

⁵ [26 July Cabinet reports and minutes.](#)

information sources that we hold on environmental assets in the city (carbon data, open space register, tree inventory etc) and convening fora to enable officers to work collaboratively across these areas.

The panel's recommendations around public engagement are welcomed. There is an opportunity to look at how we engage with the wider community on these issues collectively. Our external communications will be considered alongside the mapping exercise, and we will also look at the rich mix of partner groups in the city - including Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Portsmouth Climate Action Board, various residents and community groups - to ensure that we are working as effectively as possible with these on the agenda.

The work that has been undertaken on developing the climate change strategy is a strong starting point for the development of this wider approach to the environment in the city, and a range of key issues already relate to this. Officers will work together to broaden the scope of this strategy to ensure wider environmental and social gain is delivered, including biodiversity, and will present this work regularly through the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change.

Recommendation 3 Establish a Climate Change and Biodiversity Liaison Group in the council comprising representative officers with responsibility for biodiversity projects across each of the different departments.

Officers' response:

This officer will work with the Virtual Green Team and Portsmouth Climate Action Board to establish links with appropriate stakeholders and forums (internal and external) to co-ordinate biodiversity projects.

Recommendation 4 Establish a Climate Change and Biodiversity Public Forum to allow representatives from residents groups and third party organisations to meet and discuss ways to contribute to the city's biodiversity strategy.

Officers' response:

As above.

Representation is enabled through the Residents Consortium and Link Consortium Group via the Residents Participation Scheme (Housing Neighbourhood & Buildings directorate). Communications to be channelled through Portsmouth Climate Action Board (PCAB) (including e-bulletins). PCAB includes representation from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. The Virtual Green Team to continue to work with third party organisations. There are a number of Parks Friends Groups and volunteer groups which allow for interested parties to contribute to the city's biodiversity. Friends Groups: Rock Gardens, Canoe Lake, Victoria Park, Wilder Eastney. Volunteer Groups: Portsdown Hill, Hilsea Lines, Waterfront Garden Centre (Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services directorate).

Recommendation 5 Develop a Biodiversity Public Communications Strategy to encourage residents to take action on biodiversity at home.

Officers' response: Biodiversity Public Communications Plan to be developed by corporate communications officer in conjunction with Climate Officer, on same model as Climate Action Bulletin.

Overall, the report into biodiversity details the amount achieved in recent years to improve biodiversity and descriptions of what more needs to be done is a significant input to our investigation into the withdrawal of the use of pesticides. Significantly it provides evidence of a changing environment in which pesticides might be used. For example, de-paving so that more plants can be grown in more places and replacing traditional planting with, for example meadows or shrubs changes the context for the use of pesticides. In some cases, improving biodiversity will increase the perceived need for using pesticides, in others the reduction of pesticide use has gone hand in hand with improving biodiversity and in others different uses of pesticides may need to be considered. In all cases the environment is changing because of the need to improve biodiversity and places are looking very different with or without the use of pesticides.

Although some of the evidence we have considered was focussed very much on the consequences of withdrawing pesticides apparently with little regard for existing policies to increase biodiversity, the panel accepts the inevitability of more greenery overall. We are framing our report in the context of increasing biodiversity and accept the need for pesticide withdrawal to be in the context of a greener city with a greater area and range of planting rather than considering this review against a past status quo.

It is worth noting that cabinet members had noted that *'the council cannot stop using pesticides entirely'* but the report shows what can be done to minimise their use' Minute 56 of the cabinet meeting held on 22 March. This panel will provide information about the few exceptions (including Japanese knotweed) and make a case for a speedy withdrawal of pesticides for more general use following the example of the Estates department which has reduced use of pesticides almost to nothing at no extra cost and with no adverse effects for the workforce.

