

**MOTIONS TO COUNCIL**  
**21 April 2026**

Title of Motion	Public Realm Weed Treatment Programme: Requirement for Public Consultation
Proposer	Cllr Creek
Seconder	Cllr La Borde
Supporters (a minimum of three are required)	Cllrs Donnithorne, Evans, Long and Thomason-Kenyon.
Recommendation for Council to vote on	<p>That Cabinet is requested to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recognise that the decision to reintroduce chemical weed treatment using glyphosate represents a significant policy reversal with ecological, public health and democratic implications for communities across Cornwall.</li> <li>2. Pause the commencement of chemical weed treatment currently scheduled for May 2026 until a meaningful public consultation process has been completed.</li> <li>3. Recognise the wholly inadequate three week opt out window provided to parish and town councils which included Easter and commits to extending this to 30 days after the public consultation results have been published.</li> <li>4. Give town/parish councils more clarity on the minimum required standards of the urban network.</li> <li>5. Urgently review the financial terms of the opt-out scheme, which as currently structured are coercive: town and parish councils that exercise their democratic right to refuse glyphosate treatment are penalised by the simultaneous removal of wider targeted estate improvement works, and are offered funding covering only the chemical treatment element (£343.45 per km), leaving them to bear the full additional cost of alternative weed management, waste clearance and public liability insurance from their own precept. Decouple the opt-out from the loss of estate improvement funding.</li> </ol>
Context for the motion (i.e. why is the motion being	<b>Introduction</b>

submitted – what is the proposer aiming to achieve)

Across the globe glyphosate is considered to be a significant risk to health and ecology even when spot spraying techniques are used. Recent human epidemiological studies (March 2026) have now definitively linked glyphosate use/exposure with development of non-Hodgkin lymphoma. See article by Prof Weisenburger.<sup>1</sup>

Thousands of lawsuits have been filed against Bayer and Monsanto, alleging the glyphosate in their Roundup weed killer may cause cancer. Billions of dollars have already been paid to victims in the US with many more cases to be heard. Consequently, the use of glyphosate in public places is banned in France, Germany and Italy. There are total bans on its use in Mexico and Vietnam. Many states and cities in America and provinces in Canada have banned its public and home use.

The UK government has licensed glyphosate **only** until December 2026 pending results of research by the Health and Safety Executive.

### **Health Implications**

Beyond the cancer risk, glyphosate has been shown to disrupt gut microbiome health in mammals, including humans. The herbicide inhibits the shikimate pathway – a biochemical route not present in human cells but present in the beneficial gut bacteria on which human immune function, digestion and mental health depend. Peer-reviewed research has demonstrated that even low-level environmental exposure, of the kind that would result from children and pets contacting treated kerblines, can alter gut microbiome diversity. Children are disproportionately at risk due to their lower body weight, hand-to-mouth behaviour, and proximity to ground level. Pets, particularly dogs, are similarly exposed through paw contact and grooming behaviour on treated surfaces. These pathways of exposure are not adequately addressed by Cornwall Council's framing that diluted application is safe for the public.

### **Persistence in Water and the Marine Environment**

Glyphosate does not degrade rapidly once it reaches the aquatic environment. Research published in the *Marine Pollution Bulletin* has demonstrated that glyphosate has a significantly extended half-life in seawater compared to freshwater – breaking down far more slowly in saline conditions due to the reduced microbial activity available to metabolise it. In Cornwall's coastal context this is of particular concern: surface water runoff from treated kerblines flows via drainage channels and road gullies into watercourses

that ultimately discharge to the sea. Fistral Beach and other bathing waters in Newquay lie at the end of these drainage catchments. Glyphosate has been detected accumulating in bivalve shellfish, which filter seawater and concentrate pollutants in their tissue. Cornwall Council's own Nature Recovery Strategy (policies A.15.3 and A.72.1) specifically identifies the risk of herbicide transfer to waterways from hard surfaces and calls for chemical treatments to be limited and reduced. This decision directly contradicts those commitments.

**Killing Weeds Does Not Remove the Problem:  
Kerblines Detritus and Soil Accumulation**

A critical point omitted from Cornwall Council's public communications is that chemical weed treatment kills the plant above ground but does not remove the accumulated substrate in which it grew. Over more than a decade without highway weed treatment, significant quantities of soil, sediment, organic material and debris have built up along kerblines, in drainage channels, and at the base of footways across the urban network. This is the growing medium that sustains weed regrowth. Glyphosate application will kill existing vegetation but will leave this substrate entirely in place – meaning fresh weed seeds will colonise the same kerblines detritus within weeks of treatment, necessitating repeated chemical applications in perpetuity rather than a genuine three-year recovery. The Council has not addressed how this accumulated material will be physically removed, nor costed the mechanical clearance required to do so. Until the kerblines substrate is cleared, chemical treatment alone cannot deliver the long-term network recovery the Cabinet has asserted as justification for this programme.

Here in Cornwall, the use of herbicides has been identified as a risk to nature and waterways. In the report by Cornwall Wildlife Trust on the State of Nature Cornwall 2020, it states "since 1991, 51% of native plant species in Cornwall has declined as a consequence of chemicals, herbicides and fungicides." And "where vegetation is cleared by the use of herbicides, species suffer the loss of their habitat and food." In Cornwall Council's recently agreed Nature Recovery Strategy the dangers of herbicides are highlighted specifically where they run off hard surfaces such as pavements, contaminating water courses and damaging aquatic life, especially bi-valves (shellfish) in which glyphosate accumulates.

The decision to resume spraying glyphosate is in direct contradiction to policies A.15.3 and A.72.1 of the

Nature Recovery Strategy where it specifically states to limit and reduce use of chemical treatments which transfer to waterways.

### **Grounds for this Motion**

In this context, the decision to spray glyphosate to improve the aesthetics of the public realm is a material reversal of Cornwall Council's own environmental commitments accumulated over more than a decade. Since 2013 Cornwall Council has led the way in respect of its far reaching commitment to the health of its residents and environment. This includes the development of an environmental growth strategy, a pollinator action plan, the declaration of an ecological emergency and in 2026 a Nature Recovery Strategy.

Public concerns on the use of glyphosate are well known and several of Cornwall's town and parish councils have resolved to ban its use. Wadebridge Town Council is extolled in the Nature Recovery Strategy for its decision in 2016 to become a glyphosate free town. Other parishes have followed suit including Bude, Newquay and Perranporth.

Town and parish councils have not been meaningfully consulted about Cornwall Council's decision to resume spraying glyphosate in their parishes and in some cases this directly overrides a democratically-reached local policy. A letter sent from Cornwall Council to parish and town councils on 30th March 2026 has given them only 3 weeks to review and sign complex legal opt out agreements with enormous financial and insurance implications. In some instances parish councils will not have the opportunity to meet and discuss this option.

There is much concern about the use of glyphosate in public areas and the precautionary principle should be applied by Cornwall Council in the face of ongoing scientific debate about glyphosate's safety. And most importantly, if glyphosate use is to resume in their streets and estates, residents and communities must be consulted.

### **Contradiction of Cornwall Council's Own Formally Approved Operational Policy**

The 2026 Cabinet decision does not merely contradict the spirit of the 2016 Full Council motion (CC/861) — it contradicts formally approved operational policy documents that were produced directly in response to that motion and approved by Cornwall Council's own Portfolio Holder for Environment and Public Protection.

Cornwall Council's Terrestrial Invasive Non-Native Plants Policy (v1.7, approved 30 July 2020) explicitly

cites the 2016 Bees, Pollinators and Human Health motion as its founding policy basis and records the commitment that Cornwall Council 'ceases the use of neonicotinoids and glyphosate on all public access land (to include office, depot, housing surroundings, highways, street scene and natural environment assets) that it owns or manages' except for Schedule 9 invasive species control or genuine material risks to asset integrity. This policy was not a motion — it was a formally approved council document, signed off in 2020 and operative across all council services and third-party contractors including CORMAC Solutions Ltd. The Cabinet's 2026 decision to spray glyphosate across 1,737km of urban highway network is incompatible with this policy on its own terms: kerblane annual weeds are not Schedule 9 species, and a decade of accumulated cosmetic deterioration does not meet the threshold of 'material risk to asset integrity' that the policy's exception clause was designed to address.

Furthermore, a formal briefing presented to the Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2022 — just three and a half years ago — confirmed that Cornwall Council's Integrated Weed Management approach 'does not mean no herbicides are used; it is about exploring options and which technique will provide the best outcome before selecting herbicides as a last resort.' The same briefing confirmed that the INNS Policy, Environmental Growth Strategy, Pollinator Action Plan and Pesticide Guidance Notes together form an interlocking suite of commitments entrenched in Cornwall's climate and ecological emergencies. The Cabinet's 2026 decision bypasses this scrutiny framework entirely: no impact assessment against the INNS Policy, Pollinator Action Plan or Pesticide Guidance Notes has been published, and no evidence has been presented that non-chemical methods were genuinely trialled as a first resort before glyphosate was selected as the programme's primary treatment tool.

### **Coercive Opt-Out Financial Terms**

The opt-out scheme as designed is financially coercive. Town and parish councils that have democratically resolved to avoid glyphosate — exercising a principled environmental and public health position — are placed in an impossible position by the terms Cornwall Council has set. Opting out of chemical treatment automatically results in the withdrawal of wider targeted estate improvement works from the affected area. These improvements — which address cumulative degradation built up over thirteen years — are presented as a

benefit of the programme, but their removal constitutes a direct financial penalty imposed on communities that choose not to spray.

Funding offered to opted-out councils is limited to £343.45 per km per year: the pro-rata cost of the chemical treatment element only. No additional funding is provided for the substantially higher cost of delivering an equivalent standard of weed management by non-chemical means, which requires greater labour input, more frequent visits, specialist equipment and associated waste collection. Opted-out councils must also procure and fund their own public liability insurance. The net effect is that a parish or town council exercising its democratic right to protect its community from glyphosate exposure must do so at material cost to its precept — funding a Cornwall Council statutory duty from local taxpayers' money — while simultaneously losing public realm improvements to which its residents would otherwise have been entitled. This Council regards these terms as structurally inequitable and contrary to the spirit of the devolution agenda Cornwall Council has otherwise championed.

#### **Delay Request**

Cornwall Council will be recommencing spraying glyphosate at precisely the time the evidence is being re-examined at a national level. It seems appropriate that until the UK government has finalised its research, Cornwall Council should refrain from reintroducing glyphosate for weed control. The UK government has licensed glyphosate until December 2026 whilst the Health and Safety Executive undertakes an assessment on whether glyphosate continues to meet the legislative approval criteria for an active substance. This will take account of any new scientific, technical and regulatory knowledge. Based on these findings there will be a public consultation before a licence is potentially renewed in December 2026.

In UK Parliament a second reading is due to be heard on 1st May 2026 of a Plant Protection Products Bill to provide for the prohibition of the use of professional plant protection products by local authorities. In UK Parliament there is an early day motion awaiting a hearing which calls for the banning of glyphosate in towns and cities and especially areas under local authority control. It is signed by 33 MPs including Liberal Democrat MPs, Andrew George of St Ives and Ben Maguire of North Cornwall.

#### **Alternative Methods for Weed Management**

	<p>The information provided by Cornwall Council provides no evidence as to what methods it proposes to use after its three-year trial of glyphosate. Indeed, such methods could be employed now to avoid the use of glyphosate. Cornwall Council does not specify the standards of maintenance expected on its urban highways and estates, making it difficult for town and parish councils to plan for an opt out.</p> <p>Cornwall Council has not adequately evidenced the need for glyphosate other than asserting that highways are in a critical state. On visual inspection of local estates, the majority of growth appears to be new annual vegetation rather than established deep-rooted weeds requiring chemical root kill. The Council's own FAQ acknowledges that glyphosate kills only actively growing green vegetation and does not affect the substrate. This is the central flaw in the programme's logic: the accumulated soil, sediment and organic material built up along kerblines over thirteen years — the growing medium that will sustain immediate regrowth after chemical treatment — must be physically removed regardless of whether glyphosate is used or not. If mechanical clearance of that substrate is required in any case, then the chemical treatment step is not necessary for long-term network recovery; it is merely a short-term aesthetic intervention that does not address the underlying cause of regrowth. The Council should be asked to demonstrate, through a properly evidenced pilot, why mechanical substrate removal alone cannot achieve the same long-term outcome without the ecological, public health and legal risks that glyphosate carries. Until that evidence exists, the precautionary principle requires that chemical treatment should not proceed.</p>
Does the motion*:-	
(i) have potential financial implications for the Council – if so advise what these might be and how they might be addressed/mitigated, taking into account that the Council agreed a three-year budget in February 2026	No financial implications given budget has already been found for the proposed project.
(ii) have potential legal/constitutional implications for the	None

Council – if so advise what these might be	
(iii) require further background information to enable the Council to make a decision and/or require detailed consideration – if so advised what might be required	None
<p><b>Consultation requirements (Rule 12.2)</b></p> <p>Please provide details of how the proposer has consulted with the Strategic Director with responsibility for the matter (or their nominee) and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s) together with the details of the consultees’ response:</p> <p>Strategic Director and Cabinet Member consulted on 8 April however at the time of submission no reply had been received.</p>	

\*Note: In the context of (b) and (c) above, by voting on this motion a Member is not automatically pre-determining any future decision they may be involved in relating to the matter, depending upon the actual wording of the motion itself. Members may properly express a view at this stage, provided that they remain open minded and able to consider any subsequent decision fairly, objectively and on the basis of all relevant evidence and material considerations when required to do so.”