



Herbicide Reduction Plan

To: Executive Councilor, Alex Collis,
Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Sustainable Food and
Community Wellbeing.

Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee 27th January 2022

Report by: Alistair Wilson, Streets and Open Space – Development
Manager.

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Wards affected: ALL

Not a Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council has considered, debated, and shares the concerns from residents about the use of herbicides in the city.
- 1.2 On the 18th July 2019, the Council unanimously voted in favour of declaring a Biodiversity Emergency. In response, the Council has stopped the use of herbicides in playgrounds, parks and commons. This declaration also included a commitment to reducing and removing the need to use herbicides on highway footpaths and verges, and to find viable and effective alternatives.
- 1.3 On 22nd July 2021, the Council passed a Herbicide Motion (ref. 21/32/CN1c), which sets out a range of tasks and actions to reduce the reliance on herbicide as a means of managing unwanted vegetation on public property asset within the city.

- 1.4 This report and its accompanying proposed Herbicide Reduction Plan (HRP) Project Initiation Document (as set out in Appendix A) responds to the Council declared Biodiversity Emergency and approved Herbicide Motion.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended to approve
 - a) the Herbicide Reduction Plan Project Initiation Documentation as set out in Appendix A.
 - b) Newnham and Arbury as the two trial Wards to be completely herbicide free for 2022; and
 - c) the introduction of up to 12 herbicide free streets in addition to and outside of the two-trial herbicide free wards

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council unanimously voted in favour of declaring a Biodiversity Emergency on 18th July 2019; and this included a commitment to reducing and removing the need to use herbicides on highway verges, roads, and pavements, and to find viable and effective unwanted vegetation control alternatives. The highway verges, roads and pavements in Cambridge are the responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council, as the local Highway Authority.
- 3.2 Through collaborative working, the Council and its Highway Authority partner, Cambridgeshire County Council, have identified the opportunity to consider a range of options to stop day to day herbicide use for vegetation management across the city within the next year (2022).
- 3.3 Both Councils recognise that the city's parks, open spaces, and highway estate streets and open spaces provides significant opportunities for habitat enhancement to help buffer and connect the existing network of natural green spaces already designated and managed for their biodiversity value, for example Local Nature Reserves and County Wildlife Sites.
- 3.4 The two Councils also recognise that unwanted vegetation growing on hard surfaces associated with the city's streets and open spaces can

compromise the structural integrity of these assets and create a public health and safety risk, including slips, trips, and falls.

3.5 The Council Herbicide Motion agreed on the 22nd July 2021 resolved:

- *To explore the potential for making two wards completely herbicide-free at the earliest available opportunity on a trial basis, including:*
- *Carrying out a full assessment of the resources needed for any trial (which may include additional signage).*
- *Working with local communities in the wards identified to raise awareness of the trial and encourage participation / feedback, which may include the need for additional signage alongside other digital methods such as social media/ council website.*
- *In order to do this, to continue our assessment of the full range of alternative weed control options available (including but not limited to brush cleaning equipment) to use in the herbicide free wards (and others where possible).*
- *To assess alternative options with active involvement of Pesticide Free Cambridge representatives and frontline council staff to select the product, prior to the next planned round of treatments in 2021. This now 2022.*
- *To report back to the Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee on the differences between the herbicide-free wards and those wards that are not pesticide-free in any identified trial, and on the use of identified alternatives before the start of the 2022 cycle of treatments. This would include information about operative time and savings, or costs made, feedback from residents and operatives, and the level of any complaints or compliments.*
- *To explore the most effective methods of communicating with residents (and any additional resource implications) about any necessary herbicide applications, which may include the following commitments (both existing and additional):*
 - *publishing the planned dates of herbicide treatments by road/ward for the remainder of 2021 and thereafter on the council's website, allowing residents to find out when a treatment is planned. This is because it can take several days*

before it is clear that a pesticide treatment has been applied and residents need to be informed so that they can choose to avoid the area and to keep children and animals in particular away from the treatment sites.

