

EAST HERTS COUNCIL REPORT

EXECUTIVE

DATE OF MEETING: TUESDAY, 24 MARCH 2026

REPORT BY: COUNCILLOR SARAH HOPEWELL, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR WELLBEING

REPORT TITLE: EXTENSION OF THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT AND THE USE OF GLYPHOSATE IN THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL WARDS

Summary – The grounds maintenance contract is due to expire on 31 December 2027. Following a review of service performance, procurement considerations and the wider context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), officers consider that extending the existing contract represents the most appropriate course of action.

Extending the contract will ensure continuity of service delivery across the district's parks and open spaces. Whilst maintaining operational stability and avoid the cost and risk associated with undertaking a full procurement exercise during a period of structural uncertainty.

The report also addresses the use of glyphosate within the grounds maintenance contract. In response to Member concerns and discussions at Overview and Scrutiny, it is proposed that glyphosate use is discontinued across East Herts Council owned parks and open spaces. Glyphosate may continue to be used only where the Council operates under the Hertfordshire County Council Highways Agency Agreement, where viable alternatives are currently limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE:

- a)** Approve an extension of the current grounds maintenance contract with Glendale for a further five years, including an appropriate break clause to align with Local Government Reorganisation.

- b) Agree the withdrawal of glyphosate use across East Herts Council owned parks and open spaces and support the investigation and implementation of alternative weed control methods.

1.0 Proposals

- 1.1 Considering LGR and following advice from the Procurement Team, extending the existing contract represents the most appropriate course of action currently. Undertaking a full procurement exercise during a period of organisational uncertainty would introduce additional cost, operational risk and potential disruption to frontline services.
- 1.2 The current contract includes provision for an optional five-year extension. Implementing this extension (with a 2-year break clause), will allow the Council to maintain service continuity while retaining flexibility to review delivery arrangements once the future local government structure becomes clearer.
- 1.3 As part of the extension process, officers will review and renegotiate key elements of the service specification. This will include consideration of weed management approaches and the removal of glyphosate from parks and open spaces managed by East Herts Council.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Parks and open spaces remain committed to delivering the vision set out in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2022–2027, which provides a clear framework for the protection, management and development of the council's parks and open spaces. The Strategy recognises parks as essential community assets that support health, wellbeing and quality of life and create sustainable habitats, while responding to increased demand from population growth. It also commits to delivering improvement projects and ensuring that green spaces remain fit for purpose, financially sustainable where appropriate, and capable of continuing to deliver social and environmental benefits. Most of this work is delivered through the grounds maintenance contract by Glendale.

- 2.2 Should the grounds maintenance contract be retendered, the process would need to commence in early 2026, given that previous procurements of this scale have taken approximately two years to complete. Glendale is currently in year seven of an eight-year grounds maintenance contract which commenced in January 2020. The contract includes an optional five-year extension.
- 2.3 Officers are satisfied that Glendale is meeting contractual obligations and consistently achieving the required monthly performance indicators, including those relating to grass maintenance, shrubs, weeds, flowerbeds, footpaths, hedges, sports pitches and waste management.
- 2.4 The effective delivery of the Strategy is heavily dependent on the grounds maintenance contract, which is critical to the high-quality, day-to-day management of parks and open spaces. Glendale plays a central role in this delivery, providing the operational capacity, consistency and professional expertise required to maintain standards across the district. The contract covers routine maintenance of shrub beds, annual and perennial beds, grassed areas, hedges, football pitches, hard tennis courts, fitness tracks, shelters and watercourses, alongside associated instructed activities.
- 2.4.1 The contract includes risk-based inspections; trimming and formative pruning of shrubs and trees, weeding, fertilising, mulching and planting; sports pitch preparation and marking; litter and leaf collection; emptying of waste and dog bins; sweeping of paths and car parks; and the maintenance and painting of play areas, goalposts, equipment, fencing and seating. Through the contract, Glendale ensures that the Council's parks and green spaces remain safe, attractive and fit for purpose.

The Use of Glyphosate

- 2.5 The use of glyphosate has been the subject of debate for many years, reflecting Members and public concern regarding

environmental impact, biodiversity and public health. It is important that the Council demonstrates leadership in responding to these concerns while ensuring that parks and open spaces remain safe, accessible and financially sustainable.

- 2.6 A contract extension would provide an opportunity to formally review and, where necessary, renegotiate the approach to glyphosate use as part of the wider contract discussions. This would enable the Council to carefully balance its environmental responsibilities with the need to deliver effective, safe, and practical grounds maintenance arrangements going forward.
- 2.7 The Council also undertakes weed control on pavements and gullies on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council under a Highways Agency Agreement. Glyphosate is currently applied twice each year as part of this service.
- 2.8 Alternatives to chemical weed control have previously been explored, most notably during the 2019 retender of the grounds maintenance contract. At that time, a Member Task and Finish Group considered the available options and were advised by tenderers that chemical control remained the most cost-effective solution.
- 2.9 Glendale also uses hand weeding and hoeing in specific ornamental areas, including herbaceous beds and annual bedding, where this approach is most effective in maintaining high standards. Historically, glyphosate use has been limited to areas where necessary, such as conservation or habitat improvement sites, including the control of invasive species such as Japanese knotweed.