Glyphosate product usage over the last five years by the three maintenance teams.
Glyphosate Product Usage, in Litres Year Parks Housing Highways

Year	Parks	Housing	Highways/ Colas
2017	70	-	900
2018	80	-	860
2019	60	-	720
2020	80	166	540
2021	75	64	720
2022	55	10.73	560
2023	50	0.03	100

The above figures need to be read in conjunction with the following notes:

- Parks usage figures for 2017-2019 represented the grounds maintenance operations carried out by the newly established in-house team that covered the north, east and south areas of the city. These figures did not include any usage by the external contractors for the west, cemeteries, schools (under Traded Services) and golf course and unfortunately, we do not have a benchmark figure for these. In 2020, the west, cemetery and schools' maintenance also transferred in-house and in 2021 the golf course maintenance transferred in house. Therefore, the figures for 2020 and 2021, although higher than 2019, actually represented a continued reduction in overall use for all maintained areas and estimated to be a 25-30% reduction overall in those years. Since 2021, usage has continued to reduce through the adoption of alternative measures and maintenance practices, and it is estimated to have reduced by 55% overall since 2017.
- Housing usage figures for 2017-2019 are not available for representation but show a 60% reduction between 2020 and 2021 and the latest figures show current practices are using alternative methods of weed control.

Colas records represent a 35% reduction between 2017-2022, with latest usage figures to be provided. Colas are also trialling a reduced concentration product that reduces the glyphosates from 490g/l to 360g/l concentration. This represents an effective 26.5% reduction in glyphosates.

The steps the Parks Service is currently taking to reduce and minimise the use of pesticides.

Table showing reduction in glyphosate use since 2017, whilst the service has transitioned to a fully in-house service. Table data needs to be read in conjunction with the accompanying notes:

Year	Glyphosate used by in-house team, in litres	Estimated total used in-house and contracted service in litres.
2017	70	100-110 (West, cemeteries and golf externally provided).
2018	80	100-110 (West, cemeteries and golf externally provided).
2019	60	90-100 (West, cemeteries and golf externally provided).
2020	80	80 (golf externally provided)
2021	75	75 (all services transferred to in-house).
2022	55	55 (all services transferred to in-house).
2023	50*	50* (all services transferred to in-house).

Parks usage figures for 2017-2019 represent the grounds maintenance operations carried out by the newly established in-house team that covered the north, east and south areas of the city. These figures did not include any usage by the external contractors for the west, cemeteries, schools (under Traded Services) and golf course. We do not have a benchmark figure for these, but based on current applications, an estimate has been provided of the total used across all sites by both inhouse and externally contracted services).

In 2020, the west, cemetery and schools maintenance also transferred in-house and in 2021 the golf course maintenance transferred in-house. Therefore, the in-house usage figures shown for 2020 and 2021, although higher than 2019, actually represented a continued reduction in overall use for all maintained areas and estimated to be a 25-30% reduction overall in those years.

Since 2021, usage has continued to reduce through the adoption of alternative measures and maintenance practices.

It is estimated that total usage in 2017 was between 100-110 litres of glyphosate and the usage for 2023 is estimated to be 50 litres (* as this report is in-year) and therefore there has been a 50-55% reduction in use of glyphosate by the Parks Team in the last 6 years.

Other pesticides used:

- Approx. 20 litres of a selective herbicide is used annually at Great Salterns golf course and on fine turf sports areas (bowls and cricket)
- Approx. 1.5 litres of fungicide is used annually at Great Salterns golf course.

The draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy sets out the current provision as follows:

Typology	Area in Hectares	Area in m²
Amenity greenspace	81.89	818,900
Public parks and gardens	137.64	1,376,400
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	344.94	3,449,400
Play areas + provision for young people	4.15	41,500
Allotments	27.86	278,600
Cemeteries and church grounds	41.09	410,900
Outdoor sports grounds	141.79	1,417,900

There are a range of maintenance approaches adopted to each of the land types, with the Parks Team ground maintenance function carried out by 55 permanent staff supported by seasonal and casual staff. In addition, there are 4 Countryside Officers overseeing dedicated management of the city's more natural areas.

