

REPORT TO ENVIRONMENT AND GENERAL PURPOSES  
COMMITTEE  
**CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL WEEDSPRAYING**



**Report Reference** EN-21-11  
**Meeting Date** 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021  
**Agenda Item** 8  
**Prepared by** Town Clerk

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

At the Environment working group meeting in May, members agreed that the current Cheshire East Council policy of spraying weeds/grass around trees/lampposts was unfavourable and that Cheshire East Council should be petitioned to change it and that the Town should receive something in return of the spraying stopping in lieu of the time it takes. It was agreed that in the first instance the Town Clerk should obtain more information on the practice, namely the frequency with which spraying takes place and exactly which spaces are affected (highway only, green spaces etc).

### **1.2 INFORMATION FROM CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Information was obtained from both ANSA and Cheshire East Highways.

Cheshire East Highways confirmed that the weed spraying it undertakes is limited to the footway, top of the kerb and the channel where the kerb meets the road. This is undertaken once annually at a cost of around £50,000 across the borough.

ANSA maintain the verges and undertake weed spraying four times per year as part of the grass cutting regime. Spraying takes place around the bases of trees, lampposts, fenceposts, along fence lines, around grids, play equipment and path edges. The operative is on a fortnightly work schedule, spraying every three months. The chemical takes two weeks to work and is a glyphosate compound which kills organic matter. It takes approximately two weeks (within the three-month cycle).

## **2.0 DISCUSSION**

At the previous meeting, members expressed the desire that no spraying should take place. It was noted that it leaves unsightly yellow patches and is harmful to pollinator insects. The World Health Organisation has concluded that glyphosate based weed killer was “probably carcinogenic to humans”.

### **2.1 POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

2.1.1 Weed spraying is used as an alternative to strimming to control growth around areas where otherwise strimming would be required. It should be noted that to trim areas rather than

spray would likely take at least three times longer<sup>1</sup> than spraying and be required more frequently.

- 2.1.2 The Town Ranger uses similar weed killer to control weeds in some areas e.g. alleys and the town centre. If the council looks to have a zero-weed killer policy it would need to consider alternatives for its own weed control too.
- 2.1.3 Alternatives to weed spraying in areas where growth must be controlled include manual weeding (extremely time consuming), flame guns (not particularly effective), steam (requires frequent treatments and results in pollution from generator use) and hot foam (new technology, expensive to purchase, pollution from generator use).
- 2.1.4 In some areas, such as around the base of trees, mulching could be an alternative. This involves installing a weed membrane and annual application of mulch. This incurs annual cost and labour time. Mulching would look incongruous around lampposts etc.
- 2.1.5 In some areas, such as around lampposts and trees it may be possible to implement planting schemes which can be mown around. For example, a mix of bulbs flowering across different seasons would make an attractive display that would make the unmown grass look intentional rather than neglected.
- 2.1.6 A number of district councils have begun to move away from weed spraying. Some councils offer communities/residents the option to request areas are not sprayed on the undertaking they will undertake the work themselves (e.g. Manchester City Council) whilst others have moved to alternative solutions such as hot foam treatment (e.g. Lewes District Council).
- 2.1.7 The committee should consider its goal; some questions it should consider are:
  - Does it want a complete stop on all herbicide use in Knutsford/the borough?
  - Does it want to stop the yellowing/killing of areas around obstacles?
  - Would it be content for weeds to grow in areas where weed spraying currently takes place e.g. along highways, in the town centre etc.
  - Does it wish to invest Town Council resources (staff time and/or budget) in undertaking works to reduce the necessity for weed spraying e.g. strimming, planting or mulching
- 2.1.8 If the committee wishes to see a complete stop on herbicide use, it could lobby via the Cheshire East Council ward members and the Environment and Communities Committee (of which both Cllrs Abel and Dean are members), it is possible that a number of town and parish councils in the borough may have similar sentiments and a joint approach to lobbying could be explored.
- 2.1.9 A 2016 Macclesfield Express news article reports the decision was made to move from strimming to weed spraying on green spaces “for health and safety reasons” with a quote from a spokesman of the borough council stating “In urban areas, cutting grass around trees and street furniture on grass verges can present risks such as flying stones and debris which could hit our workforce, pedestrians, parked cars or property. In response to a number of near misses of this nature in the past, we now weed spray around trees and street furniture

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<sup>1</sup> This includes the additional time it takes to trim vs. spray, additional sweeping/tidying and the reduced duration one can trim for due to vibration exposure controls.

instead of strimming, in order to neatly maintain these very small areas”

- 2.1.10 Noting that the committee wishes to receive something in return of the spraying stopping in lieu of the time it takes it should consider what it wishes to obtain – noting that if alternative forms of weed control are used in areas it would take additional resource from Cheshire East Council.

### **3.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED**

The committee should determine what action it wishes to take.