

Call to extend weedkiller use in Midlothian

Midlothian councillors are being asked to approve the use of a toxic weedkiller three months earlier than usual this year because of climate change.

Council officers say allowing them to start spot treatment with glyphosate in March instead of June will save them nearly £18,000 by allowing them to axe a seasonal gardener job needed to remove weeds by hand in the summer.

And they say that while they remain 'committed' to reducing the use of the toxin, introducing it early will mean an additional 300 litres of it are spread over the year.

Midlothian Council has reduced the amount of glyphosate used annual from 1,374 litres in 2019 to 570 litres last year.

They say even with the additional 300 litres it still remains far below the amount being used six years ago.

The council has restricted its use to spot application on the county's streets and pavements with a continued reduction in use in parks and open spaces while it is also used for essential treatment of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed and in areas where road safety requires it to ensure visibility.

Officers also work with local community groups who have taken over maintenance of open spaces in exchange for a ban on its use in their areas.

However a report to elected members later this month will ask for permission to extend the times of year it is used.

It says: "A major challenge for the Neighbourhood Environment Team in 2024 was the amount of weeds already in the road gutters and footpaths. This was due to the restrictions on the timing of the first application of glyphosate in Midlothian.

"In addition to this, the effects of climate change have seen an increase in the growing season to include March, October and even November, due to the longer periods of wet and warm weather which have now become the norm in the UK. This means that there is now a longer period during which weeds require treatment."

The report also points to the addition of three new housing estates in the county as requiring more of the weedkiller as part of the reason for increasing the amount needed.

But it says introducing the weedkiller on the streets earlier in the year will help control growth and make it easier to maintain.

It says: "The application of glyphosate to target weed growth in March, rather than from June, would significantly improve the visual quality of the local environment and would result in resource savings, which would be reinvested in the Recycling and Greenspace service."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter