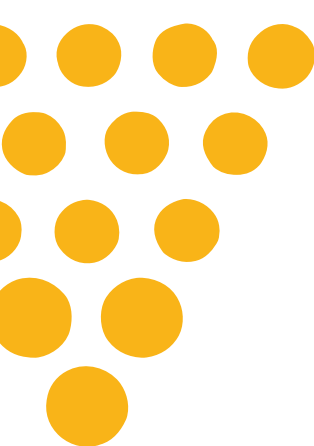




Improving Maintenance of the Public Realm

All Member Briefing, 6 March 2026

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Value of the Public Realm



“Every time I go out, I find myself more and more frustrated with the state of the roads and footpaths...”

“The overgrowth is narrowing the footpaths and the roads and nettles and thistles are growing into the small part of the paths that are left”

“The kids can't play, it's full of weeds ...



“the mood of the Estate has completely changed”

“people have started to tidy up their gardens and are making more of an effort”

“there's less litter and more pride”

“we are very grateful”

Current Condition of the Public Realm



What Level of Maintenance Currently Occurs on the Public Realm

- **Highways:** Currently no routine weed treatment aside from Schedule 9 plants (under the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981), such as Japanese Knotweed, reactive safety defects only
- **Environment:** Biodiversity-focused verge management since 2020/21, budget pressures have removed added value work
- **Waste:** Weed removal only in high-footfall Zone 1 areas; Clear detritus under the cleansing contract in zones 2 and 3 if below the required grade
- **Cornwall Housing:** Maintains housing-related public realm to similar standards as Environment
- **Third Parties:** Town/parish councils can manage weeds on estates independently



Background / Context

2013 - Stopped general highway weed treatment as a budget saving measure.

2016 - Stopped using glyphosate and neonicotinoids on all public-access land it owns/manages, except for controlling Schedule 9 invasive plants or preventing asset risk.

2018 - Review led to the Integrated Weed Management Plan and further policies (Environmental Growth Strategy, Pollinator Action Plan, Pesticide Guidance).

2019 - Climate Emergency declared

2021 - Ecological Emergency declared

2025 - Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025) adopted

2026 - Nature Recovery Delivery Plan being developed to support national goals for 30% of land, rivers, and seas to be well-managed for nature by 2030.



Complaints – Cornwall Council & Cormac, 2022-25

...“Overgrown grass and weeds along pavements in Saltash make them single file only. Granddaughter in buggy scratched by brambles. Weeds are a disgrace. Why do we pay more council tax for less service?”

...“Shocked to see council workers today spraying poison (weed killer)... It’s a threat to children, dogs, and wildlife. I’d rather see weeds than have poison used to dampen them.”

Complaints – Cornwall Council & Cormac, 2022-25

- **Total complaints analysed = 1,952**
- **Related to weeds/defects, 2022 – 25 = 1,490**
- **Related to grass cutting Nov 2024 – Oct 2025 = 462**

Dominant themes:

- Maintenance standards (e.g. overgrowth, frequency of grounds maintenance) and safety concerns (e.g. risk of trip/fall, structural damage) make up the majority of complaints.
- Clear process in place to assess whether safety report triggers action.
- Complaints generally peak in spring and summer – particularly for maintenance standards and cleanliness.
- Urban residential housing estates identified as hotspots for weed growth/public realm complaints.



Council Priorities 2026-30

Public Realm helps deliver:

- **Strong, safe, vibrant communities with more decent and affordable homes** – where people feel connected, safe, supported and proud to live, with emphasis on **‘building strong communities through partnership’**
- **A clean, green Cornwall with healthy rivers and seas** – working together to recover nature, **create litter-free spaces that are well cared for and accessible to all, making communities feel proud of the public spaces around them**, with emphasis on **‘fostering community pride’**
- **Connected, safe, reliable roads and transport** – ensuring everyone can **travel safely**, with emphasis on **‘delivering safe and reliable roads’**



Cabinet Briefing- 8 September 2025

“...to bring forward costed options for public realm improvement, including different levels of ambition and associated investment, for consideration as part of the upcoming budget process.”



Benchmarking Research

Brighton and Hove City Council





Brighton and Hove City Council

Context:

- 2019 – Chemical usage stopped, 2024 – Glyphosate reintroduced due to network deterioration

Current Status:

- Recovery phase (estimated 3 years), focusing on hotspots & safety-critical areas

Treatment Programme:

- Controlled Droplet Application to reduce glyphosate concentration
- March-Sept: 3 treatments (considering reduction to 2)
- Advised higher initial concentration, then gradual reduction

Scale & Cost:

- Network: 456km linear highways vs CC's 1,737km urban highways network
- £300k chemical contract (covers approx. 70% of Brighton)

Partnerships:

- Opt-out scheme (40 streets); coordination/resource challenges

Next Steps:

- Trial alternatives (e.g., electric equipment), expand exclusion zones & reduce chemical reliance, Improve volunteer engagement

APSE/FHRG – Weed Control Information

Information from approximately 70 different Local Authorities (2018-2024)

Summary:

- Glyphosate use remains dominant (in highways/specific areas) – cost effective and reliable but environmental/ health/ regulatory concerns
- Alternatives trialled have higher costs, increased labour/energy requirements and reduced effectiveness for root kill.
- Mechanical solutions are effective on hard surfaces but have higher upfront cost, don't kill root and may damage areas weakened by weed growth.

