

## **Parks, Amenities and Facilities Managers Report**

### **The use of Glyphosate**

Cornwall Council decided in around 2015, that they were no longer going to undertake weed spraying or weed management throughout the whole of the county. They wrote to Town and Parish Councils notifying them of the decision, but offering the option and opportunity to those Towns and Parish councils to take on the street weed management and if prepared to meet the cost. They also provided the contact details for their own contractor Cormac to carry out the services.

At the same time, along with no longer treating street weeds the Cornwall Council also reduced back on its street cleansing provision of road sweeping, along with the reduction of highway verge maintenance, unfortunately these decisions also had a severe impact on an increased weed infestation, as there were more piles of unswept material rotting down and uncollected or the weeds that had managed to reach sexual maturity, due to the fact they were no longer being cutting the verges, to set seed, thus exacerbating the weed issues around the City.

Truro City Council decided to take on the responsibilities of the street weeds within Truro City in 2016.

The parks department employed two members of staff for the period of 6 months at the cost of 26k, to set about hand weeding and hoeing the City's weed. This was a mammoth task and a very slow process, unfortunately, after about 6 weeks, we started getting issues with our staff employed with repetitive strain injuries to the wrist and elbows. But plodding on tried our best in season one. During this time we received huge amounts of complaints as Cornwall Council started to direct the complaints to ourselves, and we probably due to speed only covered 5 percent, and 3 weeks later those streets that were weeded were growing back.

### **Season Two**

We started to trial various other weed treatment methods, that we had heard or come across. A demonstration of a hot steam treatment system was arranged, which did work in killing annual weeds but unfortunately was unsuccessful in killing the established perennial weeds such as docks, dandelions and stinging nettle, which cause surface damage to pavements. The other big issue with this the machine itself, was it cost over £38,000, it could be hired in but due to the size of the machine to carry out any treatment on any pavements, you had to actually implement a full lane closure to get the equipment near the pavements that needed to be treated. Because of traffic embargos this was not possible between the hours of 7AM and 7PM, which meant that we had noisy vehicles and engines

running during the treatment process. The hot water was brought to boiling point by a large diesel engine, so this option was soon ruled out.

We then looked at and started to implement the use of petrol strimmers for walking up and down the pavements and knocking off any weed growth that came up, but once again soon started to get various issues, as the pavements were not being swept on a regular basis, there was quite a bit of grit in the material that we were trying to trim. This then picked up small stones, which then caused damage to cars and smashing windscreens, causing a huge amount of claims to come in, and made against the Parks Department.

The next option we trailed was the use of propane gas burners, once again started off with a little success, but the more established weeds soon recovered from their scorching and grew back. During the period of dry weather, we had an incident where we were burning material off the pavement, which then ignited, then spread and caught a neighbouring properties garden hedge alight, we then had the requirement of the fire brigade to assist extinguishing the fire. This again caused huge concern, and this then was felt to be another high risk way of weed reduction, along with the fact that it continued to use fuel to carry out the treatment.

We then considered the use of alternative products being suggested and trialled by some local authorities were using vinegar and salt, but once again following investigations into its use, there were mixed results, but reports stated this was an application of acid to the pavements, which in the periods of rainfall then leach straight back down into our rivers causing pollution.

We then trialled a machine called the Kirsten sweeper, this had a highly abrasive brush attached to it and was very successful in its trial but the streets still need to be cleaned up by hand after, leading us as an organisation to purchase the machine to try to manually control the weeds. We carried out our first weed control to limited areas of the city and within two and three weeks regrowth had started to come back also. So we went out on treatment again with the machine but due to the fact that it literally rips and drags, it was starting to cause damage to the surface itself! You had to be extremely careful around some of the Cobb walls within the city with neighbouring housing, as it would actually take the render and plaster off the walls of houses or if you got too close it also jumped and knocked into cars. More importantly from a Health and safety perspective, due to the hand arm vibration of the abrasive nature of the machine, we were then exceeding time limited on what the staff could use the machine, also during periods of dry weather the dust was so horrendous they had to wear large dust masks and we were getting complaints not only from the staff of being covered in dust, but from residents about their windows and vehicles getting dirty along the pavements sides.

This then left us back to the situation where that we had no other option than to look at the chemical treatment side, we then contacted a company called Complete Weed Control, who had a new innovative machine, which had a boom on the front with an infrared light system, which picked up any weeds as it was travelling along and directly spot sprayed those weeds. The operator also has a lance for any weeds that were not picked up by the covered boom, he then spots sprayed them. The mentioned practice there is no need for complete blanket spraying, as each weed is individually spot sprayed.

The contractor now treats every road in the whole of the Cities parish and do this on three applications a year.

April June and end of September this was at the cost of £4000 per application, which was a huge saving on the 26k it originally cost for the employment of two members of staff.

Since its re introduction our complaints have reduced massively on Street weeds within the city, but we do on occasions like this year have received a few concerns or complaints about the use of glyphosate there are many theories about the dangers of it. As with many things we do as humans, there are risks an concerns, but this product is still currently licenced for use. All members of staff that either use it within our organisation or the contractors that we hire in, are fully trained and qualified in its proper use and application, as a council we are meeting all of our needs and requirements from this perspective.

This practice is still the most effective and cost-effective way of treating all our areas in the City.

I really do not want to be going back to the position we were in in 2016 to 2019 with almost my time and focused on street weeds and daily dealings with residents complaining.

Richard Budge

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