

17 September 2020

Report of	Assistant Director of Environment	Author	Rosa Tanfield David Carter
Title	Greening Colchester Policy		
Wards affected	All Wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 It is the aim of Colchester Borough Council to stop using glyphosate-based products by a phased reduction of use on its land and land owned by partner organisations, Colchester Borough Homes and Amphora.
- 1.2 With the ever increasing awareness of the environment and undesirable effects of glyphosate based herbicides, both to the staff concerned with applying them, the general public and the environment as a whole, alternative methods are being identified and researched at all times, and strict controls are being made by Colchester Borough Council on those herbicides that are still being applied on our sites.
- 1.3 This policy sets out how the Council proposes to reduce, monitor and control the use of glyphosate-based products and how it will use alternative methods for the control of unwanted vegetative growth on Council owned land. As there continues to be emerging new methods, learning and understanding, this document will be frequently reviewed, updated and changed to align to the latest and most appropriate approaches.
- 1.4 This policy relates to glyphosate-based products used by Colchester Borough Council and appointed Council contractors carrying out all grounds maintenance operations for the Council on Borough owned land. Where possible Colchester Borough Council will encourage glyphosate free/reduced use across the Borough including advice to internal and external partners, Town and Parish Councils, businesses, schools and other organisations who may use glyphosate-based products for the control of weeds, moss and lichens.
- 1.5 As part of the council's commitment to the phased removal of the use of glyphosate-based products this policy is also to stop or reduce grass cutting in specific areas. Changing the management regime can improve the biodiversity and visual amenity of the grass verges. These areas will be left to re-wild and be managed as wildflower areas or left to naturalise as woodland. Each location will be assessed on a site by site basis for suitability and health and safety.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To recommend to Cabinet to approve the phasing out of the use of glyphosate-based chemicals (herbicides) in grounds maintenance operations on CBC owned land and trial alternative methods of weed control as set out in this report and appendices.
- 2.2 To recommend to Cabinet to approve a change in grass cutting frequency on selected grass verges and areas of open space to be managed as areas to encouraged wildflower or naturalisation as set out in this report and appendices.
- 2.3 To recommend to Cabinet to delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Environment to make minor changes to the Greening Colchester Policy should it be necessary. Any changes considered by the Assistant Director for Environment to be significant will be reported back to the Environment and Sustainability Panel.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 One of the key priorities of the strategic plan for 2020 – 2023 is tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability, a key element of which is to conserve and enhance biodiversity across Colchester.
- 3.2 The decision supports the Council's commitment to encouraging biodiversity and reducing environmental impact across the Borough.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options. The Council made a commitment in 2019 to phase out the use of glyphosate-based products used in grounds maintenance.
- 4.2 All products containing glyphosate are registered and approved by the European Pesticides Commission. The licence for the use of glyphosate expires in 2022.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 Colchester Borough Council aims to provide a high standard of grounds maintenance for all of its sites within the Borough. These sites include parks, recreation grounds, countryside sites, sports fields, open spaces, cemetery and crematorium, play areas, beachfronts, highway verges and Colchester Borough Homes housing areas. To achieve these high standards, a high reliance has been made on the use of glyphosate-based herbicides to control or eradicate unwanted vegetation. For example, spraying obstacles in the grass and fence lines.
- 5.2 On 17 July 2019, Colchester Borough Council declared a climate emergency, acknowledging that urgent action was required to limit the environmental impacts produced by the climate crisis. One of the main actions from the declaration was the formation of the Conservation and Environmental Sustainability Task and Finish Group.
- 5.3 In November 2019, the Council's Cabinet committed the Council to end the use of potentially harmful glyphosate weed killer. The decision followed a recommendation from the Council's Environmental Sustainability Task and Finish Group, who advised Cabinet that the change would encourage biodiversity and reduce environmental impact.
- 5.5 Due to large scale habitat loss in the countryside, and large-scale pesticide uses in agriculture, wildlife such as birds, insects and bees are seeking refuge in our towns. This makes it very important that within our areas, we create safe, glyphosate reduced, or ideally free, areas. More information on glyphosate pesticide is provided in Appendix 1 (Appendix A of the policy).
- 5.6 Unwanted vegetation control (or weed control) measures are currently in place for the following areas across the Borough (Appendix 1 (Appendix C of the policy provides images of typical areas where weed control measures are in place):
- Shrub Borders
 - Cultivated mowing margins
 - Fence lines (adjacent to footways, parks, play areas, etc)
 - Grass obstacles (bollards, post and rail fencing, etc)
 - Hard surfaces (e.g. car parks and footways)
 - Hedge lines and tree bases
 - Around beach huts
- 5.7 Several sites to stop or reduce grass cutting have been identified for a trial and shown in Appendix 1 (Appendix E of the policy). These sites will be monitored to identify the impact of reduced grass cutting on the existing habitat and local area.

Alternatives to using glyphosate-based products

- 5.8 Non-glyphosate-based methods of vegetation control will be used as a first choice wherever possible. The number of alternatives is currently limited but with the current concerns over the use of glyphosate-based products it is likely that the range and number of alternative methods will increase significantly in the future.
- 5.9 Currently there is no like for like replacement for glyphosate which can be used on all areas currently sprayed. It is proposed that a range of alternative methods will be used to control weed growth and unwanted vegetation. Alternative methods of weed control is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Alternative methods of weed control

Method	Use	Advantages	Disadvantages
Hot Foam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weeds in hard surfaces Moss on hard surfaces and play area safety surfacing, Grass growth around trees, non-chemical graffiti removal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foam holds hot water against plant. Pesticide free. Can be used in all weather. Kills 95% of targeted weeds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New technology – needs refinement. Expensive to purchase Additional cost of plant oil extract, diesel consumption and pollution. Amount of water used. Noise from diesel generator, foam left on pathways after application. Hose cannot be left on grass when being used as heat will mark the grass, addition cost for a hose guard.
Hot Water / Steam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weeds in hard surfaces, play area surfacing, non-chemical graffiti removal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower initial purchase cost. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires more treatments as heat is not held onto the plant. Diesel consumption and pollution. Amount of water used.
Propane / Flame gun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weeds on hard surfaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively cheap to purchase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health and Safety Risks. Not particularly effective.
Manual Weeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weeds in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very effective if done well. Low set up costs (excluding labour). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very time consuming. Requires large amount of labour which adds to the cost.
Mulching – bark and or membrane.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weed control within shrub borders, under trees etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves appearance of the site and retains moisture in the soil to aid plant growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be labour intensive. May be expensive depending on supply of material.
Mowing and hand pulling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undesirable weeds in sensitive natural habitats and on farmland Weed control around fence lines, bollards and obstructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No licence required and no damage to the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be labour intensive to carry out and expensive for disposal of specific species. It can be difficult to cut close to fence lines, bollards and obstructions.
Intensive grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undesirable weeds in sensitive natural habitats and on farmland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wildlife friendly with sufficient control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not suitable for all ground conditions and can damage sensitive soils.
Vinegar based solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weeds in hard surfaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No licence required for application. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has been trialled but has not been effective. Strong smell can give operator headache.
Non glyphosate chemicals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weeds in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very effective, natural fatty acid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher cost per m2 than glyphosate. Different non glyphosate chemicals will need to be used as no one product can be used on all surfaces.

