

## AGENDA SUPPLEMENT

### Decision Session - Executive Member for Environment and Climate Emergency

**To:** Councillors Kent and Ravilious

**Date:** Tuesday, 27 February 2024

**Time:** 10.00 am

**Venue:** The Thornton Room - Ground Floor, West Offices (G039)

The Agenda for the above meeting was published on **19 February 2024**. The following written representations have been received in regard to agenda item 3, Public Participation, for consideration of the following agenda item:

**4. Service Developments - Public Realm** (Pages 1 - 16)

This report focuses on the everyday tasks of street cleansing, parks, open spaces and grounds maintenance.

Written representations in respect of items on this agenda were submitted by 5:00pm on Friday, 23 February 2024.

This agenda supplement was published on **26 February 2024**.

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**Decision Session - Executive Member for Environment and Climate  
Emergency**

**Tuesday, 27 February 2024**

**Written representations received for Agenda Item 4 - Service  
Developments - Public Realm**

**Toni Bunnell written representation received on 21 February 2024**

With respect to the issue of glyphosate use as a weedkiller in the streets of York, I would like to offer the following suggestions:

That glyphosate is phased out as soon as possible.

That tried and proven practices adopted by many other councils throughout the UK are adopted.

To replace glyphosate use with the above mentioned practices - easily located online.

Finally, as a wildlife biologist, I am extremely concerned that York Council is planning the continued use of glyphosate, a highly toxic substance. It is harmful to humans and wildlife alike and random, inaccurate spraying of the substance throughout York (witnessed by myself in Holgate) is extremely worrying.

I would be grateful if my concerns could be raised at the forthcoming meeting on Tuesday February 27, under Appendix 3 of the agenda.

**Steve Galloway written representation received on 22 February  
2024**

Public realm maintenance standards - Foxwood area

My attention has been drawn to your proposals for changing “public realm” maintenance arrangements later this year. The Foxwood Residents Association hasn’t been consulted on these proposals but – on the basis of the sketchy information currently available – I have considered the implications for the Foxwood neighbourhood.

I must first record that over the last few years, residents have experienced difficulties in getting the Council to achieve consistent levels of service quality on both grass cutting and weed removal services. Residents were hoping that standards would improve this year.

We were told that a “neighbourhood caretaker” would be appointed which seemed to us like a good idea. This would have allowed local residents to influence environmental standards in the area where they live. It appears that this idea has been shelved.

Foxwood is, of course, located on the outskirts of York and therefore has access to a wide area of informal grassland, hedges and trees. Over the years, local residents have sought to improve biodiversity standards by planting more flowers and trees in amenity spaces and in specially commissioned street “tubs”.

We have established a wildflower meadow on Foxwood Park, while the Community Centre Garden on Bellhouse Way incorporates an “insect hotel”.

Bulbs have been planted on many open spaces including those in Otterwood Lane, Stirrup Close, Foxwood Park, Dickson Park, the Thanet Road Sports area, Chesneys Field and the Foresters Walk ravine.

Every home in the neighbourhood has its own garden. Every year the Residents Association organises a garden contest with additional “points” being allocated to gardens which incorporate features which encourage birds, bees, insects and other wildlife.

Most residents would wish to preserve the status quo as far as maintenance standards are concerned, unless and until there is a proven local majority in favour of change.

In particular

Verge/amenity area cutting frequencies

We witnessed, two years ago, the fall-off in standards when – because of staffing difficulties – the Council was unable to trim the verges for 6 weeks. Invasive weeds quickly took over and, in some locations, Cows Parsley reached over a metre in height. Other verges became dominated by nettles, docks and even thistles. Seeds from these weeds quickly blew into neighbouring private gardens making maintenance more difficult. The invasive weeds strangled any small wildflowers that normally grew in the verges as well as stunting the growth of patches of grass.

When eventually mowed, the long cuttings spread onto footpaths making them slippery in wet weather. We understand that the mowers suffered

breakdowns because the wet longer cuttings jammed the machinery. Drainage gullies were also blocked.

Sight lines at junction locations like Otterwood Lane/Foxwood Lane & Bellhouse Way/Foxwood Lane were compromised.

If the Council implements a “6 cuts a year” regime, then these problems will reoccur. While some neighbouring residents do cut the verges outside their homes, there are several locations where this is impractical either because of the size of the area concerned or because the residents are not physically able to do so.

The Council must also commit to a timetable for either strimming or using weedkiller at the bases of both street furniture and highway trees. It was unclear last summer what was supposed to happen and when.

If local residents agree, then a trial aimed at increasing biodiversity on the rural section of Askham Lane could be developed. As experience in other Councils has confirmed, a wide variety of wildflower species can only be achieved if the verge is actively managed. This will involve the removal of arisings (cuttings).

#### Parks maintenance

It is unclear what standards the Council intends to apply to cutting frequencies in the parks and on open spaces. We would like to understand the plans more fully.

#### Foxwood Park.

The Council agreed to restrict mowing on the wildflower meadow side of the park (east side) to twice per year. It also agreed to cut a 3-metre swathe around the outside of the meadow to encourage walkers to stay out of the planted area.

The remaining part of the park is used for children’s play, football and informal walks (including dog walking). There have been issues with anti-social behaviour here, so we would not want vegetation to be allowed to grow to the point where natural surveillance was compromised. The area should continue to be cut 12 times per season.

#### Hob Moor

This is on the boundary of the Foxwood area. The current policy of environmental management is satisfactory save that the paths become

blocked by overgrowth at several locations each year (at the access points, the cycle path to the rear of Windsor Garth etc.)

#### Thanet Road Sports area (Acorn Field)

The publicly maintained section of this area should be cut 12 times a year. There are issues with the strimming of the weed growth around those trees which are protected by tree guards (cages). This issue has been raised on several occasions without any response from the Council (weed killer has been used in the past). There is a similar problem with weeds growing up the railings which surround the rugby field

Over the years thousands of bulbs have been planted by volunteers on the Foxwood Lane margins and on the landscaping mounds. The Council delays cutting the mounds until the flowers have died back. We wish to see the arrangement continued. Amenity values are high on Foxwood Lane as this is the “gateway” to our area.

#### Chesney Field

This area is used for play and incorporates a well-used football pitch. It is also a dog walking area. Considerable efforts have gone on over the years to encourage dog owners to clean up after their pets. These efforts have not always been successful. There is a narrow strip of rough ground around the perimeter which is difficult to maintain. There has been considerable investment by both the Council and the Residents Association over the years in this area. Trees and bulbs have been planted. An interpretation board covering the history of the area - as a clay pit – was erected.

We have seen proposals which seem to suggest that as much as 50% of Chesneys Field would be put to “long grass”. Such a proposal would be unacceptable. The area – which already suffers from litter drift – would rapidly become full of rubbish cans, bottles, and dog poo. If it was eventually cut, detritus would be spread over a large area. The existing maintenance regime should be maintained unless, and until, residents agree to a change.

#### Dickson Park

This is another area where there has been considerable investment on green initiatives by local residents over the years. It incorporates a formal play area but its main value is as a informal leisure area. An interpretation board has also been erected there (covering the

associations the site has with the RAF). It is important to maintain high standards at the park.

#### Foresters Walk ravine

One area that could be improved is the ravine. That is an obvious area where the Council could promote a more diverse range of flora. The grass around the ravine must, however, be cut every three weeks or so to preserve sight lines for road users

#### Osprey Close

The area at the top of Osprey Close offers a diverse ecological mix. While extensive formal maintenance by the Council is not necessary, a swath should continue to be cut through the grass to ensure that the Public Right of Way (with links to Foxwood Lane and to Acomb Wood) remains usable.

#### Acomb Wood & Acomb Wood Meadow.

The Council undertakes minimal maintenance works in these areas. We see no obvious reason to change the regime although we remain concerned about the amount of dumping seen in the area and about anti social behaviour.

#### Trees and hedges

One other area which the Council needs to address is hedge and tree maintenance.

Residents would want to see a more proactive approach to tree management in the area. We have raised several issues where trees are obstructing streetlights. In turn, the resultant poor illumination is regarded as one of the reasons for relatively high crime rates in parts of the neighbourhood.

As highlighted above, there is also the question of the amenity treatment of weed growth in the cages which protect some trees (e.g. Hermans Walk area)

A continuing concern is overgrowth on foot and cycle paths. As well as the Hob Moor cycle path, the footpath at the top of Foxwood Lane regularly becomes obstructed during the summer months by nettles. This is a particular difficulty for those using wheelchairs and represents a hazard for children. The Council must be more responsive in dealing with these issues.

## Weed control

Foxwood “enjoyed” 3 treatments on hard surfaces last year. Standards were mixed. The impact of poor weed control relates to amenity appearance and potential damage to the surfaces of roads, paths and drainage systems. Weed growth can cause trip hazards.

Reducing weed control investment would lead to higher bills in the long term as infrastructure would be damaged. Most residents have no strong view about the method of weed control which might be employed provided it is safe – mechanical removal can achieve good standards but is expensive.

We would not wish to see a diminution in the standard of weed control in our area.

Some improvement could be achieved if gully sweeping standards were improved. Failure to remove leaf detritus from some paths and gullies – in the autumn - has already provided an ideal breeding ground for weed growth.

## Conclusion

As far as sub-urban areas, located next to the open countryside, are concerned the Council has not made a case on “biodiversity” grounds for changes to the maintenance regime.

There has been no neighbourhood-level species audit conducted.

Until that has been done, the only motivation for change is cost-cutting. In Foxwood grass cutting (pro rata) costs the Council less than £3000 pa. Such an amount could be found by top-slicing ward committee budgets if necessary.

The Council's first step should be to engage constructively with local residents and see what changes – if any – they would want to see made to maintenance processes and priorities.

Please ensure that the contents of this letter are drawn to the attention of anyone who may be involved in making decisions on the issues raised.



**Sue Wherrett written representation received on 22 February 2024**

Re: Contract for Glyphosate Spraying.

I would ask how is Glyphosate Spraying delivered from Quad Bikes going to encourage designated Wildflower areas to increase the biodiversity of plants, pollinators and insects, when in the past, after Glyphosate Spraying, gardens and footpaths are covered in dead and dying bees?

Over the last two years Glyphosate Spraying has decimated the bee populations in my garden.

I have noted the advice sent to the Council by Mike Childs, Head of Science, Policy and Research for York Friends of the Earth, states that "...local authority use of Glyphosate will have minimum biodiversity impacts if used sensibly....".

How is using Quad Bikes to deliver Glyphosate using this toxic chemical sensibly?

From my own personal experience of the Quad Bike Glyphosate Spraying last year, Friday 28 July 2023, to be precise, the Quad Bike rider sprayed Glyphosate at a height of approximately four feet, or a metre and an half up from ground level. This hit all the hedges, trees and bushes along the perimeter of my home. Hardly any weeds were sprayed (see photographic evidence attached, including dying trees and bushes.)

How is this targeted 'sensible' spraying?

I was also sprayed in the face. I was standing in my own doorway. Some seven months on, I am still suffering from documented health issues resulting from contact with the chemical spray.

How then does my experience fit within the parameters of "... unlikely to have any human impact .." as stated by Mike Childs as Head of Science, Policy and Research for York Friends of the Earth?

To my mind there are no financial constraints that can justify the renewal of any Contract to spray this toxic chemical around the City of York, particularly in residential areas, more especially using Quad Bikes.

Glyphosate may not be the most toxic of pesticides/herbicides, but its use is prolific and more widespread, which arguably makes it a bigger threat to pollinators, insects, wildlife, wildflowers....and humans.

No one can deny that these are hard and difficult times for everyone, but I would ask just what price society will pay in years to come when the reality of the deadly elixers of the Glyphosate Herbicide come home to roost in the germ cells of the next generation.

There has to be another way.



























**Julie Fern written representation received on 23 February 2024**

This proposal for service developments to the public realm has my full support— concerning weeds, verges, and annual bedding areas, it recognises that the value of the appearance of neatness and cleanliness over the actual health and cleanliness of our green spaces is fundamentally flawed. As a professional horticulturalist, I would argue that the excellent proposed changes both to mowing regimes and replacing annual bedding with perennial pollinator friendly planting will not only make a massively significant improvement for pollinators locally (and the associated positive knock-on effects for other wildlife) but also that the aesthetic will actually be far more attractive. Imagine seeing the beautiful shapes and colours of wildflowers and grass heads emerge in the small strips of green you walk alongside every day, being gently foraged by pollinators, rather than the regular hideous spew of grass clippings over scalped verges. And the twee Victorian bedding displays, an eco-disaster in their horticultural footprint, are a virtual desert for both pollinators and people with an eye for beauty compared to what a permanent pollinator-friendly planting scheme could offer. Please support this proposal and thereby significantly enhance what York has to offer for both people and pollinators.