



To:
Councillor Andrew Stevens, Cabinet
Member for Environment and Infrastructure

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Date 16 February 2023
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BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure following the meeting of the Panel on 10 January 2023. It covers Public Question Time and Weed Management/Use of Glyphosate.

Dear Cllr Stevens

The Panel met on 10 January 2023 and discussed Weed Management/Use of Glyphosate.

We would like to thank you and relevant officers for attending to respond to public questions, present the item on Weed Management / Use of Glyphosate and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learned from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response.

Public Question Time

The following questions were received from members of the public and you responded.

QUESTION 1:

Swansea Climate Action Network has recently formed a Glyphosate Alternatives Working Group. We have a number of members with many years of researching and

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campaigning in this area. Considering the evidence of the harmful effects of Glyphosates we don't think it is an option for the Council to continue using it. Given that we are in a Climate and Nature Emergency we feel the Council needs all the support it can get in finding valid alternatives. We are looking into the alternatives such as Foamstream (though some members have expressed concerns re the fossil fuels used to heat the foam), proper management of verges etc. **We would like to know how our working group can feed into the relevant Council discussions in a meaningful way going forward.**

RESPONSE:

Cabinet Member: "Regarding glyphosate potentially being harmful – it has been subject to hundreds of clinical trials and all concluded it is safe when used under label recommendation. The European Chemicals Agency Committee for Risk Assessment Action published results of the latest review on 30 May 2022 which recommended no change in the classification of glyphosate. We have in the past trialled alternative methods and found them to not be viable in the scale required for on street weeds. As for inputting into the discussion we welcome views being submitted by all interested parties and encourage everyone to engage in the discussion."

Member of the public: "Is there a more productive way we can engage in on-going discussion?"

Cabinet Member: "Put your thoughts down in an email to me and I can take it up with the appropriate officers to find a way forward."

QUESTION 2:

Why is the Council still using Glyphosates instead of Foamstream?

(1) We have a report that Foamstream is 31% cheaper than glyphosates and more efficient. See [Appendix 1](#)

(2) Councils in England and the rest of the world are switching from Glyphosates to Foamstream (or other eco friendly alternatives), partly to avoid expensive court cases to defend from people who are claiming cancer through using such weedkillers. See [Appendix 2](#)

(3) Foamstream as opposed to Glyposates doesn't kill off pollinators, vital for future generations, and is not harmful if it leaks into rivers, whereas glyphosates kill fish and pollute the rivers. See [Appendix 3](#)

4) Glyphosates are proven to be dangerous to human health, Foamstream is purely hot water and foam. See [Appendix 4](#)

RESPONSE:

Cabinet Member: "We believe some other local authorities do use Foamstream in small areas, but it goes alongside a spraying contract."

Member of the public: "This second question will be able to be debated through the on-going discussion."

QUESTION 3:

As one of my councillors in Castle Ward, I want you to know how disturbed I am that Swansea council is intending to continue with the use of Roundup to control weeds on our verges. I can't attend the meeting Tuesday morning as I am teaching but I wanted to explain my objections. We are learning more everyday about the importance to our health of our microbiome that was only discovered 15 years ago. Research shows the herbicide glyphosate can definitely harm our gut microbiome as I explain below. This is important - a damaged microbiome is indicated in all chronic disease including asthma, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis - in fact any disease associated with inflammation. Those most adversely effected by Covid were very likely to have a diminished microbiome. These findings are gradually being shared with the public through the pioneering work of multiple award-winning Professor of Genetic Epidemiology, Tim Spector. I summarise some key points reported in his latest book, "Food for Life" (2022).

Professor Tim Spector's has much to say about glyphosate and none of it is good. He reminds us that a Californian groundsman who regularly sprayed glyphosate (Roundup) and developed non-Hodgkin's lymphoma was awarded damages of \$87 million by the jury who ruled that it was 'likely' the herbicide was responsible. Currently there are thousands of lawsuits against the manufacturer, Monsanto, with regard to glyphosate and they have already made out of court settlements in nearly 100,000 lawsuits, paying out nearly \$11 billion dollars in compensation. Many governments and the WHO modified their position on Roundup as a probable carcinogen in 2015, adding it to the list of chemicals we should avoid.

What we know is that widespread use of herbicides like Roundup and pesticides is contributing to the gradual reduction in the diversity of our soil microbes. As we are learning that our bodies and our soils need a rich mix of bacteria and diverse fungi, we must change our practices.

Studies by the FDA show that glyphosate creeps into most foods tested at some level. Whether or not it causes some cancers if ingested in small quantities through our food is uncertain, but it definitely harms our gut microbes. We are all exposed to it over our lifetimes. The so-called safe limits proposed by government agencies for glyphosate are highly controversial, as very little data exists in humans, and the chemicals can remain in soil for several months.

We know that herbicide chemicals including Roundup damage our soils and our human microbes. My question is: **Why would Swansea Council continue to use this substance which may cause such harm and endanger its own employees?** I ask they adopt the precautionary principle and cease use of Glyphosate immediately. Arguments that it is cheaper no longer wash - the true cost of using this chemical is currently unknown but indications are it will not turn out to be cheaper. Our health and the health of our soils cannot be bargained away in this manner.

Could you let me know your position on the use of this chemical in Swansea please.

RESPONSE FROM CABINET MEMBER:

“I reiterate that glyphosate has been subject to hundreds of clinical trials which concluded it is safe when used under label recommendations and the European Chemicals Agency Committee for Risk Assessment published results of the latest review on 30 May 2022 which recommended no change in classification of glyphosate. They actually agreed there was no scientific reason to change the classification based on wide ranging review of scientific evidence. The Committee again concluded that classifying glyphosate as a chalcogen is not justified. All Council employees and contractors who use it are professionally qualified.

In terms of use of the Chemical, it is by far the most efficient method at this time for the broad spectrum treatment of common weeds and when addressing the scale required for street pavements, but that said we always keep an open mind on suitable alternatives and any emerging information to support a change in our processes.”

QUESTION 4:

Referring to your comment in your ‘Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure’ for the Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting on Tuesday 10th January 2023. Weed Management.

I have noted that under your paragraph 6.1 ‘Future Challenges & Opportunities’ you express “increasing concern over the safety of the chemicals used.” And that ‘the Council will continue to review other options as they become commercially available.’

Further in paragraph 7.1 you stay that “Currently it is believed there is no other cost effective treatment to meet public demand”.

Further to your paragraph 6.1, in a report on the Sustainable Foods Trust website by Patrick Holden on 5th February 2021 in Chemicals in Agriculture, Farming, “A new study published on 27th January in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*, conducted by an international team of scientists led by Dr Michael Antoniou of Kings College London, found that exposure to glyphosate and it’s commercial Roundup formulation, can disrupt the function of the gut microbiome (bacteria and fungi) and internal body systems with the potential serious effects on human health. In controlled laboratory animal experiments, glyphosate was found to alter the composition, and more importantly, the biochemical function of the gut microbiome by the same mechanism through which the chemical acts to kill weeds. (Source: sustainablefoodtrust.org Sustainable Food Trust).

Pesticide Action Network stated: “Pesticides do not just harm the organisms they are designed to control, they also have a major impact on non-target organisms, including humans”. They go on to say: “The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that over 350,000 people die every year from acute pesticide poisoning. Moreover, this figure does not include deaths from cancer or other chronic disease caused by pesticide exposure”. Perhaps these unfortunate people didn’t follow the precise instructions? (Source: www.pan-uk.org Key Issues - Pesticide Action Network UK).

Further to your paragraph 7.1, May I refer you, and your committee members, to the attached report by weedingtech.com [Glyphosate vs Foamstream – which form of](#)

[weed control is right for your organisation?](#) Who state that not only are Foamstream's results immediately visible on the day of treatment, that there is also less weed growth. It goes on to say glyphosates are weather dependant, Foamstream isn't, and Foamstream can be used in all weathers. Most importantly, glyphosates have been found to be more expensive than Foamstream, and over a five year period, Foamstream works out to be 31% cheaper than glyphosates. This is contra to your assertion that "Currently there is no other cost effective treatment to meet public demands.

Regarding public demands, Glyphosates such as Roundup are contra to Swansea Council's Sustainable Development Policy as glyphosate use is not in the public interest as mentioned earners they may be carcinogenic, destroy pollinators, pollute the land they fall on such as being wind swept into trees, or leaking into river, where there is much evidence compiled by the Wildlife Trust.

Denbighshire County Council has been successfully using Foamstream M600 to control weeds since 2018, as have may other councils outlined by the attachment below.

<http://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free-towns-success-stories/>

Therefore, I would like to suggest that Swansea Council consider using Foamstream on a trial basis in a specific area for a few years to determine its efficiency and cost effectiveness. I remind you that Swansea Council has declared a climate emergency and, during the UN Conference on the Human Environment, 'Stockholm 50' on 2-3rd June 2022, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned "Earth's natural systems cannot keep up with our demands". Asking all governments, national and local to, "lead us out of this mess" and "stop waging war against nature". Which Swansea Council is doing with it continual use of glyphosates.
<http://www.stockholm50.global/>

RESPONSE FROM CABINET MEMBER:

"As stated earlier, a demonstration has been given in the past of this particular produce and some other alternatives. Found not to be as efficient nor as cost effective and not ideal for large broad spectrum treatment that footways require to ensure that they are safe and that damage caused by excessive weed growth is limited. From the demonstration it was clear that it was not suitable. So even if we overlooked the initial investment, it would be very time consuming and not effective in controlling perennial weeds. Our understanding from the demonstration is that the weeds targeted actually grew back within a fortnight and the same with the moss that was targeted, it also grew back within a fortnight. Also, the demonstration required the use of a petrol generator powering applicator, so there's the additional carbon impact to be considered should any alternative methods be put forward."

Weed Management / Use of Glyphosate

We feel glyphosate has an effect on pollinators that are essential to the eco system and queried how seriously the Authority is taking the biodiversity of Swansea when it is continuing to use glyphosate. We were informed that the biodiversity of Swansea is extremely important as is evident in the number of biodiversity schemes the Authority

is doing across the County. We heard that in respect of bees and other wildlife, results on toxicity of glyphosate are often conflicting. We disagree with this statement and feel that scientific data very strongly shows a positive correlation between the use of glyphosate and health issues within most insects, pollinators, amphibians, and zooplankton populations, particularly bees. We were informed the Council is open to alternative viable methods should they become available or should scientific evidence change.

We asked about tilling and if there are alternative methods. We heard that from a farming perspective, unless there is a suitable viable alternative, glyphosate is essential in commercial arable, has been safely used for over 40 years and reduces the need for tillage which reduces the carbon footprint and helps farmers retain healthier soil. We stated that this timeframe matches up with the timeframe where we have seen a massive collapse in the numbers of insects in our biosphere. Given that insects are a primary food source for many birds and small mammals and essential for healthy biodiverse ecosystems this is an important point.

A member of the public mentioned wildflower patches and stated that a book produced by a registered charity, titled Plant Life, recommends practices which do not involve using glyphosate, and that they work with councils. They queried if the Council would consider talking to the charity and using best practice for producing wildflower patches in Swansea. We heard that the wildflower planting scheme is used to kill off grass before seeds are sown, otherwise the seeds will not take. We also heard that regarding native wildflowers, there are a number of areas across Swansea which are designated as 'cut and collect' where the Council cuts and takes the grass off which encourages native wildflowers to come through.

We queried if it is an option for wards to opt out of the highways weed spraying scheme and were informed that it is an option and any councillors who want to opt out or have a reduced programme in their ward just need to inform you and relevant officers. However, spraying would still have to be carried out for any invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed.

A member of the public stated a viable option to spraying is to have permanent planting. We heard the Council has a county wide tree planting strategy and ward members can take up the wildflower planting schemes in as many areas as they want, paid from their community budget. We noted the report you provided to the Panel specifically talks about the highways/footway spraying programme.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, however in this instance, a formal written response is not required.

Yours sincerely

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