Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 21 April 2026

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Forde, Climate & the Environment

Director Lead: Matt Finch, Communities & Environment

Lead Officer: Ash Kitchen – Street Scene Manager

Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open Report / Key Decision
Report Title	Glyphosate Free Play Areas
Purpose of Report	To seek approval for a proposed pilot program to reduce the use of glyphosate-based herbicides across Newark & Sherwood District Council owned playgrounds and housing owned playground areas from April 2026 to the end of March 2027. The proposal focuses on introducing spray-free zones across approximately 34 playground sites, while maintaining a targeted weed management approach where required to ensure public safety and site usability. The report also outlines the financial, operational, risks and environmental implications of reducing glyphosate usage, including any implications financially and labour requirements associated with alternative methods of weed management.
Recommendations	That Cabinet approve: a) the introduction of spray-free weed management zones across 34 council-owned playgrounds, including housing playground areas; b) the continuation of glyphosate use in targeted operational areas where alternative methods are not viable or would pose safety risks; c) the adoption of mechanical and manual weed control methods, including the use of NoMix Dual applicator systems where herbicide use is still required; and d) a review of the operational and financial impacts, including any additional labour costs, herbicide savings and site condition assessments, to enable a decision to be made about whether the approach becomes business as usual from April 2027.

Alternative Options Considered	Consideration was given to maintaining the current weed management programme using glyphosate across all operational sites. While this approach remains the most cost-effective and operationally efficient method of weed control, there has been increasing public concern regarding herbicide use in sensitive locations such as playgrounds and residential areas. An alternative option of eliminating glyphosate across all council land was also considered. However, this was not recommended due to: A. Significant increases in labour costs B. Reduced weed control effectiveness C. Potential deterioration in site standards and safety D. Increased carbon emissions associated with repeated mechanical treatments Therefore, a targeted reduction approach focused on highly visible and sensitive areas such as playgrounds has been proposed as a balanced solution.
Reason for Recommendations	The introduction of spray-free zones within playground environments will provide visible evidence of the Council's commitment to reducing chemical use, whilst still maintaining operational practicality. The introduction of spray-free zones within playground environments provides a balanced and proportionate approach to reducing the Council's reliance on glyphosate-based herbicides while maintaining safe and accessible public spaces. Playgrounds represent some of the most sensitive and highly visible areas within the Council's public realm, frequently used by children and families. Removing routine herbicide application in these locations supports the precautionary principle, responds to increasing public concern regarding chemical use in recreational areas, and demonstrates the Council's commitment to environmentally responsible land management. The proposal builds upon the Council's existing spray-free areas and forms part of a wider strategy to gradually reduce glyphosate use across the district. By focusing reductions within targeted locations, the Council can continue to manage operational risks such as trip hazards, accessibility issues and excessive vegetation growth while still progressing towards environmental and sustainability objectives. The proposed approach can be delivered within existing operational resources and will contribute towards a measurable reduction in annual glyphosate usage across the district.

1.0 Background

1.1 Glyphosate is a systemic herbicide widely used across the world for the control of unwanted vegetation in both agricultural and amenity environments. It works by inhibiting a plant enzyme required for growth, resulting in the gradual death of the plant from the roots upwards. As the herbicide is absorbed through the foliage and transported throughout the plant system, it is particularly effective at controlling weeds that regrow from roots or underground structures.

1.2 Glyphosate-based herbicides contain glyphosate as the active ingredient, typically in the form of glyphosate isopropylamine salt or potassium salt. This compound inhibits the plant enzyme EPSP synthase within the shikimic acid pathway, preventing the production of essential amino acids required for plant growth and survival. As a result, treated plants gradually die back over a period of days or weeks. Commercial formulations also contain inert or adjuvant ingredients such as surfactants, water carriers and stabilising agents which improve the herbicide's ability to adhere to leaf surfaces, penetrate plant tissue and remain chemically stable during storage and application.

1.3 Glyphosate is highly effective at controlling a wide range of vegetation types including annual weeds, perennial weeds, invasive vegetation and weeds that regenerate from roots or rhizomes. Due to its broad-spectrum effectiveness and relatively low application rates, glyphosate has historically been the most operationally efficient and cost-effective method of weed control used by Newark and Sherwood District Council. The product has traditionally been used to manage vegetation across public areas including footways, kerb lines, playgrounds, housing estates, car parks and pathways where unmanaged vegetation can create trip hazards, obstruct access routes and negatively impact the appearance of public spaces.

