

**COMHAIRLE CONTAE FHINE GALL
FINGAL COUNTY COUNCIL**

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

MONDAY 12TH OCTOBER 2026

ITEM NO. 08

**METHODS OF REMOVING WEEDS
IN HOUSING ESTATES**

Question: Councillor L. Corkery

"To ask the Chief Executive to outline the Operations Department's methods of removing weeds in housing estates throughout the county, and whether an effective alternative to chemical herbicides has been identified based on best practice in other jurisdictions?"

Reply:

The Fingal Biodiversity Plan calls for reduction and elimination of chemical herbicides for weed control purposes. As part of this process and in relation to the general overall approach to pesticide use currently being operated by Fingal Council, the Council has used several non-chemical weed control alternatives over the last number of years, including some vinegar-based solutions, hot steam/foam applicators and mechanical brushing techniques. All systems tried have a noticeably short reaction time and will result in increasing the labour input to match the reapplication visits required.

Like other local authorities, during 2021 Fingal County Council carried out a pilot project using Hot Foam Treatment as a non-chemical weed solution in selected trial locations. The trial's objective was to find a suitable alternative with an applicator system that can be used within our current maintenance regime. The clear observations on the trials have highlighted that there is not one single replacement alternative to chemical herbicides, but instead it will require multiple changes in how we design and maintain the public realm. The Hot Foam treatment trials demonstrated that it is an extremely expensive and high labour input process with poor longevity and limited success.

The Operations Department has also trialed different types of mechanical steel brush weed removal machines to remove kerb side weeds in the public realm. Key locations such as main roads and village entrances were prioritised for this trial and this approach was a successful method and emerged as one of the viable solutions, however, it requires a resource of three staff members working together to complete the task as there is a tidy up sweep required to follow the mechanical brush.

The method of spraying a vinegar-based solution onto weeds has also been trialled over the last few years, but this product also does not have great longevity and needs to be reapplied every 6 weeks. It can also be only applied via the old-style water based large knapsack applicators. This process can only be carried out during dry weather when rain is not present for at least 6 hours. The Area Teams are using vinegar in certain locations where the mechanical brush machines cannot be used. As with all the substitutes for using chemical herbicide, the labour input is three times more intensive than a single operator with an oil based CDA herbicide backpack.

Since 2022, there has been a phased reduction and elimination in certain areas in the use of chemical herbicides, resulting in chemical herbicides not being used in public open spaces, around playgrounds and residential open spaces. There is still controlled usage within the rural graveyards where weed growth around headstones can only be kept clear by mechanical strimming as an alternative, and the resources are not there to carry this task out on a 4-week interval during the growing period.

With the move away from chemical control of weeds in the public realm, it is not possible to maintain all roads and estates around the county as before. It is currently not practical for the Operations Department to implement a weed killing programme in all residential estates within Fingal from both a resource and financial perspective.

In that regard, citizens of Fingal are encouraged to actively contribute to maintaining their residential areas by adopting the public footpath and grass margin in front of their homes as set out in the Fingal Citizen Charter.

Following all the trials of alternatives, it was planned that Fingal County Council would have a Draft Pesticide Policy ready for public consultation during 2024 where new proposals for controlled use of herbicides and alternative weed control methods would be outlined. However, the enormous public pressure to cease use of chemical herbicides prior to the trials being completed resulted in the actual final Pesticide Policy not being completed.

The Council is also liaising with the other local authorities as part of a National Scientific Assessment of Alternatives to Herbicide Use in the Maintenance of Amenity Public Open Spaces. The Council is awaiting the final report on this study.

While grass cutting is still a priority, removal of weeds will be scheduled at the end of the season's growth. Main access roads will be prioritised for any mechanical brushing works, with residential housing estates having lower in priority when scheduling any weed removal works.

Source of Reply:
Sinéad Murphy, Director of Operations