

REPORT TITLE: Herbicide Free, Weed Management Work Programme and Communications Plan

To: Councillor Martin Smart, Executive Councillor for City Services & Open Space

Committee: Environment and Community Services Scrutiny Committee

20th March 2025

Report by:

Alistair Wilson, Strategic Delivery Manager

Tel: 01223 458514 Email: alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk

Wards affected:

ALL

1.	Recommendations
1.1	<p>It is recommended that Executive Councillor for City Services and Open Spaces: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) approves the work programme (appendix A) to ensure systematic implementation across all wards. b) approves the communications plan (appendix B) to support public engagement and transparency.
2.	Purpose and reason for the report
2.1	<p>This report provides an update on the implementation of the herbicide-free weed management programme for Cambridge. It outlines the planned work programme and the accompanying communications strategy to ensure effective delivery and public engagement.</p> <p>The report seeks approval for:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work programme, detailing the schedule and approach for weed management across all wards. • The communications plan, ensuring clear public engagement and awareness regarding changes to weed control methods.
2.2	<p>In line with the Council's commitment to environmental sustainability and biodiversity protection, the use of herbicides on highways, footways, and public spaces has been phased out. The Herbicide Free, Weed Management Work Programme (WMWP) sets out a structured approach to maintaining public spaces without chemical herbicides, prioritising mechanical and manual removal methods.</p> <p>The transition to herbicide free has identified that the approach presents operational and public engagement challenges, making a structured work programme and an effective communications plan essential.</p>
3.	<p>Work Programme: Implementation and Key Actions</p>
3.1	<p>The WMWP will follow a systematic deep-cleaning schedule across all 14 wards to ensure comprehensive and equitable service delivery. The work programme will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow a structured timetable, ensuring each ward receives planned deep cleaning to prevent excessive weed build-up. • Use a combination of mechanical and manual removal methods, with dedicated teams and specialised equipment such as mechanical sweepers and weed ripper brushes. • Be supported by the Cambridgeshire County Council's Highways Department, particularly in managing Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to facilitate operations in busy vehicle and pedestrian areas. • Address initial challenges, such as the backlog of weed growth

	<p>following the cessation of herbicide use, which will require more intensive efforts in the early phases.</p> <p>The programme will require ongoing monitoring and adjustments, ensuring that resource allocation, equipment use, and staff deployment remain efficient.</p>
4.	Communications Plan: Public Awareness and Engagement
4.1	<p>To support the successful delivery of the herbicide-free approach, a communications plan has been developed. The aim is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of the Council’s approach to weed management and the rationale for discontinuing herbicide use. • Encourage public cooperation, including support for reporting overgrown vegetation and reducing personal herbicide use. • Manage expectations by informing residents of the evolving appearance of streets and open spaces. • Promote the ‘Happy Bee Streets’ scheme¹ <p>Key Communications Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use multiple channels, including social media, press releases, newsletters (Cambridge Matters), and public signage. • Engage residents through interactive campaigns, such as competitions and on-the-ground video content highlighting progress. • Provide clear reporting mechanisms, ensuring residents can easily notify the Council of problem areas. • Work with external partners, including environmental groups and researchers, to reinforce the benefits of the herbicide-free approach.

¹ The Happy Bee Street scheme is an initiative aimed at promoting biodiversity and pollinator-friendly environments in urban areas. Under this scheme, residents can choose to opt out of standard weed removal practices, allowing non-invasive vegetation to remain outside their properties. By preserving flowering plants and greenery that support bees and other pollinators, the initiative contributes to ecological sustainability while enhancing the natural beauty of streetscapes. The scheme aligns with broader environmental goals, fostering a balance between urban cleanliness and the conservation of local wildlife.

5.	Corporate plan
5.1	<p>The WMWP report aligns closely with Cambridge City Council's Corporate Plan for 2022 to 2027, particularly with the priority of "Leading Cambridge's response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies and creating a net zero council by 2030." By eliminating herbicide use, the Council demonstrates its commitment to reducing environmental impact and promoting biodiversity, directly supporting its climate and biodiversity objectives.</p> <p>Additionally, the report's emphasis on community engagement through a comprehensive communications plan reflects the Council's vision of working cooperatively with residents and partner organisations. This approach fosters a united city, "One Cambridge — Fair for All," where environmental initiatives are implemented inclusively, ensuring that all residents are informed and involved in the transition to sustainable practices.</p> <p>In summary, the herbicide-free weed management approach not only addresses environmental concerns but also embodies the Council's broader goals of sustainability, community collaboration, and social equity as outlined in the Corporate Plan.</p>
6.	Consultation, engagement and communication
6.1	<p>The Communication Plan aims to raise public awareness, encourage engagement, and manage expectations regarding the transition to herbicide-free weed management.</p> <p>1. Public Engagement and Consultation</p>

- Resident Feedback Mechanisms – Opportunities for residents to report overgrown vegetation and provide feedback, particularly in communal housing areas.
- Collaboration with Partners – Joint communications with Pesticide-Free Cambridge, and other stakeholders.
- Monitoring Public Perception – Collecting feedback on changes to weed management and the effectiveness of non-chemical approaches.

2. Communication Plan has the following key messages

- How the Council is managing vegetation growth.
- How and where to report overgrown vegetation.
- Encouraging residents to adopt herbicide-free gardening practices.
- Educating the public on biodiversity and environmental benefits.

3. Communication Channels

- Social media – Regular posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.
- Press Releases & Articles – Updates in *Cambridge Matters* and *Open Door*.
- Digital Engagement – Videos showcasing on-the-groundwork and public involvement.
- Signage & Leaflets – Informing residents about the herbicide-free approach and reporting methods.

3. Planned Engagement Activities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring 2025 – Launch of a public campaign (e.g., <i>Name the Weed Ripper</i> competition). • May 2025 – Video showcasing a day of work by the weed management team. • June 2025 – Walkabout with the Executive Councillor in a well-performing ward. • July 2025 – Highlighting resident involvement in sustainable weed management <p>The communications plan ensures clear, transparent, and proactive engagement with residents and stakeholders, reinforcing the Council’s commitment to sustainable urban maintenance while addressing public concerns and encouraging participation.</p>
7.	Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact
7.1	<p>The current herbicide-free approach to weed management aligns with Cambridge City Council’s sustainability goals and is expected to deliver environmental, social, and operational benefits.</p> <p>1. Environmental Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Biodiversity Protection</u> – Removing herbicide use supports pollinators (bees, butterflies) and other beneficial insects, contributing to a healthier ecosystem. • <u>Improved Soil and Water Quality</u> – Eliminating chemical runoff prevents contamination of local waterways and preserves soil health. • <u>Reduced Carbon Footprint</u> – Sustainable weed management methods contribute to the Council’s net-zero ambitions by 2030. <p>2. Public and Community Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Health and Safety</u> – Minimising public exposure to chemical herbicides

improves overall community well-being.

- Engagement and Awareness – The communications plan encourages resident participation in weed management and environmental stewardship.
- Aesthetic Improvements – Regular mechanical and manual removal of weeds enhances the appearance of streets, parks, and public spaces.
- Enhanced Public Health & Safety: Reduces exposure to chemical weedkillers, particularly benefiting vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic illnesses or chemical sensitivities.
- Biodiversity & Environmental Benefits: Supports Cambridge City's sustainability goals by promoting eco-friendly weed management and reducing environmental risks.
- Improved Accessibility & Inclusion: Ensures that public spaces remain accessible for all, including individuals with disabilities and mobility challenges.
- Community Leadership & Inspiration: Sets a positive example for other communities looking to adopt greener and more inclusive urban maintenance practices.

3. Operational and Strategic Benefits

- Alignment with Corporate Priorities – Supports the Council's climate action commitments and long-term sustainability strategies.
- Resilient Public Realm Maintenance – Transitioning to non-chemical methods ensures long-term viability amid changing environmental regulations.
- Cost-Effective in the Long Run – While initial investment in equipment and staffing is higher, long-term operational costs may stabilize as

	maintenance becomes more efficient.
8.	Implications
8.1	Relevant risks
	<p>Short-Term Public Concerns – Some residents may initially perceive more visible weeds; proactive communication will manage expectations.</p> <p>Operational Adjustment Period – Initial phases will require additional resources to clear the backlog of growth, but efficiencies will improve over time.</p>
	Financial Implications
8.2	<p>Higher Initial Costs – Investment in mechanical equipment and additional staffing will increase short-term expenditure.</p> <p>Potential Long-Term Savings – Reducing herbicide purchases and regulatory compliance costs may balance expenses over time.</p>
	Legal Implications
8.3	<i>None identified</i>
	Equalities and socio-economic Implications
8.4	<p>Key Positive Impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved Accessibility – Regular weed management will prevent overgrowth on footpaths and pavements, reducing the risk of slips, trips, and falls, particularly benefiting older adults, people with disabilities, and pregnant individuals. ● Public Health Benefits – Eliminating herbicides reduces exposure to harmful chemicals, supporting community well-being. ● Enhanced Urban Environment – Streets and open spaces will be better maintained, improving overall public realm quality.

	<p><u>Key Considerations and Monitoring:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment Before Cleaning – Areas will be inspected to ensure accessibility needs are met. • Ongoing Public Engagement – Residents can report concerns about weed growth and accessibility issues. • Collaboration with Partners – Work with Cambridgeshire County Council and other stakeholders to address potential challenges. • Annual Review – The Equalities Impact Assessment has been updated in March 2025 to ensure ongoing evaluation of impacts. <p>The mechanical weed removal approach is expected to have a largely positive impact on accessibility and public health while supporting biodiversity and sustainability goals. Continuous monitoring and community engagement will help mitigate any emerging concerns.</p>
	<p>Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications</p>
8.5	<p>The net zero, climate change and environmental impacts of the decision have been rated as low positive using the Climate Change Rating Tool. Climate Change Ratings</p> <p>The transition presents opportunities for improved public and ecological health by eliminating herbicides this protects pollinators, improves biodiversity, and reduces chemical exposure. The transition also presents some potential aesthetic challenges with some areas to appear less manicured during the transition, requiring public expectation management.</p>
	<p>Procurement Implications</p>
8.6	<p>None identified</p>

	Community Safety Implications
8.7	None identified
	Other implications
8.8	<p><u>Operational Implications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased Labour Requirements – Manual and mechanical weed removal is more labour-intensive than herbicide application. ● Need for Scheduling Adjustments – The deep-cleaning programme requires careful coordination across 14 wards to maintain efficiency. <p><u>Environmental and Health Implications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved Public and Ecological Health – Eliminating herbicides protects pollinators, improves biodiversity, and reduces chemical exposure. ● Potential Aesthetic Challenges – Some areas may appear less manicured during the transition, requiring public expectation management. <p><u>Community and Reputational Implications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public Engagement and Education Needed – Effective communication is required to explain changes and encourage resident cooperation. ● Alignment with Corporate Priorities – Strengthens the Council’s leadership in environmental sustainability and climate action. <p><u>Regulatory and Policy Implications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compliance with Environmental Standards – Supports national and local biodiversity targets.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation Required – Data collection on effectiveness will inform future policy adjustments.
8.9	While the current transition presents short-term operational challenges, the long-term environmental, health, and reputational benefits align with Cambridge’s commitment to sustainability. Effective planning, communication, and adaptation will be essential for success.
9.	Background documents Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
9.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24/24/EnC Herbicide Reduction Plan – Environment and Scrutiny Committee 24th March 2024 • 21/32/CNLC Pesticide-free Motion • Best Practice Guidance Notes for Integrated and Non-chemical Amenity Hard Surface Weed Control • The County Council’s Highways and Transport Committee report of Highway Standards for Weed Control 23rd January 2024 • EQIA for the Herbicide Reduction Plan • Mechanical Weed Removal (kerstenuk.com)
10.	Appendices
10.1	Appendix A – Herbicide Free, Weed Management Programme Appendix B – Communication Plan Appendix C – Equalities Impact Assessment
	To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Alistair Wilson, Strategic Development Manager, 01223458514; alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk