

ENVIRONMENT UPDATE REPORT

AGENDA ITEM No. 7

MEETING: ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: 27TH MAY 2026

REPORT BY: WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT MANAGER

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to bring Members up to date regarding issues relating to the environment.

2.0 Simpasture Nature Line

2.1 Following the independent tree survey last year, numerous trees were felled and made safe along the Simpasture Nature Line.

These trees had been identified as medium risk and required action within six months. Officers were keen to ensure work was completed prior to the bird nesting season, and so all work was completed in late March / early April.

3.0 Bedding Plants

3.1 The bedding plants have now been stripped at Williamfield Way, and Durham County Council have been reminded that the beds are now being returned to them to consider future maintenance.

3.2 Bedding plants have also been removed from the Council Offices, Oak Leaf Sports Complex and both cemeteries, and beds renovated in preparation for the summer bedding arriving in early June.

3.3 Social media updates have been posted to allow local residents the opportunity to collect plants that have been lifted from the winter beds, with a view that they can split, replanted and grown on to plant up elsewhere. This has been received well by the public, but limited plants have been taken to date.

4.0 Invasive Weeds

4.1 Giant Hogweed has now been treated by qualified operatives using knapsack spraying from Williamfield through to the Woodham Academy bridge, with 15 to 20 plants being treated. This is a reduction on this point last year, but it is also acknowledged it is still early in the growing season.

4.2 Officers have been working with the Tees River Trust to identify other land ownership along the water courses where Giant Hogweed is known to grow and seed, with a view to reducing seed sources in future years.

4.3 Residue sprouts of Japanese Knotweed has been treated on the River Skerne bank at Aycliffe Village.

5.0 Fly Tipping

5.1 Significant volumes of household waste have been removed and dens dismantled and removed from the South Agnew Planation. This is an ongoing issue but this time there was evidence to identify where the waste had been produced from.

6.0 Use of Herbicide on Council Land

6.1 In June 2022, the following was agreed at the Environment Committee:

- i. The use of herbicides and strimming be discontinued around the base of trees, allowing a grass fringe to grow around the base.*
- ii. The use of herbicides elsewhere be continued, where appropriate, but that care be taken when spraying footpaths to minimise overspray onto grass verges.*
- iii. A small relevant site be earmarked and allowed to grow wild with no spraying of herbicides.*

6.2 These recommendations are, in theory, in place across all Council land, but works operatives have recently been reminded of the Council's policy, following isolated incidences of spraying of trees taking place.

6.3 However, this has provoked ongoing questions from works operatives especially around the base of trees in specific locations, including the golf course and within cemeteries, where the presentation of the areas is of importance to users.

6.4 The Oak Leaf Golf Course has recently received significant praise for the presentation of the course from the golf club, members and other visitors. Golfers are fee paying customers and expect the best possible visual appearance and by not maintaining the base of certain trees e.g. on fairways, would put the course at a disadvantage to its competitors.

6.5 Allowing a grass collar around the base of these trees would slow play, balls would become caught in the long grass, resulting in extra time searching for lost balls, and possible penalty shots. During the increasing use of the golf course, this will result in a hold up of play.

6.6 It is therefore proposed that those trees on or on the periphery of the fairways should be treated with herbicide to avoid this happening

6.7 It should also be noted that the North East Community Forest have planted significant swathes of trees across the golf course over the last few years. Part of their ongoing maintenance agreement is to spray the base of these newly planted trees with herbicide to avoid competition from grasses to allow them to get established. This is a condition of the grant.

6.8 The perceived appearance and management of the Council's cemeteries can also be a very important matter to grieving relatives. For this reason, it is considered that cemeteries should be presented in a manicured state to present the cemetery in the most visually appealing manner and this would include spraying around the base of the trees at the beginning of the growing season.

6.9 Members are asked to consider making an allowance within the use of herbicide policy to provide for this.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that Members:

- i) Receive the report.
- ii) Members consider making an allowance for the use of spraying herbicide around trees on the Oak Leaf Golf Course and West Cemetery and Stephenson Way Cemetery.

Works and Environment Manager