Key insights:

- Adoption of an Integrated Weed Management approach.
- Ambition to phase out glyphosate gradually / phase in sustainable practices
- Improve public communication.
- Invest in research and innovation.

FHRG:

- Mirrors the APSE findings and places further emphasis on long-term concerns over use of glyphosate – legislative review scheduled for 2026.

Options Considered for Weed Removal



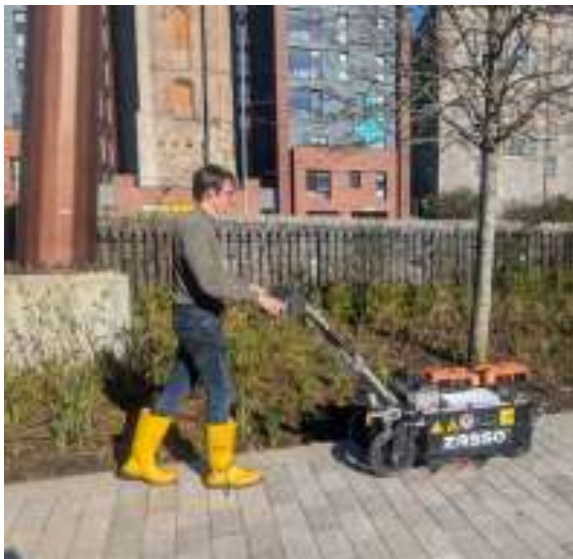
Powered Brush



Thermal Lance



Hot Water



Electricity



Acetic Acid/ Glyphosate

Advantages and disadvantages of three approaches to weed control on hard surfaces.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Chemical	○ Quick ○ Efficient ○ Cost effective ○ A fixed number of treatments per growing season ○ Fewer greenhouse gas emissions	○ Pesticide losses to the environment ○ Potential for herbicide resistance ○ Public perception of spraying chemicals
Integrated	○ Reduced risks associated with pesticide use ○ Less pesticide PPE required	○ Increased greenhouse gas emissions ○ Monitoring required ○ Increased costs (x2)² ○ Increased no. of treatments (2-6)
Non-chemical	○ Avoid the risks which may arise from pesticide use ○ No pesticide PPE required	○ Greater greenhouse gas emissions ○ Increased monitoring ○ Greater costs (x8)² ○ Persistent perennial weeds ○ Increased number of treatments (3-6)



Options Presented to Cabinet

Option A: Baseline Model – Keep things as they are

Retains current minimal standards with no extra investment, causing asset decline and rising public dissatisfaction.

Option B: Enhanced Environmental Care

Increases maintenance for amenity and biodiversity areas, additional cutting to amenity space, edging, and giving biodiversity areas a 'cared for' image.

Option C: Hotspot Manual Intervention

Targets 10-20 areas yearly using mechanical and manual means to clear areas of significant growth, the intention would then be for these areas to be chemically treated and swept.

Option D: Chemical Weed Treatment

Reintroduces chemical herbicides up to three times a year on the Highway network only to reduce weed growth for a short period to bring sites back to a good standard.

Option E: Comprehensive Recovery

Combines Options B-D method above for full network recovery and sustained maintenance.

Additional Actions

Valuing Local – Working with Communities:

- Enhance civic pride, support local delivery, expand volunteering.
- Coordinate town/parish contributions and explore co-investment.

Public Realm Actions:

- Promote Urban Verge Service Level Agreements and biodiversity-friendly cutting regimes.
- Volunteer training, Keep Cornwall Clean initiatives, exploring further devolution.

Feedback from DLT/CDT:

- Improve consistency across Cornwall Housing land.
- Support opt-out options for chemical use with agreed standards.
- Strengthen links with Community Wellbeing (graffiti, cleansing).





Cabinet Decision

To progress Option E and to deliver the additional actions

What does this mean?

Combine B, C, and D to recover the network and then maintain it. Along side this to work with volunteers and partner organisations to realise the best possible outcome for Cornwall.

Impact: High and long-lasting sustainable improvement.

Funding split (agreed over 3 years):

33% for Environment increased maintenance (Option B)

14% for Manual Removal of Weeds in Problem Areas (Option C)

53% for Highways chemical weed control (Option D)



How the Council plans to deliver Cabinet's requirement



1. Improvements to the Environment Assets

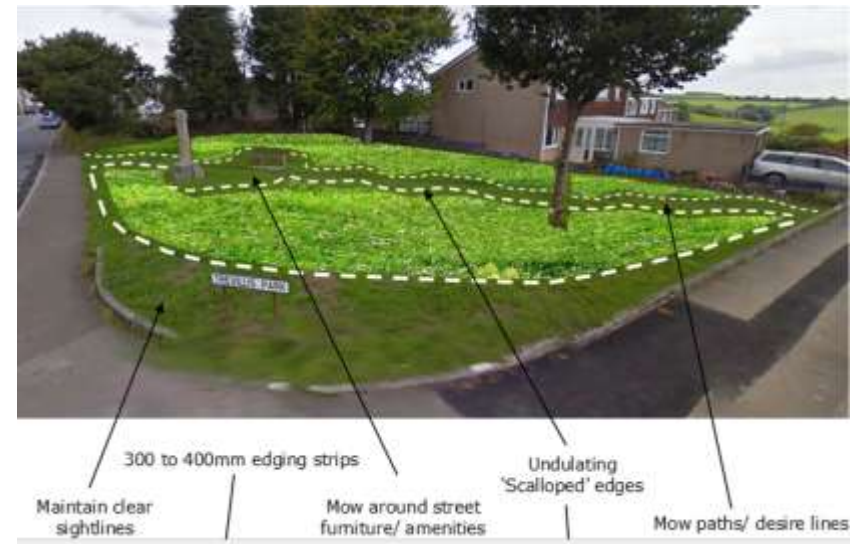
Amenity Enhancement/ Rewilding Urban Greenspace/ Verges

- Enhanced cutting on amenity areas.
- ‘Opportunity/ Positive’ outcome arising from lockdown...delivered fresh approach to urban verge management.
- Best practice from Making Space for Nature project.
- No cutting through spring/ summer reintroduce edging, sight lines & on-site infrastructure cutting.
- Change of machinery/ ‘cut & collect’ compared to ‘drop’ to improve appearance, reduce nutrients/ enhance biodiversity.



Workforce Development & Fleet Changes

- Operational team training with ecologists, empowering teams to make local decisions with communities.
- Further investment of specialist machinery to provide efficient, sustainable equipment using new technology.
- Review / expand MS4N towns where operating 'cut and collect'.
- 'Urban Rangers' to facilitate growth in volunteering and social prescribing.





2. Improvement to the Highway Asset

Targeted Treatment of Estates Mirroring Pilot



Pilot- Hallane Road & Trenarren, Treverbyn



Targeted Chemical Weed Treatment

This is not a return to blanket weed spraying.

- We will use a diluted glyphosate mix, this is widely used and HSE-approved for safe use on public highways and in amenity areas.
- This will be applied by Controlled Droplet Application (CDA).
- We will only treat within Urban limits (within reduced speed limits).
- We will not treat Zone 1 areas as they're managed by Biffa through the waste contract.
- We will not treat roads which are weed free.
- We will only treat areas of roads that have weeds present.
- Because of the above the quantity of glyphosate used will significantly reduced from 2013 volumes.
- There will be an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to Opt Out.



When and How Will We Undertake Treatment

1st Application - May to June 2026

2nd Application - August to September 2026

- Exact dates and streets cannot be confirmed in advance due to weather, resources, and operational changes.
- Streets with no visible weeds will not be treated.
- The first application will follow the 2013 coverage maps; the second will be updated to reflect changes to Waste Zone 1 and newly adopted highways.
- Weeds will take several weeks to die and turn brown. The herbicide only affects green, actively growing weeds; new growth after treatment will not be affected.
- Once dead, weeds will dry, break down, and be removed by Biffa as part of routine street cleansing, coordinated with treatment cycles.



Opt-Out

- All Town and Parish Councils are opted in by default they may opt out through a formal process.
- Opting out of chemical treatment also means opting out of targeted estate treatments.
- Cornwall Council will contribute only the pro-rata chemical-treatment amount per km, and not the targeted-treatment funding.
- Contribution depends on the Town / Parish demonstrating they can meet equivalent service standards and protect asset integrity.
- Opted-out Councils must hold public liability insurance.
- Failure to meet the agreed standards means the Town / Parish cannot opt out the following year.
- Opt-out forms and details will be issued shortly via CAPs.



Summary

- Highways, Environment and Waste teams are working together to deliver coordinated public realm improvements.
- The Environment estate will see enhanced amenity cutting and improved natural wildflower areas.
- Volunteering and local ownership of site management will be encouraged.
- After reviewing all options, chemical treatment is the only practical way to deliver a consistent, affordable standard across the highway network.
- Only roads with visible weeds will be treated; weed-free roads will be skipped.
- We will not treat weeds in grass verges or shrub beds, and we will not use neonicotinoids.
- Town and Parish Councils may opt out and manage areas themselves if they can match the same non-chemical standard; the Council will review its own approach where this is demonstrated.
- Chemical use will be tightly controlled and limited to the initial recovery phase (expected to last at least three years).



Thank you / Meur ras

We welcome your questions or comments