Approach to reducing glyphosate-based weed killer 2020/21

Glyphosate free parks and open spaces

- 5.10 The aim of creating glyphosate free sites is to create areas which are safe for children, adults and wildlife. These sites and parks will be signposted as glyphosate free so that everyone knows that they can use the parks safely and only environmentally friendly solutions will be used.
- 5.11 All these sites will become safe havens for wildlife. Wherever possible we will also promote the creation of wildlife friendly habitats and pollinator plants.
- 5.12 Colchester Borough Council will phase out the use of glyphosate-based products from April 2020 to end March 2021 on the following sites:
- Castle Park
 - Castle Park Sports Ground
 - The Recreation Ground, Old Heath
 - Mile End Sports Ground
 - Lexden King George
 - West End Sports Ground
 - Shrub End Sports Ground
 - Mill Road Sports Ground
 - All children play parks maintained (74 sites)
 - All Parkland (23 sites)
 - Open Spaces (these include small areas of land in housing estates approx. 189 sites)
 - Non HRA 190 (former Housing land which is now public open space)
 - West Mersea Beach huts (384)
 - Closed Churchyards (16)
- 5.13 Appendix1 (Appendix B of the policy) sets out the individual sites maintained by Colchester Council and identifies possible alternative methods for weed control using non-glyphosate-based methods.

Glyphosate free beach huts

- 5.14 The Council will consult with Beach Hut owners during 2020/21 and explore options on stopping the use of weed killer around the perimeter of Beach Huts, allowing native plants to grow and naturalise, and/or exploring options for owners to plant and maintain their own areas.

Obstructions in verges

- 5.15 The location of post and fence rails, posts and bollards within grass verges mean that close cutting with mowers is difficult to achieve. Spraying is usually therefore undertaken. Removing the items will enable full mowing and negates the need for spraying or weed treatment. Therefore, when items are broken or removed, Officers will assess whether items should be replaced based on need

for health and safety, inconsiderate/illegal/unsafe parking or where there is another clear need.

Grounds maintenance specifications

- 5.16 To ensure that Council's contractors comply fully with the Council's requirements, all grounds maintenance specifications will include detailed information of the Council's Greening Colchester policy, the requirements for glyphosate free /reduced areas and conditions for the use of glyphosate-based herbicides where essential. The use of glyphosate-based herbicides will not be permitted in any contract unless no other suitable alternative is available.

Community enabling

- 5.17 The Council will engage and educate the community in helping to create a greener environment to live and work by reducing the use of glyphosate used in the home and garden. A number of home and garden weed killers are now available glyphosate free.
- 5.18 The Council will work with existing community and volunteer groups, in addition to supporting new groups and networks in order to build community capacity to support the maintenance of green spaces and play areas, to reduce the use of glyphosate to control weeds in areas where children play.

A combined approach with chemical based products

- 5.19 Although every effort will be made to use non-glyphosate-based methods of control, there will still be some areas where alternative methods are not currently available or effective. Wherever this is the case, integrated control will be practised wherever possible i.e. a combination of cultural and herbicide use to resolve a problem with the least impact on the environment.

Fine turf areas

- 5.20 One of the main areas where chemicals will still be used will be for maintaining fine turf areas such as bowling greens, cricket squares and tennis courts. These areas are maintained to a high standard to allow the games to be played to a good standard and to meet the expectations of the customer. The use of chemicals will be minimised to only be used where necessary and no alternative method is available.
- 5.21 Selective herbicides will be permitted for use on fine turf and sports pitches to control broadleaf weeds. Selective weed killing will only take place where there is weed growth affecting the use of the area of play and will not be applied where there is not a weed problem. Hand weeding where possible will always be encouraged as the preferred method.

Tree stump regrowth

- 5.22 The use of herbicides will be permitted for the control of tree stump regrowth to restore and maintain valuable ecological grassland habitats and to stop the spread of invasive non-native trees. This may also be carried out for areas

where stump grinding is not viable. Eco-plug is currently used to control tree stump regrowth on Council land. Eco-plug contains 204mg of glyphosate and is driven into a drilled hole in the tree stump. Once the plug is inserted the opening is sealed so that no substance can escape resulting in only the selected tree coming into contact with the chemical.