- *displaying signage in situ on the relevant roads and pavements with dates of any herbicide treatments from 2022 onwards.*
- *publishing the amount of herbicide used each month and the cost to the council.*
- *To commit officer time to working with community groups who may wish to volunteer to clear their street spaces to avoid herbicide use.*
- *To complete a comprehensive assessment of the resources needed to ensure we can make Cambridge City Council herbicide free by the end of 2022.*
- *To publish a regular six-monthly update to be included in the environmental reports already made to Area Committees on any exceptional usage of herbicide (for example for Japanese Knotweed) and to establish a clear protocol for any such usage, ensuring that the least harmful options are selected, including sign off by a senior manager before any use is permitted.*

3.5 A proposed Herbicide Reduction Plan (HRP) which responds to this Motion and its associated commitments is set out in the Project Initiation Document (PID) in Appendix A.

Herbicide Reduction Plan

3.6 The Herbicide Motion agreed in July 2021 sets a requirement *to explore the potential for making two wards completely herbicide-free at the earliest available opportunity on a trial basis.* The preparatory work ahead of this report has considered the ward composition with regards property types and where herbicides have previously been used and for what purpose. Both Newnham and Arbury are proposed for the HRP trial as they afford the opportunity to consider the effect of the trial on a range of road types including terraced residential streets and private gardens as well as estate layout properties with communal gardens. An

assessment of alternative vegetation treatment methods to herbicide to be used in the trial is included in the Table below.

Table 1 - assessment of alternative vegetation treatment methods to herbicide to be used in the trial

Method	Use	Advantages	Disadvantages
Hot Foam	Weeds in hard surfaces, Moss on hard surfaces and play area safety surfacing, Grass growth around trees, Non-chemical graffiti removal	Foam holds hot water against plants Pesticide free Can be used in all weather. Kills 85% of targeted weeds	New technology needs refinement. Expensive to purchase Additional cost of fuel, diesel consumption and pollution
Hot water / steam	Weeds in hard surfaces, Moss on hard surfaces and play area safety surfacing, Grass growth around trees, Non-chemical graffiti removal	Lower initial purchase cost	Requires more treatments as heat is not held onto plant. Diesel consumption and pollution
Propane / Flame gun	Weeds on hard surfaces	Relatively cheap to purchase	Health and Safety risk Not particularly effective and very unlikely to be used.
Manual weeding	Weeds in general	Very effective if done well. Low set up costs (excluding labour)	Very time consuming Requires large amounts of labour, which add to cost

Method	Use	Advantages	Disadvantages
Mulching – bark and or membrane	Weed control within shrub borders, under trees etc.	Improves appearance of the site and retains moisture in the soil to aid plant growth	Can be labour intensive, may be expensive depending on supply of material
Vinegar based solutions	Weeds in hard surfaces	No licence required for application	Has been trialled but not has not been effective, Strong smell can give operator headache
Volunteer programmes	Weed control and championing of principles of herbicide free	Residents and Groups may have other priorities and wish to manage weeds in different ways and with alternative methods	Some Groups may not be able to resource this approach in the medium to long term.

- 3.7 The Council has a long-standing highway maintenance arrangement with the County Council, whereby the Council fulfils a grounds maintenance function for the County Council’s adopted highway assets within the city, including verge grass cutting and shrub bed maintenance; and surface vegetation treatment, including use of herbicide. As part of the preparation of the HRP, officers from the County and City Councils have met and the Chair of the County’s Highways and Transport Committee has committed to support the inclusion of County highway assets within the proposed herbicide free ward trial in Newnham and Arbury Wards.
- 3.8 In 2020, the Council agreed with the County Council the following annual maintenance ‘specification’ to control unwanted vegetation on the public highway:

- Only treating weeds in the channel¹, and the kerb line.
- Only treat the footway in tarmacked or paved areas.
- Only treat weeds at the rear of the footway where they abut buildings and hard surfaces.
- Only treat visible weeds.
- Do not carry out any weed treatment adjacent to or on grass verges.

3.9 This specification will remain in place for Cambridge wards and streets not included in the HRP.

3.10 The research completed in the HRP preparatory work, alongside feedback and requests from local stakeholders, has introduced the opportunity for a variant of the trial, which is called Herbicide Free Streets by other Councils. The Herbicide Free Streets scheme allows residents the option to opt out of herbicide use in their road/ street and take on responsibility for weeding it, without the use of herbicides, with their neighbours. The creation of a Herbicide Free Streets scheme requires a commitment of officer time to work with residents and other community groups who may wish to volunteer to clear their street spaces to avoid herbicide use. As an addition to the herbicide free ward trial, officers would like to support up to 12 Herbicide Free Street schemes across the city (outside of the proposed trial wards of Newnham and Arbury) as part of this HRP².

3.11 The County Council already has an established [volunteer programme](#)³ which allows for volunteers to undertake agreed minor works on low speed roads, including the cutting of grass, clearing verges and vegetation. As part of the preparation for the HRP some revisions will need to be made to the County's volunteering scheme information pack. The scheme does not include weed control at this time. It is also suggested that the City Council leads the Herbicide Free Street volunteer

¹ a concrete or stone structure typically located at the edge of a road designed to provide road drainage, and as a barrier to prevent vehicles from leaving the road carriageway.

² There is scope to support more streets however in 2022 it is not recommended these form part of the HRP. This is due to the uncertainty around the likely uptake and demand and the ability to plan and dedicate management resource. The preparatory work completed in the HRP to support the first twelve can be used to expand the scheme outside the scope of the HRP, so the scheme is scalable.

³ The volunteer programme trial does not include principal A class roads and those with speed limits above 20mph.

scheme in the city, as an extension of its already established and successful Streets and Open Space volunteers' scheme.⁴

- 3.12 The HRP PID set out in Appendix A is a collaborative response, between the City and County Councils, to the City Council's Herbicide Motion agreed in July 2021. The task and actions set out in the PID will help the City Council achieve the stated aims and objectives of the Herbicide Motion.

4. Implications

a) Financial Implications

A revenue budget pressure has been calculated and is summarised in the HRP - Project Initiation Document. This revenue budget pressure is the subject of the published BST bid B4861 and will fund staff resources, media and information, specialist reports and a range of assets to support the delivery of the aims and objectives of the HRP. Further details are available from the [General Fund Budget Setting Report 2022/23 to 2026/27](#), on page 55 and 77, to be considered by Strategy and Resources Committee on the 7th February 2022.

b) Staffing Implications

There has been a fixed term temporary staffing resource need identified to help develop, manage, and then evaluate the Trial elements of the Herbicide Reduction Plan, as outlined in point 4a above.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

The EQIA has identified a potential negative impact relating to Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity. An increase of weeds in pavements and footpaths does create a higher risk of slips trips and falls. This risk needs to be monitored during the trial and any webpage resource created to support the Trial must have a reporting tool so that the Council can respond to concerns raised.

d) Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications

The Plan is currently overall rated as Low Positive. The Plan has medium positive impacts on biodiversity. It has low negative ratings in respect of energy use for alternative weed control items such as hot water and

⁴ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/streets-and-open-spaces-volunteers>

foam, and a low negative rating where extensive weed growth has to be cleared, collected and processed.

e) Procurement Implications

None identified.

f) Community Safety Implications

None identified.

5. Consultation and communication considerations

In the scoping and preparation of the HRP PID a range of consultation and communication tasks have been identified. These tasks have a completion deadline of the 25th February 2022 and must be in place before the planned Project start date of the 1st March 2022.

In summary, these tasks will form an overall Project Communication Plan, to include: -

- A review of current website content
- Preparation of new website content
- Creation of press and news articles
- Creation of Trial feedback forms

6. Background papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

- a) [21/32/CNLC Pesticide-free Motion](#)
- b) [Best Practice Guidance Notes for Integrated and Non-chemical Amenity Hard Surface Weed Control](#)
- c) EQIA for the Herbicide Reduction Plan
- d) General Fund Budget Setting Report 2022/23 to 2026/27

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Herbicide Reduction Plan – Project Initiation Document

8. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Mr Alistair Wilson, Development Manager, 01223458514, alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk

Appendix A – Project Initiation Document for Herbicide Reduction Plan

Project Name	Herbicide Reduction Plan	CPO ref: 1426
Project Lead	Alistair Wilson	
Sponsor	Joel Carré	
Board	Place	

Description
<p>This PID sets out the Council’s plans to trial an alternative approach to control unwanted vegetation on some highways and housing estates in this coming year (2022) and therefore reduce the reliance upon the use of glyphosate-based herbicides.</p> <p>On the 18th July 2019, the Council unanimously voted in favour of declaring a Biodiversity Emergency. The Council stopped the use herbicides in playgrounds, parks, and commons. This declaration also included a commitment to reducing and removing the need to use herbicides on highway footpaths and verges, and to find viable and effective alternatives.</p> <p>On 22nd July 2021, the Council passed a Herbicide Motion (ref. 21/32/CNlc), which sets out a range of tasks and actions to reduce the reliance on herbicide as a means of managing unwanted vegetation on public property asset within the city. This report and its accompanying proposed Herbicide Reduction Plan (HRP) respond to the Council approved Motion</p> <p>In 2021, the last application of herbicide was made prior to the Motion. This non-use of herbicides limited the effectiveness of any proposed Trial in 2021 which responded to the Motion. This limitation was because we want to see and understand the differences between the Trial and Non-Trial areas whilst weeds are in full growth. Therefore, Officers have taken the opportunity during 2021 to develop the Herbicide Reduction Plan.</p> <p>The presence or absence of weeds is an important element of what we call local environmental quality. If a street has lots of weeds, it looks rundown and uncared for, and can attract environmental crime such as littering and fly-tipping. If weeds are left to grow unchecked their roots can cause damage to pavements and garden walls. Streets that are free from weeds, on the other hand, look cleaner, tidier, and more welcoming.</p> <p>The research completed in the HRP preparatory work, alongside feedback and requests from local stakeholders, has introduced the opportunity for a variant of the trial, which is called Herbicide Free Streets by other Councils. The Herbicide Free Streets scheme allows residents the option to opt out of weed spraying in their street and take on responsibility for weeding it, without the use of herbicides, with their neighbours. The creation of a Herbicide Free Streets scheme makes <i>a commitment of officer time to working with community groups who may wish to volunteer to clear their street spaces to avoid herbicide use.</i> As an addition to the herbicide free ward trial, officers would like to support up to 12 Herbicide Free Street schemes across the city (outside of the proposed trial wards of Newnham and Arbury) as part of this HRP.</p>

Objectives

The HRP is collaboration document and is a collective response to the Council Motion of July 2021, intended to set out the work to be completed to meet the commitments made in the Motion. In completing the HRP: -

- a) Officers will have considered a range of Wards and select two for the trial.
- b) Completed a full assessment of the resources needed for the trial.
- c) Created a communication asset to include a website resource, online feedback forms and a communications plan to seek to achieve the Motions commitment to working with local communities in the wards identified to raise awareness of the trial and encourage participation / feedback, which may include the need for additional signage alongside other digital methods such as social media/ council website
- d) Continue our assessment of the full range of alternative weed control options available (including but not limited to brush cleaning equipment) to use in the herbicide free wards (and others where possible).
- e) Identified resources to support the assessment of alternative options with active involvement of Pesticide Free Cambridge representatives and frontline council staff to select the product, prior to the next planned round of treatments.
- f) Report back to the Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee on the differences between the herbicide-free wards and those wards that are not herbicide free in any identified trial, and on the use of identified alternatives before the start of the 2022 cycle of treatments. This will include information about operative time and savings, or costs made, feedback from residents and operatives, and the level of any complaints or compliments.
- g) Explore the most effective methods of communicating with residents (and any additional resource implications) about any necessary herbicide applications, which may include the following commitments (both existing and additional); publishing the planned dates of herbicide treatments by road/ward for the remainder of 2022 and thereafter on the council's website, allowing residents to find out when a treatment is planned.
- h) Consider the commitment to displaying signage in situ on the relevant roads and pavements with dates of any herbicide treatments from 2022 onwards.
- i) Published information on the amount of herbicide used each month and the cost to the council on a website.
- j) Publish a regular six-monthly update to be included in the Environmental Reports already made to Area Committees on any exceptional usage of herbicide (for example for Japanese Knotweed) and to establish a clear protocol for any such usage, ensuring that the least harmful options are selected, including sign off by a senior manager before any use is permitted.

Deliverables
<p>A trial that considers and evaluates a range of non-herbicide management options, in terms of financial and operational management implications and vegetation management cost-effectiveness and supports and seeks to understand alternative approaches to weed control.</p> <p>Creates opportunities for contributions, collaborative working and involvement and feedback and learning from the Trial from a wide range of stakeholders, including Councillors, residents, volunteers, and community groups.</p> <p>Introduces new approaches and creates opportunity to explore new ideas and to innovate.</p> <p>Create and manage opportunities afforded to the Trial period by a Herbicide Free Street volunteering scheme.</p>

Stakeholder & Comms Plan (PID only)
To be developed for sign off at the 25 th February 2022 Milestone

Impact Assessments
<p>The EQIA has identified a potential negative impact relating to Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity. An increase of weeds in pavements and footpaths does create a higher risk of slips trips and falls. This risk needs to be monitored during the trial and any webpage resource created to support the Trial must have a reporting tool so that the Council can respond to concerns raised.</p> <p>Climate change, community safety and other considerations will form part of the Project Board terms of reference and will form part of the key findings reported back to Scrutiny Committee.</p>

Key Milestones			
WorkStream	Name	Owner	Planned Date
Project Board	Assessment of the resources needed for any Trial	Don Blair	29.10.2021
Research Phase	To explore the potential for making two wards completely herbicide-free	Alistair Wilson	24.12.2021
Research Phase	Assessing of a range of alternatives used in the Trial	Alistair Wilson	01.07.2022
Reporting	Lessons learned and knowledge sharing	Alistair Wilson	30.09.2022
Policy Drafting	Development of a service action plan to support any NEW Strategy/ methodology	Alistair Wilson	19.01.2023
Reporting	Report to Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee on the Trial	Alistair Wilson	19.01.2023
Consultation Process	Stakeholder engagement and wider consultation approved	Alistair Wilson	25.02.2022

Non-Key Milestones			
WorkStream	Name	Owner	Planned Date
Project Board	Explore methods of communicating the Trial and its intended outputs	Alistair Wilson	25.02.2022
Project Board	Reporting of herbicide use (How, when and where)	Don Blair	25.02.2022
Consultation Process	Working with local communities in the Wards	Guy Belcher	01.03.2022
Research Phase	Working with Pesticide Free Cambridge and others to assist the Trial	Guy Belcher	27.01.2022
Policy Drafting	Complete EQIAs and Climate Change rating templates	Alistair Wilson	19.01.2023
Project Board	Resourcing and supporting working parties and volunteers	Don Blair	01.03.2022
Research Phase	New Policy Formation	Alistair Wilson	30.11.2022
Reporting	Environmental Reporting at Area Committees	Don Blair	27.01.2022

Financials				
Financial Year	Budget	Forecast	Actual	Variance
2021	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
2022	£35000.00	£0.00	£0.00	-£35000.00
2023	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Total	£35000.00	£0.00	£0.00	-£35000.00

Assumptions		
Assumption	How will you test the assumption	Date to test
Use of Environmental Management System ISO14001.	Climate change policies at the forefront of new sustainable approaches. New operational improvements, resilience, and ability to anticipate and respond to shifts in position. EMS will provide an opportunity to build on existing achievements and drive more transformation.	27.08.2021
Use of Alloy to support reporting of weeds and detailing areas that are herbicide free.	The NEW software will be tested to identify where it can support the reporting of scheduled work	25.02.2022
Trial feedback will be used to inform NEW approaches and methods of working	The Project is intended to seek feedback and review a new methodology to weed control. The Project will see a wide range of views, research alternatives and formulate new service approaches, with a Policy to Committee in January 2022	04.04.2022

Dependencies

Project or initiative name	Description	Impact type	Impact description	Owner	Status	Date raised
Working to an EMS	The purpose of this Environmental Management System Manual is to provide guidance for establishing an EMS that is implemented, maintained, and continuously improved to achieve the intended outcomes.	Change of Scope	The EMS takes into consideration all compliance obligations and follows the requirements for registration under BS EN ISO 14001 - 2015 Environmental Management Systems standard and Cambridge City Council's environmental strategy.	Alistair Wilson	1 - Accepted	09.08.2021
Working with Key Stakeholders	This Project requires the involvement with a range of key stakeholders to influence and shape the Trial outcome and outputs	Change of Scope	Reaching consensus on NEW methodologies may not be achievable	Alistair Wilson	1 - Accepted	09.08.2021
Working with Elected Members	This Project relates to an agree Council Motion and has interdependencies relating to Climate Change and Biodiversity.	Change of Scope	Ensuring there is agreement with the project outputs is essential at inception and this project plan reflects the intentions of the approved Council Motion.	Alistair Wilson	1 - Accepted	09.08.2021

Risks						
Risk Owner	Category	Risk Description	Inherent Risk Rating	Residual Risk Rating	Status	Avoidance/ Mitigation Action
Alistair Wilson	Stakeholder	Failure to ensure a range of views and perspectives will influence policy development and the future vision. It is paramount that a range of stakeholders with varying levels of interest and influence are engaged in the development of the future herbicide use policy. These stakeholders could become partners to achieving the overall objectives.	6	9	Open	Prepare and have approved a stakeholder engagement plan and ensure there are mechanisms to give and receive feedback.
Alistair Wilson	Business continuity	COVID relating service pressures may influence the capacity to achieve the project development/ management work.	6	9	Open	Identify skills required and available resources from within Team. Identify alternatives and seek external support at the earliest opportunity if capacity is identified as a concern.
Alistair Wilson	Stakeholder	Failure to develop and establish partnerships between local stakeholders to deliver input and feedback during the Trial.	6	9	Open	Identify stakeholders with interest and influence at early planning stage. Ensure that the stakeholders are engaged with appropriate interventions and information.
Alistair Wilson	Change management	Failure to complete research that helps to develop a strong business case to support changes to herbicide use methodologies	4	9	Open	Identify research needs and decide on a hierarchy of importance and priorities

Issues						
Issue Owner	Category	Issue Description	Inherent Severity	Residual Severity	Status	Avoidance/ Mitigation Action
Alistair Wilson	Business continuity	COVID relating service pressures may influence the capacity to achieve the project development/ management work.	3	3	Open	Have a scale down and scale up plan should the Trial be impacted by a change in COVID status/ severity
Alistair Wilson	Change management	The Trial seeks to provide research and information to support the selection of suitable alternatives and reorganisation of work.	3	3	Open	Produce quality information and data to support service improvements. This could include time saved, financial gain, improved service delivery and improved management of service resources

End of report