It is not possible to breakdown the amount of glyphosate used within each typology, although natural greenspace can be excluded since herbicide is not applied to this type of area (except for treating invasive species). Parks records show the following areas are identified for weed control:

Hard Surface Areas	53,541 m2 (with additional 19,387 m2 in schools)
Hard Surface Linear	14,037 lin m (with additional 9,426 lin. m in schools)
Shrub Bed Weed Control	89,336 m2
Grave Top Maintenance	4,596 graves

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These represent the total area and linear measurements in amenity greenspace, public parks and gardens, play areas and allotments that are identified as needing some form of weed control, albeit these will be targeted treatments and where weeds exist, not preventative treatments across the whole area.

How has the reduction been achieved?

The following measures have been implemented to achieve the 50-55% reduction in use since 2017:

- restricting use to a minimum - reduction in treatments carried out annually (most areas only treated once per year) and targeted treatments only.
- selective herbicides are now only used on maintaining quality of selected sports facilities (golf course, mini-golf, bowling greens and cricket).
- increased use of woodchip derived from council tree works as a weed suppressant.
- overplanting / gapping up in beds to reduce areas for weed growth to establish.
- reduced mowing regimes to create or increase environmental areas in parks and around tree bases.
- manual weed removal where small areas are being treated.

What is the target reduction by 2025?

If operating within current staffing and financial resources, the Parks Team expect to achieve a further 20% reduction in the use of glyphosate by 2025.

Glyphosate product is typically supplied with concentration rates of 360g/l and 490g/l. The team will trial more diluted application rates where the product is still used, towards achieving the projected reduction and establish whether a greater reduction is feasible.

What are the exceptions?

The council has a responsibility to control the spread of any Japanese Knotweed identified on its land and the Parks Team currently use an external specialist to treat identified sites using glyphosate.

A selective herbicide is required to maintain the tees, fairways and greens at Great Salterns golf course, greens at Southsea mini golf, the bowling greens at Milton Park and cricket tables at Langstone, Rugby Camp, Drayton and Farlington. A fungicide is required to maintain the fine turf on golf greens and bowling greens in order to maintain a surface to the required standard.

Trials of alternative methods of weed removal

The Parks Team undertook a trial of some alternative methods of weed control between March and August this year within Kingston Cemetery and the draft report is appended.

The trial evaluated the hot foam thermal treatment, glyphosate, pelargonic acid, acetic acid, wire weed brush and hand weeding, recording observations of the resource required (staff and equipment), time taken for treatment and any issues associated to the method. The results of the effectiveness of the treatment are photographically recorded.

The trial unsurprisingly concludes that glyphosate remains the most economic and effective form of weed control. However, it has confirmed the teams understanding of the practicality and effectiveness of the alternatives and this is summarised within the report conclusions.

What more can be done and by when?

The purpose of the trial was to give the team a greater understanding of the preferred approach for weed management if to stop, or significantly reduce, the use of glyphosate beyond that already being achieved.

If additional financial resource were made available to support this transition, the team's recommended approach is the addition of dedicated operatives and vehicles adopting an integrated approach, using a combination of manual tools, wire brush / sweeper and trimmers as the alternative treatment to applying herbicide. If this approach were adopted, it is suggested the following be monitored in the subsequent 12 - 24 month period:

- the weed management method employed per site / area treated.
- record any site where herbicide is still required and the reasons why (inc. invasive species)
- public / school feedback from a change to this approach and the standards attained.
- record of condition of a selection of public spaces.

Since the trial has established none of the alternative treatments are as effective as applying herbicide (glyphosate), requiring more treatments per year if to be maintained to the same standard, it is almost inevitable there will be some visual impact and public response to a change in approach.

There are two levels of resource that, with best-estimate at this time, are predicted to deliver two levels of service and the perceived change in standard of maintenance:

2-operative team, van hire and tools £72,124¹

Anticipated outcome	minimum 1 visit to each site for weed management per annum re-growth will not be treated substantial reduction in the effectiveness of weed management visible reduction in standards / evidence of weeds in public areas
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4-operative team, van hire and tools £144,248¹

Anticipated outcome:	1-2 visits to each site for weed management per annum repeat treatments prioritised to selected sites reduction in the effectiveness of weed management some reduction in standards / evidence of weeds in some areas
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1 Figures based on labour being Band 3, spinal point 4 operatives, current van hire rates, the uniform, tools and machinery required and based on each operative covering an area of approx. 50m² per hour. All subject to the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff. Staff deployment based on current site task schedule and at discretion of grounds maintenance supervisor.