Fungal attacks

- 5.23 Fungicides will be permitted to be used to prevent and remove fungal attacks on grass. Where practical grounds maintenance improvements such as increased aeration/brushing have and will continue to be increased in grounds maintenance specifications to reduce the occurrence of fungal attack and therefore reduce the need for fungicide application.

Inaccessible or difficult to reach locations

- 5.24 The maintenance of hard surfaces such as paths, garage blocks, on a large scale may still require the use of herbicides where other methods cannot be used i.e. inaccessible to Foamstream machines. However, where this operation is carried out, weeds will be individually targeted by applicator reducing the amount of herbicide used and preventing any excess herbicide being lost into the environment.

Invasive and destructive weeds

- 5.25 The only other occasion where glyphosate-based herbicides will be applied is for one off operation to control the spread of invasive weeds such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed. On all these occasions a glyphosate-based pesticide will only be used if no alternative method is suitable.

Timeline to phase out the use of glyphosate-based products 2020-21

- 5.26 Colchester Borough Council will phase out the use of glyphosate-based products from use in grounds maintenance operations from April 2020 over a 12 month period until end March 2021 where an alternative method of weed control can be identified.

Site **2020**

All children play parks maintained (74 sites)
West Mersea Beach huts (384)
The Recreation Ground, Old Heath
All Parkland (23 sites)
Open Spaces (these include small areas of land
in housing estates approx. 189 sites)
Castle Park
Castle Park Sports Ground
Mill Road Sports Ground

Glyphosate free from

April 2020
April 2020
April 2020
September 2020
September 2020
September 2020
September 2020
October 2020

2021

Mile End Sports Ground	March 2021
Lexden King George Sports Ground	March 2021
West End Sports Ground	March 2021
Shrub End Sports Ground	March 2021
Non HRA 190 (former Housing land)	March 2021
Closed Churchyards (16)	March 2021
Highway verges	March 2021
CBH Owned Land	TBC
Estates (Amphora) Owned Land	TBC

5.27 Officers are currently working with partners Colchester Borough Homes and Amphora to identify a way that phases out the use of glyphosate on these areas of land but still maintains the grounds maintenance expectations and requirements of their customers.

5.28 It is estimated that by the end of March 2021 the use of glyphosate-based products in grounds maintenance activities carried out by CBC will be reduced by 95-98%. This will be constantly reviewed and monitored as alternative methods to control weed growth are trialled.

Currently the use of glyphosate-based products has reduced by 100% on the following areas:

- Play Areas
- Castle Park
- The Recreation Ground, Old Heath.
- Parkland and Open Spaces
- West Mersea Beach Huts

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan, and is Attached to this report as Appendix 2.

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 The Strategic Plan is relevant, in particular in contributing towards priorities under the themes of Responsibility (encouraging everyone to do their bit towards making our borough even better) and Opportunity (promoting and improving Colchester and its environment)

8. Consultation

8.1 There are no consultation implications.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 The Greening Policy is new to Colchester and may/will warrant press attention. Communications will be prepared to inform relevant parties.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 Alternative methods of weed control may increase the cost of the ground's maintenance contract after the trial even though the aim is to work within agreed budgets.

11. Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no Community Safety Implications.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 There are no Health and Safety Implications.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 There are no Risk Management Implications.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 The use of glyphosate-based herbicides can have a devastating effect on our environment and its biodiversity. When used on hard surfaces, such as pavements, there is a possibility of run off or residues which can contaminate water courses and contaminate aquatic wildlife. They may kill plants which are beneficial and relied upon by birds, insects and other wildlife. When used on soft surfaces, such as vegetation or grass swards, there is a possibility of spray drift and contamination of adjacent areas.
- 14.2 This report sets out the Council's aims and plans to reduce the use of glyphosate-based herbicides, whilst also considering the permitting of long grass to encourage biodiversity and reduce environmental impact.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Greening Colchester Policy – The use of Glyphosate based products for Grounds Maintenance.

Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment.