

Council to discuss growing weed problem

If your street is anything like ours, then weeds are growing next to pavements, and it appears that they are largely unchecked by council environmental officers spraying weedkiller or taking any other action. It is a common problem.



At last month's council meeting Transport and Environment Convener Lesley Macinnes urged the council to defer any action until the August T&E committee meeting. She said : "We agree that weeds represent a significant issue. I have already been talking to officers about the number of different methods that may or may not be employed in the circumstances that we have here in the city.

"We believe that the issue would be better served by having the opportunity to question officers at the Transport and Environment Committee. This would create a much more effective roadmap to solution which will allow us to achieve what I believe we all want for the city."

One concerned reader contacted us last month about the weeds in the north of the city. He told us: "The area which I have reported is the worst I have ever seen in 45 years of living in the area. I believe that the shopkeepers have regularly reported the 'weed' issue with no success.

"Edinburgh is an eyesore when it comes to cleanliness. It's citizens are demonstrating their lack of concern by 'why care' attitudes. Accountability is not evident by our elected councils."

ENVIRONMENT CONVENER

We put this to Councillor Macinnes who said that complaints are actually going down. She commented : "We acknowledge that

the problem of weeds has been more noticeable this year, in part thanks to wet weather, which reduces the effectiveness of herbicides used, and appreciate residents' frustration.

"While we are working hard to address the current situation, we are also exploring the most appropriate measures to target roadsides, pavements, parks and other green spaces, focusing on the best method of treatment for each surface as part of necessary changes to our use of particular weed killers.

"It is our intention to find the most effective, safest solutions for tackling weeds in Edinburgh, and this matter will be discussed by Councillors at the next Transport and Environment Committee in August."

COMPLAINTS ABOUT WEEDS ARE DECREASING :

From January to end of June 2015 there were 150 logged

From January to end of June 2016 there were 162 logged

From January to end of June 2017 there were 107 logged

Silverknowes lies in the Almond Ward. Almond councillor Cllr Kevin Lang told The Edinburgh Reporter : "The weeds situation in Silverknowes, as in many parts of the city, is a total disgrace.

"At the last Council meeting, we had a chance to agree urgent action and start to address the problem. However, the SNP/Labour administration voted to delay taking any decision. One Labour councillor even dismissed concerns by saying a weed was just a plant in the wrong place. It's simply not good enough.

"I've already taken photos of the worst areas in Silverknowes and shared these with council officials. However, we need leadership from the new administration and a commitment to take this matter far more seriously than they are."



Is the council really not doing anything to get rid of the weeds outside your door, our front door and outside the shops in Silverknowes?

Well no it is doing something. It is going to discuss the matter at the next Transport and Environment Committee meeting on 10 August 2017. We know this because it was discussed at great length at the last council meeting and that is what was decided, and that is what the Environment Convener has confirmed. Why was it discussed last month?

There was a motion lodged at June's full council meeting by [Conservative councillor Callum Laidlaw](#) who explained the reason in proposing some action : "Just after the General Election I was walking through the New Town on my way to Conservative Central Office and a song came into my head. Not Rule Britannia or even Robbie Williams No Regrets, but it was In the Jungle, the Mighty Jungle. Unfortunately across this city it doesn't seem to be that the Lion Sleeps Tonight but the council has when it comes to weeds.

"Weeds may seem a bit of a trivial issue to end on but weeds are about more than just the aesthetics of the city. Clearly the weeds in this city are a problem.

"We see weeds growing throughout the World Heritage Site in walls and pavements. Anyone who has crossed the Dean Bridge recently will see a veritable herbaceous border growing along the wall between the road and the bridge."

Councillor Laidlaw continued that many difficulties arise from ignoring weeds across the city, such as damage to pavements and streets, and while he recognised that the council had discussed the matter in November 2016, said that more

immediate solutions were needed.

WEED CONTROL

The council agreed last winter that they would approve an ***Integrated Weed Control Programme*** which would phase out Glyphosate-based herbicide and find alternative ways to control weeds including using machinery or mulches or alternative less harmful products.

The fact that this report is not due till November 2017 was not good enough for Cllr Laidlaw who said : "I would like to move this motion to see an immediate response from the Director of Place as we approach the key festival season, as we see hundreds of thousands of people come to our city. I would ask the T&E committee to go back into that report and see what can be done to address the very low provision that we have on weeds. We have eight gardeners across the city trying to tackle a problem that really is on a scale that I don't think we have seen."

Councillor Chas Booth a Green Group councillor who sat on the T&E committee during the last administration, spoke with the authority of someone who had been there when the decision was made. He said that he would not allow the timetable for this report to be derailed.

He explained: "I moved the original motion to the T&E committee several months ago on phasing out Glyphosate. There is a very strong and highly scientific reason why we should be moving to phase this out. It has been found to be highly carcinogenic. We have a duty of care to our citizens, but also to our staff who are likely to have higher exposure to this chemical. We should therefore be moving to phase it out.

"The T&E committee reached a pragmatic agreement some months ago. The idea was to phase it out once practical and cost-effective alternatives were found."

Cllr Booth argued that the motion lodged by Cllr Laidlaw was inaccurate as the weedkiller is not actually being banned, just phased out when something else is found to replace it, and also it only applies to parks and green spaces not hardstandings such as pavements.

But he agreed that there is a fundamental problem in getting weedkiller applied anywhere in the city – lack of staff.

Councillor Maureen Child (She was the one who said a weed is

just a plant in the wrong place!) is a colleague of Councillor Laidlaw as they both represent Portobello/Craigmillar. She advocated taking the matter into her own hands. "I personally can leave my home and get rid of a weed or two. This is not rocket science."

Supporting her Conservative colleague City Centre councillor Joanna Mowat said it was a shame that Councillor Laidlaw had to bring this motion forward. She continued : "I brought forward a similar motion last year. We were assured then that the £150,000 a year that we spend on this would be spent more effectively after last summer's weed strewn city when there were many complaints.

"It costs us more in the long term if we do not take effective action."

Councillor Nick Cook, Conservative councillor for Morningside said : "Over the election period there was a real increase in the number of constituents who contacted us about weed issues. "You can see it in the city centre and in the suburbs as well. The festival is upon us which is vital for the economic prosperity of our city. We want to make a good impression on the visitors who come here. Simply saying we will deal with this at a later date is not good enough.

"The circumstances have changed. We are saying we need to do something a bit quicker and which is more tangible. That is what the motion seeks to do today."

So watch this space tomorrow 10 August for an update on what the council's Transport and Environment Committee discuss and decide. You can watch online [here](#).

And in the meantime will you be pulling up your own weeds? Or have you already done so? Do let us know! Councillor Child did just that in Portobello.

RAINBOW COALITION IN PORTOBELLO



Since the last meeting Councillor Child has been out doing her bit.

She told us: "Callum, Mary Campbell and I hoed some weeds with Bob Jefferson of Party Online outside Portobello Library and along a stretch of Rosefield Avenue in July.

“We were showing our Local Councillor ‘rainbow Coalition’ teamwork at local level as well as raising awareness of Portobello Tool Library , 4pm – 7pm every Monday. There are plenty of hoes available for hire there to tackle a few weeds near your own house. Kate Campbell couldn’t join us on the day but was there in spirit!”