1.4 Despite its widespread use, glyphosate has increasingly become the subject of public debate regarding its potential environmental and health implications, particularly when used in highly visible public spaces such as parks and playgrounds. Newark and Sherwood District Council already operates several spray-free zones across the district. These include eight closed churchyards maintained under Section 215 of the Local Government Act 1972, alongside sites such as Sconce and Devon Park, Vicar Water Country Park, Clay Lane and Thorpe Oaks Playing Field.

These locations were strategically selected due to their environmental sensitivity and the suitability of alternative weed management approaches. Whilst mechanical removal methods can be effective in some circumstances, they also present operational considerations. Mechanical weed removal can require the temporary cordoning off of areas for public safety and may not be suitable in built-up areas due to the risk of flying debris or disturbance caused by machinery.

Southwell Pilot Scheme

1.5 A previous pilot scheme was undertaken on Housing Revenue Account land in Southwell between April 2024 and April 2026 across three locations: Kings Court, Coghill Court and The Burgage.

The trial did not achieve the anticipated outcomes. During the trial period a notable level of resident complaints was received, primarily concerning the visual standard and effectiveness of weed control delivered through alternative methods. The use of mechanical equipment in these locations was also limited due to noise considerations and the proximity of surrounding residential properties. There were also concerns regarding the potential risk of damage to nearby assets when using mechanical tools. Whilst alternatives to glyphosate may not be practicable in every instance, using alternatives are deemed to be appropriate in the context of play parks and will build on the approach the Council has taken in other locations such as closed churchyards and some of our Green Flag parks.

1.6 Regulatory bodies including the UK Health and Safety Executive and the European Food Safety Authority continue to approve glyphosate for use when applied in accordance with manufacturer guidance and regulatory standards. However, many local authorities have begun reviewing their weed management strategies and introducing reduction measures or spray-free zones in response to increasing public concern and wider environmental objectives.

2.0 Proposal/Options Considered

2.1 It is proposed that Newark & Sherwood District Council introduce spray-free weed management zones across 34 playground locations across the district, including sites within both the General Fund and Housing estates. Playgrounds represent some of the most visible and sensitive areas of public realm managed by the Council. These spaces are frequently used by children and families and therefore carry higher public expectations regarding environmental quality and safety. Introducing spray-free zones in these locations will demonstrate the Council's commitment to reducing reliance on chemical herbicides while continuing to maintain safe and well-managed recreational environments.

Proposed areas include:

1. *Bridge Community Centre Play Area NSDC General Fund Newark*
2. *Chestnut Avenue Multi Sports Area Newark*
3. *Clipsham Close Play Area Balderton*
4. *Dodsley Way Play Area Clipstone*
5. *Grove Street Play Area Balderton*
6. *Hawtonville CC Multisports Area*
7. *Hilcote Drive Play Area Clipstone*
8. *Lincoln Road Playing Field – MUGA Newark*
9. *Mead Way Play Area Balderton*
10. *Old Tannery Drive Lowdham*
11. *Sconce & Devon Park Fitness Trail Newark*

12. *Sconce Hills Park Play Area Newark*
13. *Southfields Play Area Balderton*
14. *Thorpe Oaks Play Area Coddington*
15. *Vicar Water Country Park Clipstone*
16. *Alexander Lodge NSDC Housing Newark*
17. *Bramley Close Play Area Southwell*
18. *Byron Close Play Area Hawtonville*
19. *Chatham Court Play Area Newark*
20. *Cherry Holt Play Area Hawtonville*
21. *Cleveland Green Play Area Hawtonville*
22. *Clifton House Play Park Hawtonville*
23. *Derbyshire Close Play Area Harby*
24. *Fleming Drive play Area Newark*
25. *Forge Close Play Area North Muskham*
26. *Hallam Road Play Area 1 Ollerton*
27. *Hallam Road Play Area 2 Ollerton*
28. *Lawrence Street Play Area Newark*
29. *Queens Court Play Area Newark*
30. *South View Flats Play Park Balderton*
31. *Stafford Avenue Play Area Balderton*
32. *Thorpe Close Play Area Coddington*
33. *Turner Lane Park Boughton*
34. *Wellow Green Homeless Unit Play Area*

2.2 Under this proposal routine herbicide spraying within these locations would cease. Weed control would instead be undertaken through a combination of alternative non-chemical methods including manual removal using gardening tools, mechanical brushing using Stihl combi brush equipment, and vegetation cutting using brush cutters or strimmer's where appropriate.

These methods allow vegetation to be managed effectively without the use of herbicides. In addition, longer-term measures could be considered to help naturally suppress weed growth. These include introducing low-growing ground cover plants that compete with weeds and the application of bark mulch in planting beds to reduce weed germination and minimise the need for repeated manual removal.

2.3 Operationally, this additional workload will be incorporated into the current Grounds Maintenance ten-day grass cutting cycle. Each designated spray-free site is expected to require approximately 30 minutes of additional maintenance time per second visit.

The two housing maintenance rounds are expected to experience the greatest operational impact. It is estimated that this will add approximately 4.5 additional hours of work per round per month during the seven-month grass cutting season. This equates to approximately 31.5 additional hours across the 2026 season. Based on current operational capacity, it is anticipated that this workload can be absorbed within existing staffing resources without the requirement for additional personnel.

2.4 Whilst routine herbicide spraying would cease within designated playground areas, glyphosate-based roducts would continue to be used in targeted operational locations where alternative weed management methods are not practical or would present safety risks.

To improve application control and reduce chemical waste, the Council has transitioned towards the use of NoMix Dual applicator systems. These systems provide pre-diluted herbicide cartridges which remove the need for manual mixing and improve dosage accuracy. This reduces operator exposure to concentrated chemicals in line with COSHH regulations 2002, improves safety during handling and storage, and reduces the risk of product wastage.

NoMix Dual contains two active ingredients: glyphosate, which controls existing weeds by being absorbed through plant foliage and transported to the root system, and sulfosulfuron, which provides residual weed control by preventing the germination of new weeds. This dual action enables longer-lasting weed management and reduces the frequency of repeat treatments.

2.5 This table shows Newark & Sherwood District Council's total use of glyphosate from 2021 to projected quantity 26/27.

Financial Year	**Quantity Litres**
2021-2021	**320**
2022-2023	**310**
2023-2024	**290**
2024-2025	**300**
2025-2026	**240 changed to Nomix dual from normal Glyphosate manual mixing products**
2026-2027	**200 projected**

2.6 Experience from other UK local authorities demonstrates that reducing glyphosate use can produce mixed outcomes.

Cities such as Brighton & Hove and Hammersmith and Fulham have introduced glyphosate free trials and reported positive outcomes including increased biodiversity, improved public engagement and reduced chemical use. However, these programmes required significantly increased manual labour, maintenance, and financial resources.

Conversely, other authorities including Sheffield and Bristol experienced operational challenges when attempting large-scale herbicide reduction programmes. These included rapid weed regrowth, increased resident complaints, higher operational costs and reduced accessibility on pathways and hard surfaces.

As a result, many councils have adopted a targeted reduction approach rather than complete herbicide bans. The proposal within this report reflects this balanced approach.

2.7 The proposed spray-free zones would cover approximately 61,200 square metres of land, equivalent to approximately 6.12 hectares or around nine football pitches.

The previous Southwell pilot scheme covered approximately 8,765 square metres. The proposed pilot would therefore increase spray-free areas by approximately 53,435 square metres, significantly expanding the scale of the trial and allowing a more representative assessment across multiple locations within the district.

Operationally, this proposal is expected to reduce glyphosate usage by approximately 40 litres per year. This supports the Council's wider objective of reducing glyphosate use to approximately 200 litres annually, representing an overall reduction of approximately 37.5% compared with usage levels recorded in 2021.

Over the past 12 months the Council has already achieved a reduction of approximately 60 litres through improved weed management planning and the introduction of NoMix Dual application systems which allow more targeted treatment and reduce product waste.

Objectives

2.8 The primary objective of discontinuing glyphosate use within playground environments is to minimise potential exposure of children, staff and other vulnerable users to herbicide products in areas of high public contact. This approach reflects the precautionary principle and supports the Council's commitment to protecting public health while maintaining safe recreational environments.

The proposal also contributes to wider environmental objectives by supporting biodiversity, encouraging more natural landscapes within public spaces and responding to growing public concern regarding the use of chemical herbicides in highly visible community environments.

Alternative other weed management methods will therefore be implemented where practicable to maintain playground safety, control trip hazards and ensure these spaces remain safe, accessible and well maintained.

2.9 A review of key performance indicators will be evaluated before and after the no spray on play pilot scheme, to then reflect on if this can work permanently, a further report will be completed in December 26 for a decision on normal work duties surrounding this pilot scheme from April 1, 2027.

Benefits

2.10 Running a controlled pilot offers significant strategic and operational benefits. There will be more evidence based decision making as the data that is gathered it will be localised rather than based on national outcomes. Understanding the likely volume of positive and negative expectations around public view on herbicides, increased biodiversity around play areas and land with increasing greener more sustainable land management.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

The reduction in herbicide usage will require increased staff involvement in manual weed management activities.

This may require adjustments to: Work scheduling, seasonal staffing allocation, operational priorities within the Street Scene service

Implications Considered **Yes – relevant and included / NA – not applicable**			
Financial	Yes	Equality & Diversity	N/A
Human Resources	Yes	Human Rights	N/A
Legal	Yes	Data Protection	N/A
Digital & Cyber Security	N/A	Safeguarding	N/A
Sustainability	Yes	Crime & Disorder	N/A
LGR	N/A	Tenant Consultation	N/A

Sustainability Implications

3.1 Reducing glyphosate usage supports the Council's wider environmental and sustainability objectives. Lower chemical inputs within public spaces may support biodiversity, improve the ecological value of green spaces and enhance public confidence in how the Council manages the local environment.

However, alternative weed control methods may also introduce operational trade-offs. Mechanical removal methods can increase fuel consumption, operational hours and staff travel. There may also be an increase in service requests or complaints relating to weed growth in areas where chemical treatments are reduced.

For these reasons, a balanced approach has been recommended which reduces herbicide use in sensitive areas such as playgrounds while maintaining operational flexibility across the wider district.

Bio Diversity Implications

3.2 The proposed approach is not expected to result in significant adverse impacts on biodiversity when undertaken in accordance with best practice and environmental guidance. Reducing herbicide use in playground environments may allow a wider range of plant species to establish in surrounding areas, potentially supporting pollinators and other beneficial insects.

Vegetation management will continue to be undertaken in a targeted and proportionate manner to minimise disturbance to non-target plant species and surrounding habitats. Where possible, maintenance activities will avoid sensitive ecological areas and will be timed appropriately to reduce impacts on wildlife such as nesting birds or seasonal pollinators.

Risk Implications

3.3 The introduction of spray-free zones within playground environments may result in some operational and reputational risks which will need to be carefully managed.

One of the most likely risks is an increase in resident complaints relating to the visual appearance of weeds within areas where herbicide use has been reduced. Experience from other local authority trials has shown that alternative weed management techniques may not achieve the same immediate visual results as chemical control methods.

There is also a potential risk that increased weed growth on hard surfaces such as paths and playground edges could contribute to trip hazards if not managed effectively. This risk will be mitigated through regular inspections and targeted maintenance interventions as part of the existing grounds maintenance schedule.

Operationally, the use of mechanical weed removal equipment may present additional safety considerations including noise disturbance, the risk of debris projection and temporary restrictions to public access during maintenance activities. These risks will be managed through appropriate staff training, risk assessments and the use of suitable personal protective equipment in accordance with COSHH regulations and relevant health and safety procedures.

Despite these challenges, the introduction of targeted spray-free zones represents a balanced and proportionate approach which reduces herbicide use in sensitive areas whilst maintaining operational flexibility across the wider district.

Financial Implications (FIN26-27/2273)

3.4 The introduction of spray-free zones within playground areas is expected to create a modest increase in operational workload due to the need for manual or mechanical weed removal in place of herbicide application.

It is estimated that each spray-free playground will require approximately 30 minutes of additional maintenance time during each scheduled visit within the ten-day grass cutting cycle. The greatest operational impact is anticipated to fall on two Housing maintenance rounds where approximately 4.5 additional hours of work per month will be required during the seven-month grass cutting season. This equates to approximately 31.5 additional operational hours during the 2026 season.

Based on current staffing levels and operational capacity, it is anticipated that this workload can be absorbed within existing resources without requiring additional staffing or significant changes to service delivery schedules.

The proposed reduction in glyphosate use is expected to result in a small reduction in chemical purchasing costs over time. However, any financial savings associated with reduced herbicide usage are likely to be offset by the increased labour requirements associated with alternative weed management methods.

Overall, the proposal is expected to be broadly cost neutral within existing service budgets, whilst supporting the Council's wider environmental objectives.

Current Spend on Glyphosate 25/26 £7682.10
Spend on Glyphosate 26/27 if successful 27/28 £6559.80
No extra resource necessary

3.5 Data will be collected and stored in line with Health & Safety at Work Act and COSHH Regulations 2002

Human Resources Implications

3.6 No additional staff will be required for the pilot the new spray free zones, no change to Ground service role.

Legal Implications (LEG2627/2053)

3.7 As detailed within the report, regulatory bodies including the UK Health and Safety Executive and the European Food Safety Authority continue to approve glyphosate for use when applied in accordance with manufacturer guidance and regulatory standards. Any application must be undertaken in accordance with regulatory and statutory requirements including compliance with COSHH regulations.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None