1.0 Herbicides - Highways PFI Application and Use

In controlling weeds on the Project Network, herbicide use and application are summarised in table 1 below.

Product Name	Type	Treatment	Area of Application	Total Applied Quantity	Frequency of Application	Period of Application
Qualgex	Surface Biocide	Moss, Algae	Paved areas	5 litre per annum	3 per annum	Mar - Oct
Greenor	Board spectrum herbicide	Weeds	Grass areas	5 litre per annum	3 per annum	Mar - Oct
Chikara	Pre-emergent herbicide	Weeds	Street furniture (bases)	750 gram per annum	3 per annum	Mar - Oct
Mascot Hi Aktiv Amenity	Non-irritant High-load Glyphosate Herbicide [490g/l]	Weeds	Paved areas	500 - 600 litre per annum	3 per annum	Mar - Oct
Gallup Biograde Amenity	Non-irritant High-load Glyphosate Herbicide [360g/l]	Weeds	Paved areas	Trialled in 4 roads in the City	3 per annum	Mar - Oct

Since 2018 Colas has used the following quantities of Mascot Hi Aktiv Amenity herbicide on the highway network;

- 2018 = 860 litres
- 2019 = 720 litres
- 2020 = 540 litres
- 2021 = 720 litres
- 2022 = 560 litres

This year to date 400 litres has been used with the final spraying starting which will take the total to an estimated 550 - 600 litres.

Colas are trialling the use of a reduced concentration herbicide [Gallup Biograde Amenity] which reduces the Glyphosate concentration from 490g/l to 360g/l. This equates to a reduction of 26% of Glyphosate. If this year's trial is successful this will be rolled out across the network from 2024.

The other herbicides in Table 1 have also been used since 2018 and remain at the same quantities applied over whole period to 2023.

The HPFI network includes;

- 456Km of carriageway
- 767km of footway
- 27km of cycleway
- 43ha of landscaping

It is not entirely possible to breakdown the amounts of herbicide used on each typology. However, soft landscaping will only require herbicide targeting specific unwanted plants. Also, carriageways typically don't need treatment as the action of the traffic keeps the plants down. We also avoid its direct use in the drainage channels using the street cleansing to remove the detritus that encourages plant growth, although this is problematic with the amount of on street parking in the city.

Following the 2012 Sustainable Use Regulation we do not use glyphosate around schools, hospitals, old people's homes, shopfronts and play area interfaces.

2.0 Alternatives Trailed

Range of non-chemical alternatives were trailed by Colas between 2016 and 2021 are summarised Table 2 below.

Alternative	Period	Trail Area	Observations	Constraints & Limitations
Mechanical Removal Blade and Brush attachments	2016	Walton Road	Ancillary damage to paved areas and kerbing Debris - transient and 'flying'	Safety concerns - consideration of screening Too large requiring a clear pathway Noisy Cut or served weeds leaving short stem and root system in tack
Electrocution	2018	Walton Road	In-effective Non-practical	Safety concerns - compact urban environment Current generated by a 2 stroke petrol engine - noisy and fuel emissions Required temporary rolling road closure
Foam Application			All demonstrated but not specifically trailed on-street. Deemed neither practical nor suitable for use in a compact urban environment, such as Portsmouth. Additionally, some applications - not all, rendered health and safety implications, specifically Hand Arm Vibration.	
Flame				
Steam				
High Water Pressure (Hot)				

The above results were combined with the results of trials from other directorates into a paper to Cabinet on the 22 March 2022 'Use of Pesticides on City Council Land'.

The Panel requested commentary on the additional costs or savings of the alternative methods if Colas were to adopt them. This is difficult to determine due to the nature of the contract and this information would be considered commercially sensitive. For these reasons this paper will not cover this question.

3.0 Contractual Requirements

Colas have the following contractual requirements under their contract with Portsmouth City Council;

3.1 Referencing Schedule 4 Part 1:

3.2 Clause 152 Pesticide use restricted to and approved by:

- o 'UK Pesticide Guild' published by the British Crop Production Council

3.3 Clause 153 herbicides are restricted in use:

153.1 total herbicides permitted on:

- o Channel
- o Footway and paved areas
- o Base of street furniture

153.2 for weeds listed in:

- o Weeds Act 1959
- o Wildlife Countryside Act 1981

Approving application of herbicides containing glyphosate or approved equivalent.

Note 1. Nationwide product authorisation under licence.

153.3 Different herbicides to be used and applied as manufactures recommendations, on a rotational basis, to negate weed development of chemical resistance.

5.4 Clause 154 Blanket application of herbicides, require prior written consent of the PCC representative.

5.5 Clause 156 Injurious Weeds, as listed the Weeds Act 1959:

- o Common Ragwort
- o Broad-leave Dock
- o Curled Dock
- o Creeping Thistle
- o Spear Thistle.

Together with Invasive Plants, named in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981:

- o Japanese Knotweed
- o Giant Hogweed.

Note 2. The Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, include nuisance provision for the growth of 'Injurious Weeds' and 'Invasive Plants'.

5.6 Clause 165 Control of Brown Tail Moth, inflected trees and shrubs, characterised by 'tents', are pruned out during winter period and sprayed by approved pesticide to manufacturer's recommendations.

Alternative use of 'pheromone traps' is permissible. Although, from a practical perspective, vulnerable to public interference and removal.

5.7 Clause 166 Weed Control, areas forming the carriageway, pedestrian areas and cycle lanes/ways, are maintained free of weeds.

5.8 Clause 167 All areas not forming carriageway or addressed in the 'Landscaping Maintenance Plan', i.e. hard landscapes, are maintained free of weeds.

Formal amendment of Portsmouth's contract with Ensign would require a legal Deed of Variation which is a time-consuming process.

Conclusions and recommendations

This part of the report summarises our conclusions and explains how we have chosen our recommendations.

Pace of change

Overall progress has been fast across city owned and managed land. However, there is a significant range of possibilities requiring detailed measurement and monitoring. For example, there are large natural areas including Farlington marshes, part of Milton Common, Portsdown Hill and beaches where no glyphosates have been used for a long time and where they would not be used. There are also specialist locations where there are apparently no alternatives to pesticides to use over large areas if the council wants to retain current land use. This includes golf greens, bowling greens, grass tennis courts, some flower beds, perhaps some of our 'wild' meadow areas where a single species can take over.

This review is taking place early in year two of a three year plan with ambitions to eliminate the use of pesticides on Council owned and managed land by 2025. The review has taken into account what we have learned through trials, trial and error and understanding progress in other local authorities. The approaches we have used include:

- Reducing the amounts and strength of glyphosate use
- Changing the extent of land treated
- Changing the appearance of some areas
- Changing the methods of controlling unwanted plants

All of these need to work hand in hand with improving biodiversity

Estates have quietly made admirable progress and now use virtually no pesticides whilst increasing biodiversity. There were no additional costs, communication with residents is continuous and there have been no major complaints to the new ways of working. The in-house team has learned new ways of working together and experimented on the job. The reduction has been achieved by using other methods to reduce the prevalence of unwanted plants, by reducing the extend of ground requiring weed control. For example, more manual 'just in time' work using new lighter

machinery, replacing paving with planted areas, changing the type of planting and reducing the frequency of some operations. Grassed areas are generally wilder and therefore better for biodiversity. These approaches can be used with similar results on some of the land managed by Parks and also Highways.

Over the last two years Portsmouth City Council has reduced the use of pesticides by around 50% on land it owns and manages. All three departments using pesticides have reduced the amounts used significantly. Thanks are due to all those involved so far. The first recommendation of this panel is therefore to continue this work at pace. Continuing as now, even if none of the recommendations in this report are accepted by the Cabinet will continue to achieve further reductions in pesticide use across the city

However, the prospect of completely eliminating the use of pesticides before 2025 is unrealistic. Until there are effective and affordable solutions for use in specific situations such as the elimination of Japanese knotweed and the treatment of bowling greens, golf courses and specific highway locations we will need to watch and wait until better safer products are available.

In summary, we find that the fast decline in the use of pesticides can continue at a similar pace for the next two or three years using current approaches.

Although we understand that the other two departments are different, we recommend this incremental, uncontroversial, very local approach to the Parks and Highways departments. Because of the success of the Estates approach, we are not recommending the development of a grand strategy or plans, major consultations for further reducing the use of pesticides. Experimentation should continue in specific places and if necessary further trials of new products providing these do not delay incremental action and innovation in specific situations.

Accountability and measuring results

Having reviewed progress so far, we are not recommending major changes in leadership of the pesticide reduction programme even though there are three separate departments responsible, and some coordination is needed. Nor are we asking for what, in this context could be time wasting, production of big strategies, action plans or widespread consultations. We want to build on what is being achieved and enable change to continue in incremental, experimental, specific local initiatives.

We recommend that the reduction in the use of pesticides scrutinised by this panel is continued and overseen by the three departmental cabinet members. They will need to report to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Greening the City who will hold accountability for the overall reduction of the use of pesticides and improving biodiversity. We recommend the Cabinet consider a full report of progress annually, starting in November 2024 and for the report and cabinet decisions be then reported to Full council.

Each department should report on achievements since 2022, planned reduction in the coming year and achievements against targets. Parks department needs to break these figures down into their different land uses.

The main reason for eliminating the use of pesticides is to improve biodiversity. We recommend the council develop a methodology for measuring changes in biodiversity

over and above the land use' mapping that will be part of the new Biodiversity legislation that will apply to our Local Plan to be enforced in 2024.

We recommend the Cabinet to take advice from local environmental groups such as Portsmouth Friends of the Earth, RSPB, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust etc to develop an approach that involves local residents – such as annual or more frequent small- scale surveys (of vegetation, wildlife and soil quality) that would, if started soon, provide a baseline and enable scientific monitoring of the effect of reducing the use of pesticides and other greening policy. This would enhance other observations by professionals and others.

Recommendations for the Parks departments

We recommend the Parks and Highways departments continue to increase the use of non-mechanical ways of controlling unwanted plants and/or further increase the areas of land left untreated or with much reduced treatment. We are grateful for the evaluation of the trials of alternative methods of controlling unwanted plants and note the advantages of the use of vinegar (acetic acid) for use in specific situations. We request that the departmental staffing structure be reviewed to ascertain whether additional staff members are required. This process to conclude prior to the 2024/25 budget setting process, in order that any additional costs incurred (both for the 2024/25 financial year and taking into account the longer-term sustainability of any additional staffing in future financial years) can be considered for the relevant budget as part of the budget setting process.

We recommend that further work is done to enable the Parks department to ascertain where pesticides are used at the moment and what reductions are planned in each situation. In this way the reduction in use in specific situations can be closely monitored. We recommend that this is completed by November 2024 for inclusion in the annual Cabinet report of progress.

We applaud the use of information posters on site to explain changes in park management in some places especially where parks department staff communicate with the public about this. We recommend increasing the number of notices to explain other changes in land management including planting, biodiversity and the use of pesticides in future.

Regarding allotments, we recommend a target date of 2026 for the elimination of the use of pesticides following a full consultation with allotment associations and their members including the development of a city-wide policy and acceptable monitoring arrangements.

Recommendations for the Highways department

We recommend further discussions with Colas about increasing the use of non-mechanical ways of controlling unwanted plants and reduce the areas of land left untreated or with much reduced treatment, within the existing contract as far as possible. When new contract arrangements are considered reducing the use of pesticides should be central to our requirements.

Recommendation for Estates

Keep up the good work. At the right time when more estates have been 'greened' consider publicising the Portsmouth approach in the housing and environmental press, encourage site visits. Our success is worth sharing.

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Recommendation for land where services are externally procured.

We recommend that reducing the use of pesticides (and enhancing biodiversity) should be added to the council's social, environmental and economic policy as part of its Social Value statement and policies. Anyone working with the city council including contractors, leaseholders, will be expected to comply and report on progress.

We recommend that the November 2024 report to cabinet should include a review of contracts and leases regarding compliance and progress in reducing pesticide use.

Other landowners including NHS, University, Business and homeowners.

Wildlife does not respect land ownership and arguably all our efforts to improve biodiversity can be undermined if a neighbour is using pesticides. We therefore recommend that the city council develops and publishes a clear ambition to make Portsmouth a biodiverse city which is pesticide free.

Our survey of other landowners and managers revealed that most of those who responded are reducing the use of pesticides. We did not learn anything new from their experiences but gained some reassurance about progress. We recommend that the council should lead the way in influencing and persuading external agencies to reduce the use of pesticides hand in hand with 'improving biodiversity' and that members and officers representing the city in bilateral and collective meetings with these agencies routinely include city policy on biodiversity/ elimination of pesticide use in order to influence them. (See Communications below)

The Local plan has a chapter on biodiversity and now needs to include new government legislation on increasing biodiversity on new developments by January 2024. We recommend that the use of pesticides is taken into account in this as far as possible.

Public Health

We found that the council is generally very careful in its use of pesticides however we know that other some other agencies still engage in "unrestricted spraying of pesticides" and recommend that the council (Director of Public Health) is asked to include information about the risks to health of using pesticides on our website and to contribute to the November 2024 Cabinet report on progress.

Communication with the public – residents and businesses

Having taken advice about communication with the public and recognising the need for public support, understanding and involvement we recommend

1. The use of 'low cost' existing channels such as Flagship to inform people about improving biodiversity including reducing pesticides - what the council is doing and what residents and businesses could do.
2. Raising biodiversity and elimination of the use of pesticides at forums such as Shaping future Portsmouth, Hive. Meetings of landlords, registered social landlords etc (19)
3. The creation of a website page providing a regular source of information and advice about improving biodiversity including reducing pesticides (including health and safety risks of use). This to include gardening advice for homeowners and those wanting to care for tree pits etc in their neighbourhoods. It should also include, after discussion with allotment associations, advice for allotment holders as we move towards a ban of pesticide use there by 2026.

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4. Communication with all council officers, community workers and voluntary organisations who may be approached by residents who are concerned about changes in local landscapes and land management so that they can inform and reassure them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Pace of change

- 1.1. To continue to work at pace. Even if none of the recommendations in this report are accepted by the Cabinet continuing as now will be significant.
- 1.2. To aim for continued reduction in the use of pesticides on Portsmouth city council owned and managed land at the same rate as 2021 to now to 25% by November 2024. Accept slower progress in 2025 and aim to achieve a reduction to 5% of 2021 use in 2026.
- 1.3. To monitor the development and marketing of safe affordable alternatives and adopt as quickly as possible.
- 1.4. To replicate the success of the Estates Department with no additional costs, continuous communication with residents, learning new ways of working together and experimentation on the job. Using other methods to reduce the prevalence of unwanted plants, by reducing the extend of ground requiring weed control (such as replacing paving with planted areas, changing the type of planting and reducing the frequency of some operations). Accepting green areas that are generally wilder and therefore better for biodiversity.

2. Accountability and measuring results

- 2.1. The reduction in the use of pesticides should be continued to be overseen by the three departmental cabinet members. They will need to report to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Greening the City who will hold accountability for the overall reduction of the use of pesticides and improving biodiversity.
- 2.2. The Cabinet should consider a full report of progress annually starting in November 2024. The report and cabinet decisions should be then reported to Full council.
- 2.3. Each department should report on achievements since 2022, planned reduction in the coming year and achievements against targets.
- 2.4. Parks department needs to break these figures down into different land uses.
- 2.5. The main reason for eliminating the use of pesticides is to improve biodiversity. The City council needs to develop a methodology for measuring changes in biodiversity (over and above the land use' mapping that will be part of the new Biodiversity legislation that will apply to our Local Plan to be enforced in 2024).
- 2.6. The Cabinet to take advice from local environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth, RSPB, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust etc to develop an approach that involves local residents – such as annual or more frequent small scale surveys (of vegetation, wildlife and soil quality) that would, if started soon, provide a baseline and enable scientific monitoring or the effect of reducing the use of pesticides and other greening policy. This would enhance other observations by professionals and others.

