

Meeting	Decision Session - Executive Member for Environment and Climate Emergency
Date	27 February 2024
Present	Councillor Kent (Executive Member)
Apologies	Councillor Ravilious
Officers in Attendance	James Gilchrist, Director of Environment, Transport and Planning Ben Grabham, Head of Environmental Services Edward Bland, Operations Manager, Public Realm Dave Meigh, Operations Manager, Public Realm

19. Declarations of Interest (10:00 am)

The Executive Member was asked to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests or any prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interests she might have in respect of the business on the agenda. None were declared.

20. Minutes (10:00 am)

Resolved: That the minutes of the Decision Session held on 21 November 2023 be approved and signed by the Executive Member as a correct record.

21. Public Participation (10:01 am)

It was reported that there had been three registrations to speak at the session under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

All three speakers spoke on Agenda Item 4, Service Developments - Public Realm.

Clare Brown welcomed the proposed changes to the road side verges mowing regime in York. She highlighted how reducing the frequency of mowing in urban areas would improve

biodiversity in York. She urged officers to consider other council schemes around the country that supported wildflower verges which had shown to encourage local wildlife cultivation and reduce roadside verge parking.

Nicola Ward confirmed she worked for St Nicks and was a member of the local resident group Greener Cleaner Fulford. She spoke in support of all the measures within the report particularly the relaxed mowing proposal and the decreased use of pesticides across the city. She highlighted the urban green corridor projects taking place across the city, and the benefits wildflower meadows brought to wildlife and the local community.

Cllr Hollyer raised concerns regarding the lack of consultation ahead of the proposals being published for decision. He raised a number of questions relating to the resilience of the new arrangements, alternative weed treatment options, the mowing regimes in recreation spaces that were not mentioned in the report, and residents involvement following the charges to green waste collections. He also highlighted some key points for the Westfield Ward and he felt that the environmental objectives would be better achieved through meaningful engagement with Residents' Associations, ward councillors and parish councils.

The Executive Member thanked the public speakers and then confirmed she had received written representations from the following. She also noted that the full submissions received within the deadlines had been published alongside the agenda.

Toni Bunnell urged the council to phase out glyphosate and use alternative methods adopted by other councils.

Steve Galloway expressed concerns regarding the lack of consultation for different mowing regimes in amenity spaces and the difficulties caused if the grass was to grow too long.

Sue Wherrett expressed great concern regarding the use of glyphosate, which she felt went against the pollinator policy, and that no financial constraints could justify its continued use, especially on quad bikes.

Julie Fern gave her full support for increased tolerance of weeds citywide and a change to sustainable planting both on biodiversity grounds and on aesthetic grounds.

Cllr Waller requested greater consultation and for effective management of verge cutting and weed control.

Cllr Warters expressed concerns about the use of quad bikes, a preference for in house walk sprays of glyphosate, better management and roundabout verge clearance to enable wildflower growth.

22. Service Developments - Public Realm (10:13 am)

The Executive Member considered a report that focussed on the everyday tasks of street cleansing, parks, open spaces and grounds maintenance.

The Director of Transport, Environment and Planning noted the proposed changes to weed control methodologies which sought to reduce the amount of glyphosate used. He confirmed that officers had tried to find an alternative to glyphosate but those trials had proved not to be effective and cost significantly more. He noted that the recent trial of providing two treatments of glyphosate had been successful and that the recommendations in the report supported City of York Council's pollinator strategy to protect and increase the amount and quality of pollinator habitat.

The Head of Environmental Services presented the report and brought to the Executive Members attention various sections that addressed the options relating to urban highway verges, grass cutting, weed control and sustainable planting and bedding. He also noted that officers were committed to working with colleagues in Public Health and various partner organisations to continue to develop changes in the future.

During his update, the Head of Environmental Services highlighted that:

- grass cutting on housing land and highway verges would be maintained with approximately six cuts per year, but sports pitches would continue to be cut every three weeks.
- the trial undertaken on selected sites in the city centre to move to more sustainable planting and away from

bedding plants would be reviewed and further sites would be included if the ecological benefits were achieved.

- At this moment in time glyphosate remained the most effective method for weed control and was the most affordable option.
- As part of the contract to deliver weed control treatments across the city, suppliers had been asked to commit to trialling any further weed treatment methodologies that may become available.

It was noted that not all the initiatives would be delivered immediately but they offered an insight into what could be achieved in the future. In answer to questions raised by the Executive Member, officers confirmed that:

- Those areas identified for sustainable planting would only be filled and seeded with grass once all other options had been explored.
- Ward councillors, partner organisations and community groups would be consulted on any future management plans, where appropriate.
- Glyphosate was used to treat the perimeter fence of parks and playgrounds but was not used within those areas.
- The trial on using stiffer brushes fitted on the street sweepers to aid with weed removal had been successful and this had been adopted across the city.
- All proposals were developed in line with the council's budget and the ride on mowers were equipped to cut longer grass.

The Executive Member expressed her gratitude to all staff and she noted the proposals within the report, the council's budget constraints and the trials that had been undertaken, and she

Resolved:

- i) That the content of the report be noted and that the commencement of the proposed changes in the management of verges and open space in selected areas identified in the report be agreed.

Reason: To build climate resilience and adaptation to climate change and improve the biodiversity of our green spaces by determining how these spaces will be managed in the future; recognising that not all changes can be made immediately.

- ii) That the content of the report be noted and that the commencement of the proposed changes in the management of sustainable planting across the city be agreed.

Reason: To initiate a move to more sustainable and pollinator friendly planting across the city by trialling new approaches commencing with key locations around the city centre.

- iii) That the report be noted and the amount of glyphosate used in the treatment of weeds across the city be reduced by moving to two sprays citywide.

Reason: To reduce the amount of glyphosate used in the treatment of weeds across the city delivering on the Council Plan.

- iv) That the Director of Transport, Environment and Planning be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Head of Procurement, to take all steps necessary to procure, award and enter into contracts to deliver and effectively implement weed control treatments across the city.

Reason: To enable a contract to be put in place in a timely manner to ensure the treatment of weeds was delivered by an approved contractor and effectively monitored in line with budget commitments.

- v) That the Director of Environment, Transport and Planning be given delegated authority to trial alternative weed treatment options not previously trialled in York, so they can be appraised for their effectiveness and ability to be replicated across the city.

Reason: To inform the future direction of weed treatment approaches and to ensure the council can trial any emerging technologies in an effective manner and can reduce glyphosate usage as soon as possible.

Cllr Kent, Executive Member

[The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 10.33 am].