

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Report**

Committee:	Economy, Transport and Environment Select Committee
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Report Title:	Control of Weeds on the Highway
Reference:	5549
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Select Committee on the control of weeds on the Public Highway in Hampshire. It relates to the policy covered in the Highways Maintenance Management Plan (HMMP) and aims to provide the Committee with more detailed information about this aspect of this operational work and how improvements in efficiency and response to complaints can be achieved. It also addresses how the Parish Lengthsman Scheme might complement the existing service.

2. Contextual Information

2.1 Hampshire County Council has a duty to maintain the highway. Controlling the growth of grass and weeds through joints between kerbing and surfacing - a common location for seed germination is a sensible course of action to reduce the longer term destructive effect of vegetation. It is also an expectation from the public that paved areas should be kept in a tidy manner.

2.2 Weed spraying is normally carried out twice a year on urban highways in Rushmoor, Hart, Winchester, Test Valley, Fareham, Gosport and East Hants where kerbs and footways exist. The districts of Basingstoke, Eastleigh, New Forest and Havant have taken up the opportunity to carry out their own weed spraying under agency from the County Council. Basingstoke and Deane, Eastleigh and Havant commenced this in April 2007 and New Forest commenced this in April 2011.

2.3 The weed spraying programme commences at the beginning of April and is normally completed at the end of October. Spraying is delivered by AMEY on behalf of the County Council, through a specialist subcontractor. This is a part of the entire Term Highways Contract let by Hampshire County Council. Work is continuous and in wet weather when spraying is not possible, infill work of weed pulling and cutting is added to the programme. Rainfall is detrimental to weed spraying as the herbicide is washed off the leaves before it has time to be absorbed.

- 2.4 The work is carried out by trained operatives using backpack sprayers delivering micro droplets of glyphosate weed killer in accordance with the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. This is a permitted contact or non-residual herbicide (e.g. Roundup) rather than a residual herbicide which is no longer permitted. It conforms to the Health and Safety Commission's Code of Practice and with the Environment Agency's requirements. Some application is carried out by operatives using a quad bike which is an economic approach to spraying longer lengths of footway or kerbing.
- 2.5 Five 3-man teams and one 4-man team make up the total workforce of sprayers. These cover the seven Districts as follows:
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|------------------------|--|
| Test Valley area | 2 sprayers on foot plus one sprayer on a quad bike |
| East Hants area | 2 sprayers on foot plus one sprayer on a quad bike |
| Winchester area | 2 sprayers on foot plus one sprayer on a quad bike |
| Gosport area | 3 sprayers on foot plus one sprayer on a quad bike |
| Fareham area | 2 sprayers on foot plus one sprayer on a quad bike |
| Rushmoor and Hart area | 2 sprayers on foot plus one sprayer on a quad bike |
- 2.6 Performance is monitored by local Highways teams and combined audits are carried out between Hampshire Highways and Amey in each district area approximately twice a year. When the public or elected members express dissatisfaction regarding weed growth the locations are inspected by the Amey supervisor and a re-spray of the area is usually instructed. On occasions the locations may have already been sprayed but the "die off" period has not fully elapsed so extra spraying is not justified. It helps to have footways and roads swept two to three weeks after spraying has taken place but this is not always possible as routine mechanised road sweeping is organised by district councils which tends to be focus on urban roads and less on footways.
- 2.7 Rushmoor and Hart are grouped together because the combined extent of surfaced paths and roads is equivalent to other single districts. At the start of the current term highways contract in 2008, spraying commenced in either Hart or Rushmoor on alternate years and continued that way through the season. This continued the practice from the previous contract. However due to more complaints from Rushmoor than from Hart - a consequence of concerns with Rushmoor in Bloom, in both years 2012 and 2013, spraying commenced in April in Rushmoor, with spraying commencing in Hart in mid to late May each year. It is suggested that in future years the strategy be revised so that the urban areas of Farnborough and Aldershot would be sprayed first, followed by Fleet / Hartley Wintney / Hook / Yateley and Odiham, and then commence spraying the surrounding urban areas of both Rushmoor and Hart.

3. Parish Lengthsman

- 3.1 The Parish Lengthsman scheme is primarily a rural located scheme where straightforward and low risk tasks are completed by lengthsman on behalf of clusters of parishes. So far, weed-killing has not been included in the tasks undertaken by lengthsman. It is questionable how well matched parish lengthsman services would be to this task as the bulk of spraying by Hampshire Highways takes place in urban locations. However in Fleet where there is a parish lengthsman in place, it would be possible for the Town Council to

consider this as a complementary activity to the County programme if they should wish. It is noteworthy that weed killing also involves an extra element of training and health and safety and if parishes wish to provide lengthsman with the necessary equipment and training to undertake this work, it could be that their involvement would complement the existing Highways programme rather than replacing it.

4. Invasive Weeds

- 4.1 Invasive weeds such as Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Marestalk are sprayed individually twice a year with a further cutback in late November. These sites have been notified to Hampshire Highways by the public through the area offices or recorded by Highways staff and number 460 individual sites at present. Most of these are Japanese Knotweed. Some sites have been killed off following several years of treatment but each year others are added increasing this activity year on year.
- 4.2 Public interest in Himalayan Balsam is increasing although no central action has been taken by Hampshire Highways to date.

5. Injurious Weeds

- 5.1 The Noxious Weeds Act 1959, including the Ragwort Control Act 2003 places a responsibility on the Highway Authority to minimise and inhibit the growth and spread of injurious weeds growing on the highway.
- 5.2 Ragwort is classified as an injurious weed but not included in the above treatment approach as it has been dealt with in previous years by individual Highways teams across Hampshire rather than centrally. It is well known that when cut and dried in hay this plant is poisonous to horses. However it is a food source for butterflies and when growing in pasture it is avoided by cattle and horses. Small scale trials to spray Ragwort rather than pull and dispose have been carried out with encouraging results. Currently the County Council practice is in line with the DEFRA Code of Practice on "How to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort (March 2007)" but it is acknowledged that the widespread presence of this plant is unlikely to be significantly influenced by the level of activity by Hampshire Highways.

6. Finance

- 6.1 The annual cost for highway weed spraying in 2013 / 2014 is £732,000.

Term Highway Contract Amey	£511,000
Districts	£170,000
Control of invasive weeds countywide through THC Amey	£51,000

7. Devolvement of Spraying to District Councils

- 7.1. At present, four out of the eleven districts in Hampshire have elected to spray weeds on the public highway on behalf of the County Council. This has evolved through financial negotiation. In each case the district concerned has agreed to provide the service at a cost equal to or less than it would have cost Hampshire Highways. All the other districts were approached before the Term Highways Contract was let in 2007/8. They either declined or required an increased payment which was not acceptable to the County Council.

7.2. If a further transfer of weed-spraying were to take place district council(s) would have to agree to carry this function within the constraints above. However under the Term Highways Contract such a change may be subject to a Compensation Event from our contractor, due to loss of overheads from the reduced spend on weed spraying. This would, of course, inevitably have a strong influence on the overall viability of this course of action. The contract with AMEY commenced on 1st May 2008 and is currently due to terminate after eight years (March 2016). This is the basic seven year period, plus a one-year extension. It is possible that the County Council could award further extensions up to a maximum of ten years but no decision has been made regarding this at this time.

8. Conclusions

8.1. On-going weed spraying is an important highways maintenance activity for Hampshire Highways in order to prevent the deterioration of footways and carriageways caused by grass and weeds. There is also a responsibility under the Weeds Act 1959 to prevent invasive weeds from spreading. It also helps to enhance the quality of place for Hampshire residents. However, like all maintenance activities which are not directly related to Highway Safety, there is a limit on the service's ability to fully meet all public expectations due to budget limitations, with additional activity not necessarily meeting value for money criteria, or being a priority in comparison with other maintenance activities. Nevertheless it is also very important to respond to complaints and try to adapt the processes and resources to ensure the best service is delivered. Both Hampshire Highways and Amey are very conscious of the need to respond to complaints promptly and in this respect if the Parish Lengthsman scheme were to augment the annual weedspraying programme in any way, the effect would be beneficial.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None