

Minehead Town Council Weed Control Policy

Introduction

Minehead Town Council recognises the potential public concerns and associated risks with the use of glyphosate-based herbicides and also recognises its responsibility to explore alternative approaches to weed control, whilst considering the increased financial costs associated with alternative weed control.

Background – Why has the approach been reviewed?

Minehead Town Council is aware of a growing concern from residents about the use of herbicides in the town which is demonstrated by a number of enquiries via councillors, operational staff and residents themselves. Minehead Town Council, in the past decade at least, has only use Glyphosate based herbicides.

Currently glyphosate is licenced by the European Chemical Agency. On 30th May 2022 ECHA's Committee for Risk Assessment (RAC) agreed to keep glyphosate's current classification as causing serious eye damage and being toxic to aquatic life. Based on a wide-ranging review of scientific evidence, the committee concluded that classifying glyphosate as a carcinogen is not justified.

National agencies across the world have declared glyphosate to be safe to use however some countries have now decided to ban glyphosate or severely curtail its use but the UK continues to say glyphosate-based products are safe to use.

It is fair to say, depending on the source/ scientific study that you refer to, the use of Glyphosate divides opinion. Because of this, some local authorities have banned glyphosate weed killer use totally, or at least, in specific areas such as schools, playgrounds, parks, and pavements.

Guidance

The health and Safety executive (HSE) website contains information and guidance on the use of Glyphosate and pesticides in general. Some notable information provided by the HSE is included below:

What is Glyphosate?

Glyphosate is the active substance in many herbicides (weed killers) and is widely used around the world. It is a non-selective, systemic herbicide /weedkiller and was first used in the UK in 1976.

Glyphosate is effective in controlling most weed species including perennials and grasses in many situations including amenity, forestry, aquatic and industrial situations. It is used by lots of people from farmers to foresters to gardeners to biologists trying to control invasive exotic plants.

Since it is approved for use in many countries, it has been subject to extensive testing and regulatory assessment in the EU, USA and elsewhere, and by the World Health Organisation.

Has glyphosate been subject to regular regulation Checks?

The UK has a rigorous approvals process for pesticides. The main aim of the process is to protect the health of people, creatures and plants and to safeguard the environment.

All companies wishing to obtain approval for their pesticides are required to submit substantial data dossiers to support their applications. The extensive range of studies undertaken on pesticides is aimed at establishing acceptable safety for people, animals and the wider environment. This process has been applied to glyphosate which has been approved as safe and efficacious for a number of years now.

What Controls are in place on the use of Glyphosate in parks and public spaces?

The risks associated with the use of pesticides in amenity areas such as parks are specifically considered as part of the authorisation process.

Legally enforceable conditions of use are imposed on the way products can be applied, to ensure the public are not exposed to levels of pesticides that would harm health or have unacceptable effects on the environment. It is important that users (or those who cause or permit others to use pesticides) not only comply with the authorised conditions of use but also use products in a responsible and sustainable fashion.

The responsible use of pesticides in amenity areas as part of an integrated programme of control can help deliver substantial benefits for society. These include: management of conservation areas, invasive species and flood risks; access to high quality sporting facilities; and safe public spaces (for example, by preventing weed growth on hard surfaces creating trip hazards), industrial sites and transport infrastructure.

Existing vegetation management

Up until 2021, Minehead Town Council used an external contractor to control the street weeds in and around Minehead. It became apparent to councillors and officers that many factors such as the method of application, time of application and frequency of application did not represent good environmental, social, or financial value and therefore decided to no longer use the contractor. Since then, all means of weed control in Minehead Town Council owned open spaces and street weeds, has been undertaken by our in-house amenities team. Currently no Glyphosate is used to control any weeds, with the amenities team using and trialling physical and cultural weed control methods on an ad-hoc basis. The team have been exploring many varying ways and trialling different companies and alternative equipment. The general consensus is Minehead Town Council has not been able to find a solution that has produced a satisfactory outcome that represent good environmental, social or financial value thus far.

Proposed management methods.

Taking into consideration the responsibilities of Minehead Town Council to provide the best quality of service that represents the best value for money for the residents of Minehead whilst upholding its desire to be a greener, more environmentally friendly, and sustainable authority. The following approaches or combination of approaches are intended to be applied:

- As much weed control as is possible and practical will be undertaken by Minehead Town Council's in house staff.
- Minehead Town Council will always explore physical and cultural methods of weed control before considering the use of herbicide.
- Minehead Town Council will work closely with the unitary authority and their appointed street cleansing contractor to identify areas that are heavily soiled that require its removal to reduce the chances of weed germination.

- Weed removal on roads, pavements and alleyways will be undertaken as deemed necessary by Minehead Town Council. With priority taken to streets in and around the town centre
- A reactive option will be available whereby problem areas can be targeted with a mixture of treatments as many times as Minehead town Council deem necessary.
- Minehead Town Council will continue to explore alternative methods of weed control such as Horticultural vinegar and any other environmentally and financially sustainable methods.
- The use of herbicide will not be used as the first-choice option to control weeds in areas such as streets, recreation grounds or play areas except for exceptional circumstances and when these circumstances occur, appropriate measures will be taken to restrict public access to these areas for the manufacturer's recommended duration of time until the chemical is 'absorbed' by the vegetation
- Any mixture of herbicide used will not exceed a mix percentage of 2% (e.g., maximum concentrate of glyphosate used for a 20 Litre mix will be 400 Millilitres)
- When applying Glyphosate herbicides, Minehead Town council will ensure it is undertaken in the appropriate weather conditions and at a time of day when public contact is less likely (such as early mornings) The task will also be risk assessed prior to any chemical application.
- Glyphosate herbicides will continue to be used as the first-choice control method to control invasive/notifiable weed species (e.g., Japanese knot weed) and woody perennials such as tree and shrub stumps.
- All Chemical applications are recorded in a chemical application logbook and is carried out by a trained operative.

Managing Expectations

Untreated vegetation is traditionally regarded as untidy and a sign of poor maintenance and until we all understand the value of biodiversity and the role weeds and wildflowers play in the environment, the council will need to help the public understand its value and our approach to weed control.

Minehead Town Council are aware that a general level of weed control and 'tidiness' throughout the town is an important part of being a tourist town. There is, however, a growing appreciation that a level of vegetation left for environmental purposes such as re-wilding areas or less intensely controlled roadside weeds, provide good environmental value and should be considered. We are asking the public to please bear with us as we transition away from reliance on Glyphosate based weed control to more environmentally sustainable methods of control, as well as transition away from more traditional held ideals, to an agreed accepted level of weed control.

The public are encouraged to get involved in more wildflower planting on private land to provide bee corridors and even leaving some weeds for insects.

Conclusion

There is no universally approved method of weed control. It is apparent that public opinion suggests that the use of Glyphosate should be minimal when controlling weeds. Authorities such as Minehead Town Council are also ambitious in their aim to be a greener and more environmentally friendly and sustainable organisation. Early signs indicate there is no direct chemical replacement for Glyphosate and alternative treatments such as hot foams, acid, electricity, and flame throwers are far less efficient in terms of material cost and labour involved in applying them. Some alternatives also come with their own questions around

how much of a socially or environmentally friendly alternative they are. With all this considered, any permanent move away from the use of glyphosate weed control, will need to be rigorously researched and trialled to be sure it is a positive solution fiscally, socially, and environmentally

An operations manager was appointed in October 2022 who is responsible for directly overseeing and managing the amenities team which weed control falls under. With the creation of this post, there is the ability within the council to closely manage the way we control weeds and ensure weed control methods are carried out in an appropriate and responsible way.

No form of weed control comes without risk, but it is important that Minehead Town Council continue to explore methods that do not depend on the use of Glyphosate based herbicides and only use Glyphosate based herbicides when it is deemed absolutely necessary. There is also a need to further explore the market for alternative methods of weed control with the ultimate goal of becoming completely glyphosate free as soon as is practically possible. This policy will be reviewed regularly and amended to suit the present situation in order to ensure Minehead Town Council continue to provide the best quality of service that represents the best value for money for the residents of Minehead, whilst upholding its desire to be a greener, more environmentally friendly, and sustainable authority.

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