

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Reduce weed spraying treatments		Service Director: Jon Winstanley		8 February 2024	
		Author: Daniel Warne		Version 1 (Scrutiny Commission)	
Proposal:	To reduce the weed spraying treatment from two applications per year to one application per year during the summer months.				
Total budget 2023/24:	£50,000	Initial proposed saving 2024/25:	£20,000	Recommended saving 2024/25:	£12,000
No. of responses:	<p>In total, 136 responses were received. The breakdown of responses is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 126 - A resident of West Berkshire • 7 - A visitor to West Berkshire • 6 - A West Berkshire business owner • 6 - Employed by a West Berkshire business • 3 - Employed by West Berkshire Council • 8 - A Parish/Town Councillor • 0 - A District Councillor • 0 - A partner organisation • 1 - A West Berkshire Council service provider • 6 - Other <p>We received 0 petitions.</p>				
Key issues raised:	The responses to this consultation were mainly positive with people highlighting the environmental and health benefits of reduced weed spraying along sections of the public highway. Concerns were raised over the impact on elderly and vulnerable residents if the weeds got too high. In addition, concerns were raised over the increase in spending that may be needed to repair the highway if the weeds started to cause damage. There was also support for more manual weed removal which could lead to the stopping of chemical weed sprays particularly glyphosate in the future.				
Equality issues:	Impact on elderly and people with reduced mobility or partially sighted if the weeds started to impact on pavements.				

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Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Explain the benefits to people, advertise it and increase education.	We agree that this is an important component of reducing the impact from this change and will look to do so if the proposal is passed and implemented.	
	Engage with volunteers to clear weeds.	We would welcome volunteers to look after their own local community. However, currently we would not have the resource to suitably support this in terms of engagement and provision of materials. There are also serious health and safety aspects that need to be considered when working on or near the highway and with handling weed spray substances, therefore we would suggest that volunteers do not clear weeds from the public highway.	
	Physically remove the weeds and/or weed spray on request.	While we do undertake physical removal of weeds where required between the current 2 weed spray applications, relying in this method solely is unlikely to produce any savings due to an increased workload and demand on the contractor. Likewise, weed spraying on request will increase workload, demand and required equipment at the contractor, increasing costs, not reducing them.	

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Identified benefits or opportunities	Suggestion	Council response	
	Engage with the community to look after certain areas.	We would welcome volunteers to look after their own local community. However, currently we would not have the resource to suitably support this in terms of engagement and provision of materials. There are also serious health and safety aspects that need to be considered when working on or near the highway and with handling weed spray substances, therefore we would suggest that volunteers do not clear weeds from the public highway.	
	Less chemicals and pollution into the environment.	We agree there would be an environmental benefit to this proposal.	
	More pollinators, wildlife and wildflowers.	We agree there would be an environmental benefit to this proposal.	
	There would be financial savings.	We agree this would provide an immediate financial saving to the Council. However, the long-term costs are harder to estimate in terms of impact on the highway network and increase demand on contractors to remove weeds manually.	
	Environmental benefit.	We agree there would be an environmental benefit to this proposal.	
Suggested areas which might not need to be sprayed	Suggestion	Council response	
	Most or all the district.	If the proposal is implemented, we will monitor the impact of how this proposal affects the district to see if it would be possible to decrease weed spraying further.	
	Base of trees, rural areas (without a kerb), Wildflower verge scheme.	We do not currently spray these areas as part of this service.	

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	<p>Areas along the highway such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-essential for highway safety. • Roundabouts • The A4 • Areas near houses • High traffic areas • East Garston • Near schools • Within 5 metres of a water course <p>Other areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadside Nature Reserves • Conservation areas • Near allotments 	If the proposal is implemented, we will monitor the impact of how this proposal affects the district to see if it would be possible to decrease weed spraying further.	
	Areas where council members live	We do not base our weed treatment schedule on where Council members live.	
	Parks	This proposal only includes weed spraying carried out along sections of the public highway and does not include parks and green spaces managed by the Council.	
Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:	Suggestion	Council response	

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	Increase garden waste charge	This could be easily implemented and generate a significant amount of income to cover the financial shortfall, if the instruction is given by decision makers.	
	No weed spraying	We would prefer to do this in a phased approach. By reducing the weed spraying from two to one application per year we will be able to monitor and identify any impacts over the coming years. We would then look to see if we can reduce the weed spraying further or completely.	
Suggestion for income generation:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Charge more council tax.		
	Increase parking charges.	This suggestion has been consulted on at the same time as this proposal.	
	Means testing for care homes.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Cap council salaries and bonuses.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Reduce postage cost.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Turn off lights outside Mortimer library.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Better financial control.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Reduce waste.	The Council are committed to reducing waste production by residents as part of our priority to tackle the climate and ecological emergency. This includes increasing education around recycling and its benefits, and by working with schools and communities.	

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	Increase planning charges	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Stop West Berkshire Council employees working from home.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Reduce dog poo bins	This suggestion has been consulted on at the same time as this proposal.	
	Parking- allow people to pay with credit card not on app.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Use the best value contractor.	Our current contract with Veolia, with which weed spraying of a selection of public highway falls, expires in 2032.	
	Reduce grass cutting	This suggestion has been consulted on at the same time as this proposal.	
	Reduce staff salaries/staff reorganisation.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Stop putting exercise machines in parks.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Selective hedge cutting/grass cutting.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Stop with green initiatives.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Reduce use of consultants.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
	Use of community work/volunteers more.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	

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	Abandon 20mph roll out.	This suggestion has been noted and will be shared with the relevant teams for consideration.	
Officer conclusion and recommendation as a result of the responses:	Most respondents strongly support the proposal, primarily motivated by environmental considerations. However, some concerns were raised including worries about the potential negative impacts on disabled and vulnerable individuals, as well as those with allergies, if the weed growth becomes excessive. Other concerns raised were about the loss visual amenity within the district, potential hazards for drivers and pedestrians, and the perception that cost savings might be outweighed by increased road repairs. The officer recommendation is to proceed with the planned reduction of weed spraying along sections of the public highway, transitioning from two applications to one per year, effective from 1 April 2024.		

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