

Public Realm Improvement & Weed Management FAQ

Why are weeds a problem in the public realm?

- Weeds damage paved surfaces, allowing water penetration and long-term deterioration.
- They block drainage channels, increasing flooding risk.
- Overgrowth narrows footways and harms resident perception of care, safety, and amenity.

What is Cornwall Council legally required to do about weeds?

Cornwall Council must:

- Maintain safe and serviceable highways.
- Control noxious weeds under the Weeds Act 1959.
- Prevent spread of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

Didn't Full Council ban glyphosate in 2016? How can Cabinet now approve its use?

No—Full Council did not introduce an absolute ban. The 2016 motion required glyphosate use to cease *as funding for alternative treatments became available*, and this funding has never become available.

It also allowed continued use where needed to control Schedule 9 invasive plants **or** to reduce material risks to asset integrity.

Because unmanaged weed growth since 2013 is now causing kerb, drainage and footway deterioration, the targeted use of diluted glyphosate on the urban highway network is required to reduce material risks to asset integrity.

Why did routine weed treatment stop after 2013?

Routine highway weed spraying ceased in 2013 as a budget saving measure, not for ecological, legislative or safety reasons.

Why is chemical treatment being reintroduced now?

Cornwall Council's modern strategy complies with the 2016 decision while recognising operational realities:

- The proposal for targeted, minimal glyphosate use on highways is to reduce material risk to asset integrity.

- Benchmarking with 70 authorities shows no alternative is as cost effective for killing roots in hard surfaces.
- Manual methods alone cannot maintain 1,700+ km of urban highway after 13 years without treatment.
- Glyphosate approval remains in place nationally

Chemical use is intended to be tightly controlled, targeted only at visible weeds, and limited to the three-year recovery phase.

Why can't Cornwall Council just use non-chemical methods and avoid glyphosate entirely?

Extensive trials by Cornwall Council and benchmarking with around 70 other local authorities showed that non-chemical methods such as hot water, foam, acetic acid, powered brushes and electrical devices are significantly more expensive, often less effective at root-kill, and can cause infrastructure damage on weakened surfaces.

Non-chemical options alone cannot maintain Cornwall's 1,700+ km of urban network to the required standard. Chemical treatment is therefore required in a limited, targeted way alongside manual/mechanical clearance.

Is glyphosate safe to use in public spaces?

Cornwall Council will use a highly diluted glyphosate mixture (1:40) that is approved by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) for use on public highways, amenity areas, private land and gardens.

Application is carried out using Controlled Droplet Application (CDA), which produces large droplets, minimises drift, and targets only the weeds growing in the kerblines and channels.

National regulatory approval for glyphosate remains meaning it continues to be assessed as safe for its permitted uses under UK law.

Cornwall Council does not and will not use neonicotinoids and does not plan to use glyphosate in grassed verges, planted areas, or wider greenspace except to prevent spread of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

Planned use will be limited, highly controlled, and restricted to hard-surface locations where weeds pose structural and safety risks.

Why will operators wear PPE if glyphosate is safe?

PPE is required because all herbicides—whether permitted, diluted, or low-toxicity—must be applied in line with product labels, HSE requirements, and best-practice safety procedures.

The PPE worn by staff protects them from:

- Accidental splashes during mixing, handling, or equipment maintenance.
- Prolonged contact when working at close range.
- Exposure during decanting or refilling, which carries higher concentration risk than the applied spray.

Cornwall Council's operators also use PPE because:

- The Council must comply with herbicide label instructions and operator-safety rules enforced nationally.
- All treatment is delivered by trained and certified staff using BASIS-advised methods, as required in the Council's own weed-treatment policies.

PPE is therefore a standard professional safety measure, not an indication that the public is at risk. It ensures compliance with legislation and protects staff who handle the product directly.

What treatment will be carried out?

- The treatment of urban highways only, and only where weeds are present.
- Excludes Zone 1 streets (waste contract) and excludes verges/landscaped areas.
- Two treatment windows: May–June and Aug–Sept.
- Manual/mechanical clearance on worst estates before chemical treatment.
- Application via Controlled Droplet Application (CDA) using diluted glyphosate.

How will chemical treatment be applied?

- Precise CDA low-drift method.
- Applied at 1:40 dilution, meeting the legal requirement of 25 ml active ingredient per litre of water.
- Only the kerb-to-channel hard surface is treated.
- This is not blanket spraying.

How much will treatment cost?

Based on two annual treatments across 1,515 km:

- Total annual estimated cost circa £520,000
- Equivalent to £343.45 per km per year.

What trial of purely mechanical treatment has been undertaken?

A trial was recently undertaken in Treverbyn Parish, St Austell this showed:

- Significant waste was generated - over 14 tonnes of waste removed.
- Manual works alone produce quick improvements but weeds rapidly regrow.
- Tap-root species require follow-up chemical treatment otherwise they quickly grow back.

What options were presented to Cabinet?

Cabinet asked for "costed options with different levels of ambition".

Options ranged from doing nothing to full recovery.

Cabinet selected the comprehensive recovery option, combining enhanced maintenance, hotspot manual removal, and targeted chemical treatment.

How does the opt-out scheme for Town & Parish Councils work?

T&PCs are opted in by default, but may opt out if they can:

- Maintain equal or better standards than the Council.
- Prevent asset deterioration and keep kerb lines clear.
- Handle all weed-related complaints.
- Provide a full-season delivery plan and maps.
- Hold appropriate public liability insurance.

Opting out also means losing access to targeted estate-clearance work.

How much funding will opt-out councils receive?

Only the pro-rata chemical-treatment value (approx. £343.45/km/year) is contributed, and only if a plan is in place to deliver equivalent standards to the Council. No additional labour, manual-clearance or waste collection funding is provided.

What happens if an opted-out council cannot maintain standards?

The Council will offer support.

If standards are still not met, the opt-out is withdrawn for the next season and the area returns to the Council programme.

How are noxious and invasive weeds treated?

- Japanese Knotweed and Schedule 9 species continue under multi-year specialist programmes, with controlled-waste requirements.
- BASIS-qualified adviser involved for method selection and compliance.

How does this policy support environmental commitments?

This policy will:

- Continue biodiversity-focused verge management and supports the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Chemical use remains minimal, targeted, and time-limited.

How will residents benefit?

Residents can expect:

- Clearer, safer footways and kerb lines.
- Improved drainage performance.
- Better appearance and community pride.
- More consistent standards across the network.

How will you ensure chemical use is kept to a minimum?

Chemical treatment is restricted to:

- urban highways only,
- reduced-speed areas,
- locations where weeds are actually present,
- two tightly controlled windows per year,
- application via low-drift Controlled Droplet Application (CDA).
There is no blanket spraying, and untreated/weed-free roads are skipped entirely.

Will residents see dead brown weeds left in place for long periods?

After treatment, weeds die back over several weeks. Their removal is coordinated with Biffa through routine street cleansing cycles to avoid unsightly detritus. Timing is aligned so that cleansing follows treatment runs.

Are there any risks to children, pets, or wildlife from the diluted glyphosate solution?

When used correctly, the risk to children, pets, and wildlife is very low.

Cornwall Council will use an HSE-approved glyphosate product at a highly diluted 1:40 ratio and apply it using Controlled Droplet Application (CDA), which produces large droplets and minimises spray drift.

Treatment is targeted only to kerb lines and hard surfaces where weeds are present.

Glyphosate continues to have national regulatory approval, and its use is tightly controlled under UK law to ensure it is applied safely and in a way that reduces exposure to people and animals.

Who decides which streets get treated?

Route selection is based on:

- the 2013 network maps (for the first application),
- updates for newly adopted roads and Waste Zone 1 boundaries (for the second application),
- visual inspection confirming weed presence.
Weed-free roads are *not* treated.

How long will the recovery phase last?

The recovery phase is expected to take a minimum of three years, after which weed growth should be at a manageable baseline for ongoing non-chemical maintenance.

What happens if weather conditions prevent scheduled treatment?

Exact dates cannot be guaranteed in advance because herbicide requires dry, still conditions with appropriate drying time. Treatments may be adjusted or rescheduled to ensure legal and safe application.

Why can't Town or Parish Councils opt out of only *some* streets?

Opt-outs must be for whole areas, not individual streets, to ensure consistent asset protection, clear responsibility, and enforceable performance monitoring. Partial or street-by-street opt-outs introduce safety, liability, and inspection challenges.

How does this link to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and pollinator commitments?

Chemical use remains minimal and targeted, only on hard surfaces where weeds pose structural or safety risks. The programme sits alongside biodiversity-focused verge management, "cut and collect" operations, and the Pollinator Action Plan endorsed since 2016. No use of neonicotinoids is planned and the impact on flowering weeds and therefore pollinators will be minimal and should be more than offset through the improved environmental maintenance.

How will the public be kept informed?

Public-facing communication will explain:

- treatment windows,
- what to expect visually,
- why some roads are skipped,
- how dead weeds will be removed,
- options for Town and Parish Councils to opt out.

This supports transparency and helps manage expectations.