3. Recommendations for Parks department

- 3.1. The Parks and Highways departments continue to increase the use of non-mechanical ways of controlling unwanted plants and/or further increase the

areas of land left untreated or with much reduced treatment. Vinegar (acetic acid) should be used in specific situations.

- 3.2. The cabinet request further analysis in time to include the additional cost of two or three staff to the department's 2024/25 budget of possible.
- 3.3. Further work should be done to enable the Parks department to ascertain where pesticides are used at the moment and what reductions are planned in each situation. In this way the reduction in use in specific situations can be closely monitored. We recommend that this is completed by November 2024 for inclusion in the annual Cabinet report of progress.
- 3.4. To increase the number of notices to explain changes in land management including planting, biodiversity and the use of pesticides in future and enable staff on site to explain to people what is happening.
- 3.5. Regarding allotments, set target date of 2026 for the elimination of the use of pesticides following a full consultation with allotment associations and their members including the monitoring arrangements.

4. Recommendations for Highways department

- 4.1. Development of a city-wide policy
- 4.2. Further discussions with Colas about increasing the use of non- mechanical ways of controlling unwanted plants and reduce the areas of land left untreated or with much reduced treatment, within the existing contract as far as possible.
- 4.3. When new service/contract arrangements are considered reducing the use of pesticides should be central to our requirements.

5. Recommendation for Estates

- 5.1. Keep up the good work. At the right time when more estates have been 'greened' consider publicising the Portsmouth approach in the housing and environmental press, encourage site visits. Our success is worth sharing.

6. Recommendation for land where services are externally procured

- 6.1. Reducing the use of pesticides (and enhancing biodiversity) should be added to the Council's social, environmental and economic policy as part of its Social Value statement and policies. Anyone working with the city council including contractors, leaseholders, will be expected to comply and report on progress
- 6.2. In the November 2024 report, the cabinet should conduct a review of and amendments to contracts and leases regarding compliance and progress in reducing pesticide use.

7. Other landowners including NHS, University, Business and home owners

- 7.1. Wildlife does not respect land ownership and arguably all our efforts to improve biodiversity can be undermined if a neighbour is using pesticides. Cabinet should agree that the council should develop and publish a clear ambition to make Portsmouth a biodiverse city which is pesticide free
- 7.2. The council should lead the way in influencing and persuading external agencies to reduce the use of pesticides hand in hand with 'improving biodiversity' and that members and officers representing the city in bilateral and collective meetings with these agencies routinely include city policy on biodiversity/ elimination of pesticide use in order to influence them. (See Communications below)

7.3. The Local plan has a chapter on biodiversity and now needs to include new government legislation on increasing biodiversity on new developments by January 2024. The use of pesticides should be taken into account in this as far as possible.

8. Public Health, safety and risk

8.1. The council (Director of Public Health) be asked to include information about the risks to health of using pesticides on our website and to contribute to the November 2024 Cabinet report on progress.

9. Communication with the public – residents and businesses

9.1. Use 'low cost' existing channels such as Flagship and social media to inform people about improving biodiversity including reducing pesticides - what the council is doing and what residents and businesses could do.

9.2. Raise biodiversity and elimination of the use of pesticides at forums such as Shaping future Portsmouth, Hive. Meetings of landlords, RSLs etc

9.3. Create a website page providing a regular source of information and advice about improving biodiversity including reducing pesticides (including health and safety risks of use). This **is** to include gardening advice for homeowners and those wanting to care for tree pits etc in their neighbourhoods. **It** should also include, after discussion with allotment **associations**, advice for allotment holders as we move towards a ban of pesticide use there by 2026

9.4. Communicate with all council officers, community workers and voluntary organisations who may be approached by residents concerned about changes in local landscapes and land management so that they can inform and reassure people.

Integrated Impact Assessment

An integrated impact assessment would be carried out when the Cabinet makes its decisions based on the recommendations set out in this report.