

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CP/07/26

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 21 May 2026

Report Title: Integrated Weed Control Strategy and Action Plan

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces the Integrated Weed Control Strategy and Action Plan 2026 and sets out the key objectives, methods and actions which will support the implementation of the strategy.
- 1.2 The Highland Council has developed this Integrated Weed Control Strategy to align with its broader environmental objectives, including biodiversity conservation and achieving net-zero emissions. This strategy emphasises reducing chemical herbicide use and adopting sustainable weed management practices and low hazard products.
- 1.3 This strategy emphasises a cross-Council approach, promoting consistent and sustainable weed management practices across all services and areas. A dedicated working group was established to oversee the development and implementation of this strategy, focusing on reducing chemical usage and exploring alternative control methods.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
 - i. **Note** the contents of the report;
 - ii. **Agree and adopt** the Integrated Weed Control Strategy and Action Plan 2026; and
 - iii. **Note** that an annual update on progress will be reported to the Communities and Place Committee.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – Alternatives to Glyphosate are considerably more expensive, if the partial ban is not retained then additional budget would need to be provided to use alternative methods of weed control. This would relate to increased product costs as well as the number of staff needed for an increased number of applications, if all other grass cutting and maintenance standards remain at the same level.

- 3.2 **Legal** – The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 outlines control measures that the Council must take to protect the Health and Safety of its employees and members of the public when using chemicals such as weed killer.
- 3.3 **Risk** – Whilst there have been several court cases in the United States regarding the use of glyphosate, it is regarded as safe to use by EU and UK regulators, with glyphosate use licensed until 15 December 2026. Highland Council complies with all Health and Safety requirements when using any weed control methods.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – Any changes to current practice will incorporate the appropriate control measures. Currently glyphosate is licensed for use in the UK until 15 December 2026.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** – there are no known Gaelic implications.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary**
- 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 30 March 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.
- 4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there are positive impacts with the introduction of the strategy and action plan. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.
- 4.3.3 **Impact Assessment Area**

Equality	Children and Young People – <i>positive impact</i> Children affected by disability – <i>no impact</i> Older adults – <i>no impact</i>
Socio-economic	<i>No impact</i>
Human Rights	<i>No impact</i>
Children’s Rights and Well-being	<i>No impact</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<i>No impact</i>
Climate Change	<i>Positive impact</i>
Data Rights	<i>No impact</i>

5 Background

- 5.1 On 6 September 2018 the Council agreed to fully review its policy on weed control and to explore affordable and safe alternatives (to products containing glyphosate) with a view to introducing those as soon as possible.

- 5.2 On 27 June 2019 a revised motion was agreed to an immediate ban on the use of weed control products containing glyphosate in all sports recreation facilities/play grounds and schools and that a business case be prepared for consideration at the next council meeting on options for a complete ban on the use of such products, except for invasive species control and at dangerous road junctions where its use will be risk assessed on a case by case basis.
- 5.3 Since the Council meeting of 27 June 2019, operational and financial appraisals of alternatives to glyphosate have been undertaken by Amenity Services, Roads and Facilities Management.
- 5.4 In April 2020 it was confirmed it was too early to implement a full ban on products containing glyphosate as there were not sufficient affordable and effective alternatives available and the ban should be restricted to all sports recreation facilities, playgrounds and schools, as set out in the motion agreed at Council in June 2019, this in effect is a partial ban.
- 5.5 Currently all other areas such as for example footpaths, kerb edges, fence lines etc can be treated with products containing glyphosate but if an affordable, effective alternative is available this should be used. Where possible trials of alternative products and weed control methods can take place if appropriate.

6 Health and Safety and the use of Glyphosate

- 6.1 Glyphosate has been used by the Council for many years to manage weeds on the areas that it maintains. Amenities used the product on path edges, round fence posts and the base of trees as well as around edges of play equipment and grass areas in place of strimming and to avoid causing any damage. Roads used the product on the edges of roads, on kerbsides and on footpaths and Facilities Management used it within school grounds. The products were widely used, but very safely.
- 6.2 A key consideration in its use is the health and safety of Council employees and members of the public. The Council complies with all legislative and manufacturers' guidelines when applying herbicide.
- 6.3 The UK has a rigorous approvals process for pesticides. The main aims of the process are to protect the health of people, creatures and plants and to safeguard the environment. Glyphosate has been subject to this approval process and has had the approval extended until 15 December 2026.
- 6.4 In addition to the UK process, all pesticides are subject to the regular EU wide initial approval and review programme for active substances. The review programme ensures that the data supporting their approvals meets modern safety standards. Glyphosate is currently approved for use as an herbicide (weed killer) throughout the EU.
- 6.5 Approval was granted in 2002, based on a review of mammalian toxicology, ecotoxicology and other data. The risks associated with the use of pesticides in amenity areas such as parks are specifically considered as part of the authorisation process.

- 6.6 Legally enforceable conditions are imposed on the way products can be applied, to ensure the public are not exposed to levels of pesticides that would harm health or have unacceptable effects on the environment. Council employees not only comply with the authorised conditions of use but also use products in a responsible and sustainable fashion, by only using the minimum amount of pesticide required to treat areas. This is regularly monitored by the management team within Amenity Services by checking on the application of the products and ordering only enough for exactly the areas required.
- 6.7 All products which contain glyphosate must be individually authorised by the UK government. Applicants for authorisation must show that their products are effective, humane and pose no unacceptable risks to people or the environment. If their products were to pose such risks, they would not be authorised; or if such effects were discovered later, authorisation would be withdrawn.
- 6.8 Neither the EU's assessment of glyphosate as an active substance nor the UK's assessments of applications for authorisation of products which contain it have found the substance unacceptable for use.
- 6.9 The responsible use of pesticides in amenity areas, as part of an integrated programme of control, can be beneficial in several circumstances. These include management of conservation areas, invasive species and flood risks; access to high quality sporting facilities; and safe public spaces (for example, by preventing weed growth on hard surfaces creating trip hazards), industrial sites and transport infrastructure. The HSE consider that the regulatory process for authorising plant protection products (PPP) is a robust system, and that the authorisation process considers all scientific knowledge available.

7 Integrated Weed Control Strategy and Action Plan 2026

- 7.1 The Highland Council is committed to:-
- Reducing chemical herbicide use in line with environmental and public health goals;
 - Enhancing biodiversity through sustainable land management practices; and
 - Achieving net-zero emissions by 2045, integrating weed control strategies into broader climate action plans.
- 7.2 The Council's vision for weed control is to:-
- Minimise chemical herbicide use to protect public health and the environment;
 - Implement integrated weed management that combines mechanical, cultural, and biological methods;
 - Harmonise the weed control practices across the Place Service;
 - Preserve biodiversity by allowing native vegetation to flourish in appropriate areas;
 - Control invasive non-native species effectively to protect local ecosystems; and
 - Engage communities and stakeholders in sustainable land management practices.

- 7.3 The strategy included at **Appendix 2** outlines the strategic context of the approach to weed control and how this is embedded within its broader environmental and sustainability objectives. Aiming to balance effective vegetation management with ecological preservation and community wellbeing.
- 7.4 The Highland Council's strategic objectives for weed control are guided by its broader commitments to biodiversity, sustainability, public health, and climate action. These objectives are embedded in key policy frameworks such as the Integrated Weed Control Strategy, the Ecology Strategy and Action Plan, and the Net Zero Strategy.
- 7.5 The Council recognise that weed control involves a diverse range of stakeholders, each with specific roles, responsibilities, and interests as detailed in section 4 of the strategy document.
- 7.6 Weed identification is crucial for selecting the most effective control method and at section 5 of the strategy explanations of how to identify weeds is covered.
- 7.7 Herbicides use and their impact is explained at section 6 of the strategy; environmental, human and animal health, resistance development and regulatory and policy implications are all explained.
- 7.8 Various weed control methods are identified at section 7, and the combination of an integrated weed management is crucial to taking forward the action plan.
- 7.9 Invasive species, their characteristics and management strategies are explained at section 8 of the strategy.
- 7.10 The importance of responsible weed control and risk assessments confirms the principles of responsible weed control at section 9.
- 7.11 Highland Council is committed to the sustainable and responsible management of weeds across its land and assets. The policy statement set out at section 10 explains our approach to controlling invasive and problem vegetation in a way that protects public health, promotes biodiversity, and complies with environmental and legal responsibilities.
- 7.12 For Council maintained land (such as parks, roadsides, public gardens, and green spaces), evaluation and adaptation of weed control focus on balancing effective management with environmental sustainability, public health, and budget constraints.
- 7.13 Section 13 of the strategy contains the Action Plan setting out the 7 actions, implementation steps and timeline for the lead service and others to implement upon adoption of the strategy.

7.14 An options appraisal, decision matrix and risk assessment are all included within the strategy to assist services in their selection of weed control methods. There is also a contractor checklist for those wishing to contract out the responsibility of weed control.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 20 April 2026

Author: Debbie Sutton, Chief Officer Operations and Maintenance

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Integrated Weed Control Strategy and
Action Plan

Integrated Impact Assessment

Appendix One

In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken. Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken in March 2026; the conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

The Screening process has concluded that there are positive impacts with the introduction of the strategy and action plan.

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
	<p>The Highland Council is committed to the sustainable and responsible management of weeds across all Council-owned land and assets. This strategy outlines our approach to addressing invasive and problematic vegetation in a manner that safeguards public health, enhances biodiversity, and meets all environmental and legal obligations.</p> <p>The strategy aligns with the Council's wider commitments to climate action, public health, biodiversity protection, and community wellbeing. It also recognises the need to accommodate varying levels of environmental tolerance across different landscapes and habitats.</p>
Equality	Children and Young People – <i>positive impact</i> Children affected by disability – <i>no impact</i> Older adults – <i>no impact</i>
Socio-economic	<i>No impact</i>
Human Rights	<i>No impact</i>
Children's Rights and Well-being	<i>No impact</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<i>No impact</i>
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Integrated Weed Control Strategy and Action Plan 2026

Document Control

Date	Revision	Description	Revised by

Introduction

The Highland Council has developed this Integrated Weed Control Strategy to align with its broader environmental objectives, including biodiversity conservation and achieving net-zero emissions. This strategy emphasises reducing chemical herbicide use and adopting sustainable weed management practices and low hazard products.

The Highland Council is committed to:

- Reducing chemical herbicide use in line with environmental and public health goals.
- Enhancing biodiversity through sustainable land management practices.
- Achieving net-zero emissions by 2045, integrating weed control strategies into broader climate action plans.

This strategy emphasises a cross-Council approach, promoting consistent and sustainable weed management practices across all services and areas. A dedicated working group was established to oversee the development and implementation of this strategy, focusing on reducing chemical usage and exploring alternative control methods. There is also a link to the National Action Plan 2025 exploring three key objectives: integrated weed management, targets for reductions in chemical use and strengthening compliance.

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1. Highland Councils Vision for Weed Control

The Council's vision for weed control is to:

Minimise chemical herbicide use to protect public health and the environment.

Implement integrated weed management that combines mechanical, cultural, and biological methods.

Harmonise the weed control practices across the Place Service.

Preserve biodiversity by allowing native vegetation to flourish in appropriate areas.

Control invasive non-native species effectively to protect local ecosystems.

Engage communities and stakeholders in sustainable land management practices.

2. Strategic Context

The Highland Council's strategic approach to weed control is embedded within its broader environmental and sustainability objectives, aiming to balance effective vegetation management with ecological preservation and community well-being.

- UK Pesticides National Action Plan (2025)

Published in March 2025, outlines a strategy for the sustainable use of pesticides to minimise risks to the environment and human health, while also ensuring effective pest and pesticide resistance management. The plan encourages the adoption of Integrated Pest Management and alternative approaches, sets reduction targets for pesticide use, and support safe pesticide application practices.

- Ecology Strategy and Action Plan (2024)

Adopted in November 2024, this outlines actions to tackle biodiversity loss and integrate ecological considerations into all Council operations. It aims to manage the Council estate more effectively for biodiversity and work collaboratively with communities and stakeholders to address the ecological emergency.

- Net Zero Strategy (2023)

Sets targets to reduce emissions by at least 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040. Key actions related to biodiversity within this strategy include developing and enhancing green/nature networks across Council land and delivering projects through the Nature Restoration Fund. These initiatives indirectly influence weed control practices by promoting sustainable land management.

- Highland Nature Biodiversity Action Plan (2021–2026)

This plan focuses on conserving and enhancing important habitats and species, aligning local actions with national and international biodiversity priorities.

- Biodiversity Duty Report (2021–2023)

Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, the Council is required to further the conservation of biodiversity. The latest report highlights positive actions taken, such as the Nature Restoration Fund Community Grants Scheme and the Species Champions Initiative.

3. Strategic Objectives

The Highland Council's strategic objectives for weed control are guided by its broader commitments to biodiversity, sustainability, public health, and climate action. These objectives are embedded in key policy frameworks such as the Integrated Weed Control Strategy, the Ecology Strategy and Action Plan, and the Net Zero Strategy.

- Minimise Chemical Herbicide Use

To reduce reliance on glyphosate and other chemical herbicides to protect human health, water quality, and biodiversity.

- Promote Integrated Weed Management (IWM)

To use a combination of mechanical, biological, cultural, and chemical methods to manage weeds effectively and sustainably.

- Protect and Enhance Biodiversity

To ensure weed control practices support the regeneration of native ecosystems and reduce the spread of invasive species.

- Support Climate Action and Net-Zero Goals

To integrate weed control within broader efforts to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2045.

- Standardise Weed Control Across Services

To provide a clear, unified approach to weed management that is consistent across Council departments.

- Engage and Educate the Community

To raise public awareness about sustainable weed control and encourage community participation.

- Ensure Health and Safety

To maintain safe and accessible public spaces, especially along paths, roadsides, and urban areas.

These objectives reflect the Council's recognition that weed control is not just a maintenance issue, but a key part of its ecological, social, and climate responsibilities.

4. Stakeholder Analysis

Weed control involves a diverse range of stakeholders, each with specific roles, responsibilities, and interests as detailed in the table below.

Stakeholder Group	Examples	Roles and Responsibilities
Local Government Authorities	Highland Council, Community Councils	Develop policy; manage public land; coordinate services; ensure compliance
Landowners and Land Managers	Farmers, estate owners, forestry operators	Control weeds on private land; prevent invasive spread; comply with legal duties
Contractors and Maintenance Services	Landscape companies, local contractors	Implement control measures; follow regulations and council guidelines
Regulatory Bodies	SEPA, NatureScot	Set environmental standards; monitor herbicide use; oversee invasive species control
Community and Environmental Groups	Local NGOs, conservation volunteers	Conduct habitat work; support invasive species removal; engage communities
Educational Institutions	Schools, colleges, universities	Research weed control methods; educate on ecology and sustainability
Public Health Bodies	NHS Highland, Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	Assess health risks of herbicides; provide safety guidance
Residents and General Public	Local individuals and households	Maintain private property; report weed issues; participate in community efforts
Retailers and Suppliers	Garden centres, agricultural suppliers	Sell weed control products; ensure safe use information; support alternatives
Policy Makers and Elected Officials	Councillors, MSPs, MPs	Guide strategic direction; approve policies and budgets; engage with constituents

5. Weed Identification

Weed identification is the process of recognising and classifying plants that are unwanted or invasive in a specific area. Accurate identification is crucial for selecting the most effective control method.

Key Weed Types by Growth Habit

Type	Description	Examples
Annual Weeds	Complete their life cycle in one growing season	Chickweed, Fat hen, Annual meadowgrass
Biennial Weeds	Live for two years: vegetative growth in year one, flowering and seed in year two	Spear thistle, Ragwort
Perennial Weeds	Live for multiple years, often spreading by roots or rhizomes	Dandelion, Couch grass, Creeping buttercup
Woody/Invasive Weeds	Often non-native and aggressive, damaging habitats or infrastructure	Japanese knotweed, Giant hogweed, Himalayan balsam

Common Weeds in the Highland

Weed Name	Native / Non-native (UK)	Identification Features	Concern
Creeping Thistle	Native	Spiny leaves, purple flowers; spreads by rhizomes	Difficult to control; spreads rapidly
Dandelion	Native	Rosette leaves, yellow flowers, fluffy seed heads	Persistent in lawns and verges
Dock (Broad-leaved)	Native	Large leaves with red stems; grows in clumps	Reduces pasture quality
Giant Hogweed	Non-native (invasive)	Very large plant; white umbrella-shaped flowers; can grow over 2 m tall	Sap causes severe skin burns
Himalayan Balsam	Non-native (invasive)	Pink helmet-shaped flowers; explosive seed dispersal	Outcompetes native flora
Japanese Knotweed	Non-native (invasive)	Bamboo-like stems, heart-shaped leaves, white flowers in late summer	Highly invasive; damages structures
Mare's Tail (Horsetail)	Native	Jointed stems; brush-like appearance	Resistant to many herbicides
Ragwort	Native	Yellow daisy-like flowers; deeply lobed leaves	Toxic to livestock
Rhododendron ponticum	Non-native (invasive in UK)	Evergreen shrub with dark leaves and purple flowers	Highly invasive; outcompetes native flora

6.0 Herbicides and their Impacts

Herbicides are chemical substances used to control or eliminate unwanted plants (weeds). While they are effective tools in vegetation management, their use carries ecological, health, and regulatory concerns that must be carefully weighed, particularly by local authorities.

Types of Herbicides

Herbicide Type	Mode of Action	Examples
Selective	Targets specific plant types (e.g., broadleaf vs grass).	MCPA, 2,4-D
Non-Selective	Kills most plant types it contacts.	Glyphosate, glufosinate
Contact	Affects only the plant parts it touches.	Pelargonic acid
Systemic	Absorbed and transported within the plant.	Glyphosate, triclopyr
Residual	Remains active in the soil to prevent regrowth.	Imazapyr, simazine

Impacts of Herbicide Use

1. Environmental Impacts

- **Soil Health:** Some herbicides disrupt soil microbial communities or persist for months, affecting future plant growth.
- **Water Contamination:** Runoff can carry chemicals into rivers and groundwater, harming aquatic ecosystems.
- **Non-Target Species:** Beneficial plants, fungi, and insects may be unintentionally harmed.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** Overuse can simplify ecosystems and favour resistant weed species.

2. Human and Animal Health

- **Glyphosate Concerns:** Though widely used, glyphosate has been classified as “probably carcinogenic” by the IARC (2015), sparking global debate.
- **Residue Exposure:** Herbicide residues may linger on food crops or in public green spaces.
- **Worker Safety:** Inadequate protective equipment or training increases risk of exposure during application.

3. Resistance Development

- Repeated use of the same herbicide can lead to herbicide-resistant weed populations, making management more difficult and costly.

4. Regulatory and Policy Implications

- The EU and UK have imposed increasing restrictions on certain herbicides (e.g., paraquat is banned; glyphosate approved in UK until 15th December 2026).
- Local councils, including Highland Council, have moved to reduce or phase out herbicide use, especially in sensitive areas like schools or playgrounds.

7.0 Weed Control Methods

The choice of control method depends on:

- Weed type (annual, perennial, invasive)
- Location (urban, rural, roadside, sensitive habitat)
- Public safety and access
- Environmental sensitivity
- Cost and resource availability



Weed Control Methods and explanations

Method Type	Control Method	Explanation
1. Mechanical	Hand Pulling / Hoeing	Manual removal of weeds by hand or with tools; effective for small infestations or in sensitive areas
	Strimming / Mowing/Weed Brushing	Cutting weeds above ground to reduce seed production and spread; not effective on deep-rooted perennials. Pedestrian mechanical brushes to dislodge and remove surface weed growth
	Mulching	Applying organic or synthetic material to block light, suppress growth, and retain soil moisture
	Soil Cultivation	Turning over soil to expose and destroy weed roots; may stimulate new growth if not timed well
2. Chemical	Selective Herbicides	Targets specific weed types (e.g. broadleaf weeds), allowing desirable plants to remain unaffected

Method Type	Control Method	Explanation
	Non-Selective Herbicides	Kills all vegetation it contacts (e.g. glyphosate); used in hard surfaces or invasive species control
	Residual Herbicides	Applied to soil to prevent seed germination; used sparingly to avoid environmental buildup
3. Biological	Grazing	Controlled grazing by livestock (e.g., sheep, goats) to manage weeds on rough terrain or conservation sites
	Pathogen Introduction	Use of fungi, insects, or microbes that specifically target certain invasive weeds (experimental in UK)
4. Thermal	Flame Weeding	Direct application of intense heat via propane burners to damage plant cells
	Hot Foam / Steam	Applies hot organic foam or steam to wilt and kill weed tissue; safe for urban environments
5. Cultural	Crop Rotation	Rotating crops to interrupt weed life cycles and reduce build-up of specific species
	Cover Cropping	Growing fast-growing plants to outcompete weeds and cover bare soil
	Timely Planting / Watering	Optimising timing and density of desirable plantings to shade out weeds
6. Integrated	Integrated Weed Management (IWM)	Combining methods in a strategic, site-specific plan to minimize chemical reliance and maximize ecological benefit

8.0 Invasive Species

Invasive species are non-native organisms (plants, animals, or pathogens) that spread rapidly in a new environment, causing harm to ecosystems, economies, or human health. In the context of weed control, invasive plant species are a major concern for biodiversity and land management.

The Council actively manages invasive non-native species (INNS) such as Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed, Rhododendron Ponticum, and Himalayan balsam only on Council owned and managed land. Efforts include targeted projects and community engagement to control these species effectively, aligning with the Council's Biodiversity Duty and contributing to ecological preservation.

Key Characteristics of Invasive Plant Species

- Fast growth and reproduction
- Lack of natural predators or controls
- Outcompete native species for resources
- Alter ecosystems and soil chemistry
- Often difficult and costly to control or eradicate

Legislation and Responsibilities

- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: Illegal to plant or cause certain invasive species to grow in the wild.
- Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019: Regulates possession, sale, and release of certain invasive plants.
- Landowner Duty: Owners are responsible for preventing invasive species from spreading from their land.

Management Strategies

- Early detection and rapid response (EDRR)
- Mechanical removal: Cutting, digging, and root removal
- Chemical control: Herbicide treatment (e.g., glyphosate for Japanese knotweed)
- Biological control: e.g., Japanese knotweed psyllid trials (experimental)
- Long-term monitoring and aftercare

For more details guidance on the identification and controlling of INNS operators should refer to the Terrestrial Plant Invasive non-native species guidance. This guidance is relevant to those controlling INNS identified on Council sites as well as Council services looking to develop or change the land use on sites where INNS have been identified.

Notable invasive Species in Highland

Species	Identification	Impact
Japanese Knotweed	Bamboo-like stems, heart-shaped leaves, white sprays of flowers	Damages infrastructure, costly to remove, spreads aggressively by rhizomes
Giant Hogweed	Tall (up to 5m), large white flower heads, serrated leaves	Sap causes severe burns; spreads along rivers and disturbed ground

Species	Identification	Impact
Himalayan Balsam	Pink/purple helmet-shaped flowers, explosive seed pods	Outcompetes native plants; causes erosion along riverbanks
Rhododendron Ponticum	Woody shrub with purple flowers, thick leaves	Shades out native woodland flora; toxic to grazing animals
New Zealand Pygmyweed (Crassula helmsii)	Mat-forming aquatic plant with small leaves	Disrupts freshwater habitats; difficult to control once established

9.0 Responsible Weed Control and Risk Assessments

Responsible weed control ensures effective vegetation management while minimising harm to people, property, and the environment. A core part of this approach involves conducting risk assessments before any control activity begins, especially when chemicals or mechanical tools are involved.

Principles of Responsible Weed Control

Principle	Description
Legal Compliance	Follow UK laws (e.g., Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended, Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 as amended)
Environmental Stewardship	Avoid harm to wildlife, waterways, soil, and non-target plants
Targeted Action	Only treat problem weeds at the right time, using the least invasive method
Public Safety	Minimise exposure to herbicides or machinery in public areas
Monitoring and Evaluation	Record actions, assess effectiveness, and adapt methods accordingly
Communication	Where relevant inform residents, landowners, and stakeholders when planning weed control near them. Propose that mapping of areas be made available on Council website

10.0 Integrated Weed Control Policy Statement

Highland Council is committed to the sustainable and responsible management of weeds across its land and assets. This policy sets out the approach to controlling invasive and problem vegetation in a way that protects public health, promotes biodiversity, and complies with environmental and legal responsibilities.

This policy provides a framework for delivering safe, effective, and environmentally conscious weed control using an Integrated Weed Management (IWM) approach. It supports the Council's broader objectives on climate action, public health, biodiversity, and community wellbeing. It is also necessary to account for varying levels of tolerance within the environment.

Policy Principles

1. Integrated Approach

Combining mechanical, cultural, biological, and chemical control methods tailored to each site and situation. Herbicides will only be used when no viable alternative exists.

2. Legal and Regulatory Compliance

All weed control activities will comply with UK legislation, including:

- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002
- The Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012
- Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019

3. Environmental Responsibility

Weed control will be carried out with consideration for ecosystems, pollinators, watercourses, and soil health. Sensitive habitats will be protected and monitored.

4. Risk Assessment and Safety

Risk assessments will be undertaken before any weed control is conducted. Public safety, operator protection, and the minimisation of non-target impacts are priorities.

5. Public Communication

The Council will where relevant, engage and inform residents, landowners, and stakeholders about planned weed control work, particularly where herbicides are used in public spaces. Propose that mapping of areas be made available on Council website.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

All weed control work will be recorded and reviewed to ensure effectiveness, identify best practices, and inform future planning.

Scope

This policy applies to all land under the Council's management including:

- Roads, highways, pavements, and footpaths
- Parks and open spaces
- Cemeteries and burial grounds
- Schools and public buildings
- Invasive species control on sites designated for natural or cultural heritage value

Review

The Council will work collaboratively with landowners, contractors, community groups, and statutory agencies to support coordinated and informed weed management across the region.

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if required by changes in law, science, or local priorities.

Use of Contractors

Where Council Services are using a contractor to deliver weed control, they must follow the steps outlined at Appendix 14.4.

11. Integrated Impact Assessment

In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

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The Screening process has concluded that there are positive impacts with the introduction of the strategy and action plan.

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
Equality	<p>The Highland Council is committed to the sustainable and responsible management of weeds across all Council-owned land and assets. This strategy outlines our approach to addressing invasive and problematic vegetation in a manner that safeguards public health, enhances biodiversity, and meets all environmental and legal obligations.</p> <p>The strategy aligns with the Council’s wider commitments to climate action, public health, biodiversity protection, and community wellbeing. It also recognises the need to accommodate varying levels of environmental tolerance across different landscapes and habitats.</p> <p>Children and Young People – <i>positive impact</i> Children affected by disability – <i>no impact</i> Older adults – <i>no impact</i></p>
Socio-economic	<i>No impact</i>
Human Rights	<i>No impact</i>
Children’s Rights and Well-being	<i>No impact</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<i>No impact</i>
Climate Change	<i>Positive impact</i>
Data Rights	<i>No impact</i>

12. Evaluation and Adaptation

For Council maintained land (such as parks, roadsides, public gardens, and green spaces), evaluation and adaptation of weed control focus on balancing effective management with environmental sustainability, public health, and budget constraints.

Evaluation of Weed Control Objectives:

- Maintain aesthetic quality of public spaces.
- Ensure safety (e.g. clear sightlines along roads, reduce trip hazards).
- Protection of infrastructure.
- Prevent invasive species spread.
- Comply with environmental regulations and public expectations (e.g. pesticide reduction).

Evaluation Methods:

- Visual inspections and weed mapping by maintenance teams.
- Monitoring public complaints or feedback about overgrown or unsightly areas.
- Biodiversity assessments – especially in wildflower areas or naturalised zones.
- Tracking frequency and cost of treatments (chemical or mechanical).

Key Adaptation Strategies

Integrated Weed Management (IWM)

- Combining cultural, mechanical, biological, and (where appropriate) chemical controls.
- E.g., using mulching, mowing, and native plantings instead of regular herbicide sprays.

Reduced or Targeted Herbicide Use

- Switching to spot-spraying
- Using non-glyphosate alternatives like acetic acid or pelargonic acid in sensitive areas (e.g. near schools or waterways).

Mechanical and Manual Methods

- Regular mowing, strimming, hand-weeding in ornamental beds.
- Use of weed brushes on pavements and curbs.

Sustainable Design

- Planting schemes to suppress weeds naturally (dense ground cover/bark mulch).
- Wildflower meadows instead of mown lawns in selected areas to reduce inputs.
- Pathing designed with hard surfaces rather than gravel.

Community Engagement

- Educating the public on the benefits of reduced chemical use and biodiversity.
- Involving volunteers in weeding and maintenance of natural areas.

Digital and Precision Tools

- Using mapping software to log weed infestations and schedule control operations.
- Implementing data-driven prioritisation of weed control efforts (e.g., treating high-traffic areas more often).

13. Integrated Weed Control Action Plan

Goal	Action	Implementation Steps	Timeline	Lead Service/Team	Others
Minimise Chemical Herbicide Use	Prioritise non-chemical alternatives and restrict glyphosate use	Pilot various other methods such as thermal, mechanical, and organic treatments in parks and high-visibility zones Review current herbicide use data Set targets for glyphosate reduction by area	Start Month 1, ongoing review	Amenities	CCFM, Roads, Waste
Promote Integrated Weed Management (IWM)	Develop a consistent, cross-service weed control approach	Use established Weed Control Working Group to align operations with IWM principles Implement use of decision matrix Create guidance documents for different land types	Start Month 2	Amenities	Roads, CCFM, Waste, Housing
Protect and Enhance Biodiversity	Align weed control with the Council's Ecology Strategy to meet nature-positive targets by 2030	Identify key biodiversity areas Avoid herbicide use in ecologically sensitive zones Use native planting and low-intervention management	Phased rollout from Month 2	Environment Team	Amenities, CCFM, Housing
Support Climate Action and Net-Zero Goals	Manage vegetation to support carbon sequestration and reduce emissions from operations	Prioritise native and perennial plantings Reduce frequency of mechanical mowing Evaluate carbon impact of weed control activities	Begin assessments in Month 3	Environment Team	Net Zero Team, Amenities
Standardise Weed Control Across Services	Use decision matrix and training resources to guide best practice	Ensure roll out decision matrix across teams Conduct staff training on sustainable weed control Monitor application through audit or checklists	Develop training in Month 1–3, implement from Month 4	Amenities	Roads, CCFM
Engage and Educate the Community	Promote community-led monitoring and invasive species reporting	Launch awareness campaign Support volunteer weed removal groups Share results of ecological management success	Start Month 4, ongoing	Corporate Communications	Amenities, Community Development Team, Environment Team, Service

Centre, Housing
Participation Team

Ensure
Safety

Health and

Strategically manage
weed growth that poses
risks to infrastructure or
public use

Prioritise control along footpaths, playparks,
and roads
Monitor and log hazard-prone zones
Apply targeted control based on safety risk

Ongoing

Amenities

Roads, CCFM,
Health and Safety
Team, Housing
Estates Team

14.0 Appendices

14.1 Options Appraisal of Weed Control Methods

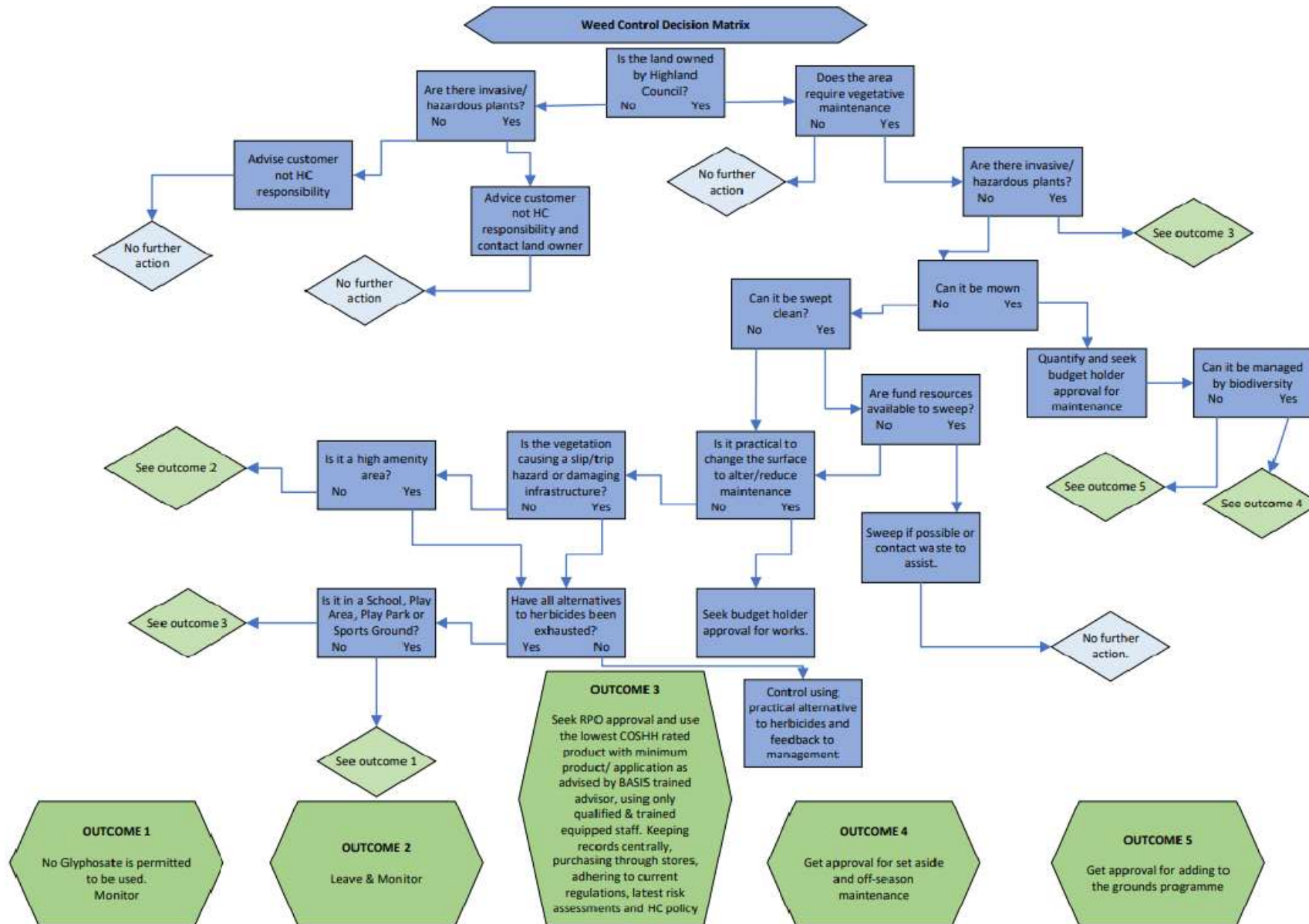
Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	Cost Comparison (where available)
Chemical			
Pelargonic Acid (Katoun gold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited effect on environment • Naturally occurring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-residual effect • Requires a number of applications • Regrowth will occur, as does not affect roots • Up to 4 – 6 times more expensive than Glyphosate • Guidance from manufacturers states product is dangerous to bees and should not be applied when bees are foraging, or flowering weeds are present. • Access to school areas, out with holidays, would be an issue • Usage limited on some surfaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional £400k per annum
Horticultural Vinegar Acetic acid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost (approximately half the cost of Glyphosate) • Limited impact on environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low residual effect • Requires repeated application • Pungent • Requires robust PPE • Regrowth will occur • Not effective against invasive species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional £700k per annum

Thermal / Electrical			
Electrical weed control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals • Effective against invasive weeds • No potential for weeds developing resistance • Chemical free • Can be used all year round • Reduced requirement for controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No residual effect • High capital cost (£30,000 per machine) • Use in difficult to access areas may be an issue • Public must be kept at least 3m away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional £1.6m per annum
Foam Stream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals • No potential for weeds developing resistance • Can be used all year round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No residual effect • High capital cost (minimum £19,995 per machine) • Increased staff costs and training • Use in difficult to access areas may be an issue • Unsightliness of foam after treatment • Increased number of applications • Supervision of public required during application • Increased carbon footprint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional £1.2m per annum
Hot water and/or Steam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals • No potential for weeds developing resistance • Kills seeds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased staff costs, equipment and training • Use in difficult to access areas may be an issue. • Water usage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional £1.2m per annum

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No fire risk • Suitable for use on all surfaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel costs • Increased carbon footprint 	
Weed burners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel costs • Increased staff costs, equipment and training • Unsuitable for use in some areas, due to fire risk, and during dry spells • Health and safety concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional £1.2m per annum
Infrared / hot air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel costs • Capital costs 	
Mechanical / Manual			
Sweeping/ weed ripping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for damage to some surfaces • More labour intensive • Capital costs • Increased carbon footprint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional £492k per annum
Mowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil erosion • Fuel and equipment costs • Not suitable for all areas • Increased carbon footprint 	
Strimming	Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel and equipment • Increased staff requirement • Increased risk of exposure to HAVS • Increased carbon footprint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional £800k per annum

Manual weed removal / hoeing & hand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labour intensive Requires programme of regular revisits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional £3.2m per annum
Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impractical in unfenced areas and naturally limited in scope. 	
Mulching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses concerns about the use of chemicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to be an option for a limited number of areas Can be seen as unsightly 	
Environmental Systems			
Wildflower planting/ Managed naturalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmentally friendly Improved visual impact Would reduce ongoing maintenance costs Increase in biodiversity Could offer an opportunity for communities to become involved in developing and maintaining areas of ground. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to be an option for certain areas only Any areas thought suitable for seeding with wildflower or meadow mix would need preparation May take a number of years to be fully effective Areas would have to be treated as 'meadow', and cut at appropriate times and cuttings removed, to keep nutrient levels in the soil down, which favours wildflowers and ensures that stronger species can't dominate. Costs in establishing, and annual mowing/removal of grass clippings 	

14.2 Decision Matrix



14.3 Example Risk Assessment

Service: Amenities	DESCRIPTION OF WORK ACTIVITY OR AREA OF THE WORKPLACE ASSESSED: Pesticide Spraying.					Name of Assessor: J Mackay
Area: All						Date completed: 02/03/2026
Location: Various						Date of Review: 02/03/2027
STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4			STEP 5
List potential Hazards here:	List groups of people at risk from hazards. Including those most vulnerable:	List existing control measures or note where information may be found:	Calculate the residual risk taking the presence and effectiveness of existing measures into account: Severity x Likelihood = Risk Rating (1 TO 3) (1 TO 3)			List further control measures necessary to reduce risk to an acceptable level and date of their proposed introduction:
Use of untrained personnel.	Employees, public.	Operatives must hold a Certificate of Competence in the safe use of pesticides (PA1 & PA6).	2	1	2	Toolbox talks should be provided to bring the control measures to the attention of workers.

Spillages of Pesticides	Employees, public, environment	<p>Absorbent granules (spill kit) must be available at place of storage and within the vehicle.</p> <p>Adequate PPE for the task been undertaken, including coveralls, rubber / nitrile gloves, rubber boots, face shield when mixing pesticide.</p> <p>Provide/maintain suitable welfare facilities for washing and for immediate first aid (including eye irrigation) facilities.</p> <p>Accident and incident reporting procedure.</p> <p>Refer to product label and data sheet available in vehicles and operatives made aware of safe operation and use.</p>	2	1	2	
Mixing Pesticide	Employees	Use Nomix CDA applicators wherever possible. The mixing of chemicals and the	2	1	2	

		<p>washing of equipment must be undertaken in well-ventilated conditions away from welfare facilities.</p> <p>Facilities for washing of equipment is available in the depot.</p> <p>When mixing chemicals, half fill the tank with water; add the correct quantity of chemical as stated by the manufacturer and top up with water to the final level. Never put chemicals into a dry tank.</p> <p>PPE including face shield, gloves, coverall & rubber boots.</p>				
Spraying	Employees, public, environment	<p>Ensure equipment is in good order with no leaks.</p> <p>Select the appropriate nozzle for the task.</p> <p>Keep a safe distance from public.</p>	2	1	2	

		<p>Adhere to product label instructions.</p> <p>Avoid drift by keeping lance at the prescribed height.</p> <p>Do not spray in windy or wet conditions.</p> <p>Operator to wear correct PPE.</p>				
Storage	Employees, public, environment	<p>Chemicals stored in and transported in appropriate locked, secure area, away from sources of direct sunlight and heat.</p> <p>Dispose of empties correctly once properly washed out.</p>	2	1	2	
Irritation / contact with skin	Employees	<p>PPE – (head, eye, hearing, respiratory and hand and foot) protection appropriate to the activity undertaken should be worn.</p> <p>In addition to the standard issue of safety clothing, impervious full body</p>	2	1	2	

		<p>protection and face visors must be worn where necessary.</p> <p>Provide/maintain suitable welfare facilities for washing and immediate first aid (including eye irrigation) facilities.</p>				
Manual Handling Injury	Employees	Employee induction, manual handling training & toolbox talks.	2	1	2	
Slips, trips & falls	Employees	<p>Provision and use of suitable & sufficient PPE. Operatives to carry out site specific assessment to identify potential hazards.</p> <p>Accident / Incident reporting procedure.</p>	2	1	2	
Weather Conditions	Employees / public / environment	<p>Only spray in accordance with product instructions.</p> <p>Do not spray in high winds or wet conditions.</p>	2	1	2	
Equipment faults/failures	Employees / public / environment	Cease use and report to line manager.	2	1	2	

Members of the public or others within the area.	Employees / public / environment	Extra care should be taken to keep clear of the public and animals, gardens, plants, shrubs, and private property. Stop operations if approached, if the public become aggressive or abusive leave the area and report the incident.	2	1	2	
Violence and aggression while carrying out works	Employees	<p>Stop operations if approached, if the public become aggressive or abusive leave the area and report the incident via 'assure' the corporate reporting system.</p> <p>In cases of threat of, or actual violence, contact the police for assistance.</p>	2	1	2	

14.4 Pesticide Application – Contractor Checklist

Based on the Pesticides: Code of Practice for Using Plant Protection Products in Scotland (Sections 60–78)

1. General Duties

- Work complies with all pesticide laws
- Risks to people, wildlife, water & environment assessed
- Alternatives to pesticides considered
- Expert advice sought if needed

2. Tender Preparation

Policy & Justification

- Alternatives assessed
- Environmental & human risks evaluated
- Pesticide use minimised

Objectives

- Cause of vegetation problem understood
- Contract aims clearly defined

Legal Compliance

- Managers understand supply, storage & use laws

Competence

- Contractor has trained/qualified staff
- Minimum standards specified (e.g., NPTC)

Performance Standards

- Measurable indicators set

Treatment Areas

- Maps/measurements provided
- Sensitive sites identified

Monitoring

- Monitoring arrangements in place
- Record-keeping requirements defined

3. Mixing & Storage

Mixing

- Only daily-use quantities mixed
- New safety assessment if mixture stored

Storage

- Stored mixture labelled & secure
- No long-term or large-volume storage
- All legal storage rules followed

4. Contract Details

Work Specification

- Treatment areas defined
- Unusual risks noted
- Linked activities listed
- Site restrictions included
- Sensitive-area instructions included

Pesticides

- Product, active ingredient, MAPP/HSE number, rate specified
- Contractor product list approved (if applicable)

Reporting

- Weekly reports (work done, upcoming, issues, application records)

Required Contractor Documents

- Insurance
- References
- Storage certificate (≥ 200 L/kg)
- NPTC certificates
- H&S policy, risk & COSHH assessments
- Professional memberships
- Waste policy
- SOPs

5. Monitoring

Preparation

- Schedules match treatment areas
- Pesticides appropriate
- Inspection frequency set
- Monitoring checklist prepared

On-Site Monitoring

- Work safe, legal & Code-compliant
- PPE & NPTC certification verified
- Vehicle spill kit present
- Safe mixing location
- Only certified operators spraying
- Approved products, rates & methods used
- H&S rules followed
- Safe temporary storage
- Application records accurate
- Environmental risks managed
- Waste & washings disposed legally & recorded

6. Performance Assessment

- Sites inspected during & after work
- Treatment effective
- Corrective actions taken if needed
- Findings logged for future contracts