Meeting:	**Cabinet**	**Date:**	**12 March 2025**
Subject:	**Gloucester Glyphosate Reduction Strategy (GGRS)**		
Report Of:	**Cabinet Member for Environment**		
Wards Affected:	**All**		
Key Decision:	**No**	**Budget/Policy Framework:**	**Yes**
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Appendices:	**None**		

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To set out the rationale for a managed reduction in the Council's use of the herbicide glyphosate – commonly known by the brand name 'Roundup' – and other herbicide for the purpose of removing plants from the public realm.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is asked to **resolve** that:

(1) Council officers conduct a review of Gloucester City Council's district-wide glyphosate use as part of a glyphosate reduction programme in the year-one work schedule of the forthcoming Gloucester Urban Greening Strategy (GUGS).
(2) The Council maintains the 2024 weed reduction schedule – which resulted in a 50% reduction in glyphosate use relative to 2023 – as a starting point for further possible glyphosate reduction measures.
(3) Officers begin eliminating glyphosate spraying from high footfall areas, such as the city centre, where the likelihood of excessive plant growth is low.
(4) Officers identify a series of trial streets – both residential and non-residential – alongside a series of control streets to gauge the impact of glyphosate reduction on cleansing operations, public perceptions, and other key indicators.
(5) The Council reserves the right to use herbicides and manual plant removal in the case of excessive or obstructive plant growth and removal of invasive/dangerous plants such as Knotweed and Giant Hogweed.

3.0 Background and Results

3.1 In recent years, concern has been expressed about the potential public health impacts of glyphosate, which is a widely deployed broad spectrum herbicide and desiccant routinely used by local authorities in low quantities to control the growth of plants in the public realm[1].

[1] European Commission, *Glyphosate*, Accessed: 07.03.25

3.2 These concerns stem from the classification of glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans"[2] by the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer and through high-profile court cases in the United States of America[3].

3.3 This classification should, however, be placed in context of concentration and formulation. Alcohol, for example, though consumed widely and legally, is a Group 1 Carcinogen[4].

3.4 Public exposure to glyphosate from 'weed management' in Gloucester is extremely low in both absolute volumes used and because of 'micro-dosing', which involves applying glyphosate in extremely small doses directly to individual plants.

3.5 Glyphosate is currently approved as an active substance for use in pesticide products in Great Britain. As part of its renewal assessment, the Health and Safety Executive, as the Government's expert regulator for pesticides, regularly conducts thorough and robust scientific risk assessments to determine if the approval of glyphosate should be renewed in line with assimilated Regulation 1107/2009 of the GB plant protection products legislation.

3.6 The Government's current view is that glyphosate does not pose a public health threat, which includes the small quantities it is sprayed by local authority operatives; hence why it has been approved for use in line with the process laid out in 3.5.

3.7 However, it is indisputable that, as a herbicide, glyphosate is indiscriminate in its elimination of plants in the public realm, removing an important food source for insects.

3.8 Gloucester City Council is committed to minimising its environmental footprint, with several extant and forthcoming policy documents stating this explicitly. Arresting the widely reported rapid decline of insect life is therefore a priority for the council. 'Weed' management via glyphosate and other herbicides runs counter to these ambitions.

4.0 Principles for Managed Reduction of Glyphosate

4.1 Wild plants growing in the public realm is an inevitable consequence of herbicide reduction, but such growth can enhance the aesthetic of the streetscape when well-managed.

4.2 Notwithstanding, the Council is aware that some local authority glyphosate reduction and elimination programmes have met with various challenges when implemented and therefore that any plan to reduce the spraying of herbicides locally should be governed by the following principles to ensure maximum likelihood of successful implementation and public acceptance:

- **Incrementalism** – herbicide reduction should take place in a managed, gradually fashion.
- **Money-saving or cost neutral** – herbicide reduction should preferably lead to lower maintenance costs but should not exceed inflation-adjusted existing costs.

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[2] *IARC Monograph on Glyphosate*, International Agency for Research on Cancer, 19.08.18
[3] NPR, *Groundskeeper Accepts Reduced $78 Million Award In Monsanto Cancer Suit*, 01.11.18
[4] World Health Organization, *No level of alcohol consumption is safe for our health*, 28.12.22

- **Quietly impactful** – herbicide reduction should achieve its environmental and aesthetic goals without resulting in public realm obstructions.
- **Safety of workers and public** – when the Council needs to seek recourse to herbicides for the reasons stated in 2.1(5), it will ensure that operatives operate fully within the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH).

4.3 Further, alongside the reduction in glyphosate to manage plant growth in the public realm, the Council will also utilise its existing mechanical weed removal machine and a second unit, now purchased and on order, for which funding was allocated in the 2025-26 Budget.

4.4 Although mechanical plant removal removes the insect food source referred to in 3.7 and 3.8, it does so in the least ecologically impactful manner and, as part of a street cleansing operation, can be undertaken a zero marginal cost.

5.0 Social Value Considerations

5.1 None

6.0 Environmental Implications

6.1 These are contained within the body of the report.

7.0 Alternative Options Considered

7.1 The City Council could continue to undertake widescale use of herbicides to control plant growth in the public realm, but such a course of action would undermine its ambitions to reduce its ecological footprint and assist in the reversal of local biodiversity decline.

8.0 Reasons for Recommendations

8.1 To fulfil the Council's ambitions to reduce herbicide use while limiting public concerns about a changing public realm through a managed withdrawal from herbicide use and the retention of backstops that allow for glyphosate and/or other herbicide use in specific circumstances, such as for the control of invasive or dangerous plant species.

8.2 The recommendations of this strategy have been specifically designed to avoid 'termination shocks' associated with a cliff-edge elimination of herbicides for plant control.

9.0 Future Work and Conclusions

9.1 The next stage will be to integrate the recommendations of this report, if approved, into the forthcoming Gloucester Urban Greening Strategy.

10.0 Financial Implications

10.1 Funding has been allocated for the acquisition of a mechanical weed removal machine in the 2025-26 Budget. As regards the wider programme, this will be underpinned by a "money-saving or cost neutral principle" (see 4.2).

11.0 Legal Implications

11.1 Officers will work with One Legal to ensure the policy is consistent with all local authority statutory and legal requirements.

12.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

12.1 Failure to approve publication of the Gloucester Glyphosate Reduction Strategy would result in the Council having now managed process for herbicide reduction in line with the Council leadership's ambitions in this area.

12.2 Appropriate consideration will be given to management of financial risk and opportunities associated with the delivery of projects associated with Gloucester Glyphosate Reduction Strategy.

13.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

13.1 To follow.

14.0 Community Safety Implications

14.1 If not conducted in a managed, deliberately curated way, the council's herbicide reduction programme runs the risk of creating the 'broken window syndrome' perception amongst some residents who may see plants growing in the public realm as a sign of public services being withdrawn, incorrectly fuelling the idea that the council has 'given up'. This, in-turn can lead to feelings of alienation and fear amongst residents. The programme, including associated communications, should therefore be carefully curated to avoid such outcomes.

15.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications

15.1 None.

Potential Media Interest – to be completed for SMT/Cabinet Briefing purposes. Remove prior to publication of report. Draft report to be sent pressoff@gloucestershire.gov.uk.

Background Documents: None