



Weed Management Policy

Date 24/02/2026



Rationale for the Policy

Purpose

This policy sets out Westmorland and Furness Council's approach to managing weeds across council-owned and managed land. It aims to balance effective weed control with our responsibilities to protect public health, biodiversity, and the local environment.

The Council recognises growing public concern and scientific debate regarding potential environmental and health impacts of chemical-based herbicides, such as those containing glyphosate. While current UK regulations allow glyphosate use, we are committed to reducing and ultimately eliminating its use where safe and practical alternatives exist.

Whilst this policy is intended to outline the Council's approach to weed management on Council owned and managed land, we will work in partnership with landowners, (including those whose property borders or includes a river, stream, ditch, or other watercourse), community groups, and other partners to encourage best practice on non-Council owned land. Through collaboration, we will:

- Promote awareness of the environmental and health impacts of glyphosate, and share best practice guidance on alternative weed management methods.
- Support trials and demonstrations of mechanical, cultural, and ecological approaches to weed control, helping partners transition to more sustainable practices.
- Encourage biodiversity-friendly land management such as wildflower planting, reduced mowing, and natural ground cover to limit the need for chemical intervention.
- Provide advice and signposting to resources, training, and funding opportunities that enable landowners to adopt integrated weed management strategies.
- Monitor and report progress in partnership with stakeholders, ensuring transparency and accountability in reducing reliance on glyphosate

This policy applies to all services, contractors, and third parties acting on behalf of the Council in public spaces. These include, but are not limited to, parks and open spaces, highways and pavements, cemeteries, playgrounds and sports grounds, and all other council-managed land. Weed management on highways is a largely urban practice but also extends to rural areas where there are kerb channels and footways.

This policy specifically concerns weed management; other forms of vegetation management such as roadside verge management require different maintenance regimes and will not be covered by this policy.

Links to Council Plans, Policies, and Strategies

The Council has formally recognised climate and biodiversity crises and has published its Nature Strategy and Action Plan. Action O11 of this plan proposes to “explore alternatives to pesticides and herbicides, aiming to minimise their use in council operations to reduce environmental impacts and address health and safety concerns” subject to formal decision-making processes. This links priority 25 and 27 in the Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Our Biodiversity in the Community toolkit asks towns/parishes to consider “reducing or abandoning the use of pesticides and herbicides,” and promotes pollinator-friendly management. Reducing glyphosate use wherever possible would put the Council’s estate on the same footing as the practices we advocate for with our residents and partners.

The Climate Action Plan sets “providing leadership to become net zero” as a key theme and includes cross-cutting health and equality benefits. Transitioning to non-chemical weed management in public spaces reduces chemical exposure for children, pets and maintenance crews, supporting these co-benefits while delivering on the council’s ecologically aware value.

Links to Central Government Policy

Under the Environment Act 2021, including the enhanced Biodiversity Duty, public authorities must consider and act to conserve and enhance biodiversity¹. A clear commitment to minimise glyphosate use and pursue alternative weed management methods is an actionable policy that demonstrates the “act to deliver” step of our Biodiversity Duty.

The UK’s 2025 Pesticides National Action Plan (PNAP) sets a domestic goal to reduce the potential environmental harm from pesticides and to expand integrated pest management (IPM)². Whilst the PNAP is aimed at agricultural activities, minimising glyphosate application would support this work and contribute to the national direction on the reduction in pesticide use.

Actions for the Council

To support this policy, the Council will:

No.	Theme	Action
1	Monitoring	Evaluate and track the use of glyphosate on Council-owned and managed land to demonstrate the reduction in use and weed management effectiveness.
2	Monitoring	Regularly review technology and emerging policy to ensure the most appropriate methods are being implemented.
3	Operational	Prioritise non-chemical weed management methods where appropriate and cost effective (e.g., mechanical removal, mulching, hot foam/steam, planting ground cover), and support localised glyphosate use only where a non-chemical approach is demonstrably ineffective, impractical, uneconomic, or risks public safety (e.g. invasive species control at difficult or dangerous to access sites).
4	Operational	Align the minimum dilution rate of glyphosate across all services, contractors and sub-contractors so that further reductions can be made from a consistent baseline.
5	Operational	Undertake trials of alternatives to chemical-based treatment to explore the practicability and cost implications of other weed control measures with a view to limit glyphosate use to only where necessary as soon as practicable.
6	Operational	Manage Council-owned and/or managed land to enhance pollinator habitat and wildflower growth by reducing chemical disturbance.
7	Health and Safety	Protect residents, children and pets from exposure to glyphosate residues in public areas.
8	Health and Safety	Ensure all weed management alternatives are safe and comply with COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) regulations as well as government guidance on pesticide applications.
9	Health and Safety	Work towards prohibiting glyphosate in sensitive sites (schools, playgrounds, parks, cemeteries) at times of high public activity.
10	Training	Provide training for Council staff in alternative weed control methods, where practicable.
11	Communication	Inform residents when and where glyphosate will be used, with online notice and clear signage where practical.
12	Communication	Publish clear information for residents on why glyphosate use is being reduced, why weed management is changing, and why they may see more weeds in certain areas.
13	Partnership working	Support parish and town councils, schools, community groups, local businesses and residents to adopt pesticide-free practices.

Monitoring and Review

This policy, and the data that it requires, should be reviewed every 12 months, or sooner if there is compelling evidence for a change or a change in central government policy or advice.

References

1. GOV.UK (2023) *Complying with the Biodiversity Duty*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty> (Accessed: 26 September 2025).
2. Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (2025) *UK Pesticides National Action Plan 2025*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-pesticides-national-action-plan-2025> (Accessed: 26 September 2025).