3.0 Reasons

- 3.1 The grounds maintenance contract provides a vital, customer-facing service and maintaining high standards is essential. Having reviewed performance, officers are satisfied that Glendale is meeting contractual requirements and delivering a cost-effective service. Officers consider that extending the contract by a further

five years, with a two-year break clause, will ensure continuity, operational stability and consistent standards across the district's parks and open spaces, while avoiding unnecessary disruption to frontline services.

- 3.2 The application of glyphosate has attracted scrutiny, due to concerns around environmental protection, biodiversity loss and potential impacts on public health. Considering this, it is important that the Council takes a proactive and responsible approach, while continuing to ensure that parks and green spaces are well maintained, safe for users, and delivered in a cost-effective manner. The proposed extension of the current contract provides a timely opportunity to reconsider existing weed management practices through formal discussions with the contractor.

4.0 Options

4.1 Grounds Maintenance Contract Extension

- 4.1.1 Full re-procurement is not appropriate at this time, as it would introduce additional cost, risk and uncertainty at a point when the Council requires flexibility. A new procurement exercise would carry risk of service disruption, including potential Transfer of Undertakings (protection of employment) (TUPE) implications and transition-related issues at the commencement of a new contract.
- 4.1.2 From a value-for-money perspective, the current contract provides cost predictability and acceptable performance standards. A full re-procurement would result in significant additional expenditure, including the likely appointment of external consultants (estimated at approximately £70,000), together with substantial officer time, without clear evidence that improved value would be achieved at this stage. Strategically, although re-procurement can avoid commitment to a longer-term delivery model, deferring this decision preserves necessary flexibility while the wider LGR landscape remains uncertain.
- 4.1.3 Therefore, the most favourable option is to extend the current contract with Glendale for a further five years, incorporating a

break clause, and to renegotiate key areas of service delivery which are to be confirmed.

4.2 Glyphosate in the Grounds Maintenance Contract

4.2.1 In considering glyphosate specifically, officers reviewed three potential options. The first option is to discontinue glyphosate entirely through a full retender and investigate alternative technologies.

4.2.2 The second option is to return responsibility for footpath maintenance to Hertfordshire County Council, thereby removing glyphosate from the contract. However, this is not preferable, and the Council will continue to fulfil all statutory obligations and agreed responsibilities. Officers will prioritise a collaborative approach, aligning weed management with other services, such as street cleansing, to optimise efficiency and delivery.

4.2.3 It is therefore proposed that the third and balanced option is that glyphosate use will continue only where the Council is operating under the Hertfordshire County Council Highways Agency Agreement and where no viable alternatives currently exist. Though, as part of the extension and renegotiation of the grounds maintenance contract, glyphosate use will be discontinued across East Herts Council owned parks and open spaces, with alternative methods implemented instead. This approach reflects environmental responsibility while ensuring effective and practical service delivery.

4.3 Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny

4.3.1 Overview and Scrutiny considered both the contract extension and use of glyphosate on 20 January 2026. Members raised concerns about the continued use of glyphosate in parks and open spaces, and sought clarification on alternative methods, potential cost implications, and the governance considerations of extending the grounds maintenance contract for up to five years considering LGR. They also requested assurance that any extension would include appropriate break clauses to maintain flexibility and value

for money. Support was given for the contract extension and removal of glyphosate from Council parks and open spaces.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 If the grounds maintenance contract were not extended and a full tender were pursued instead, the process would be highly resource-intensive, requiring substantial staff time. Furthermore, transitioning to a new contractor could be lengthy and carries a risk of service disruption due to the new provider's lack of familiarity with local areas and specific community needs.
- 5.2 Glendale is not contractually required to change its method of weed control during the current contract term. Any additional costs resulting from the removal of glyphosate will need to be funded by the Council, as glyphosate remains a low-cost and effective option compared with alternative weed control methods.
- 5.3 If the Council were to withdraw from undertaking weed control on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council, the County would likely continue management of footpath weeds through its own contractor. While this would shift responsibility away from the district, it would not reduce overall glyphosate use. Effective weed control on highway footpaths is essential to supporting the district's duties to maintain cleanliness and safety. Without such control, the Council would likely need to allocate additional resources to mechanically manage weeds.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

Community Safety

Nothing arising from this report.

Data Protection

Nothing arising from this report.

Equalities

Nothing arising from this report.

Environmental Sustainability

The Council has agreed objectives in the current Parks and Open Spaces Strategy that take environmental considerations into account.

Financial

Nothing arising at this time. The existing cost of the current contract is built into the Council's budget. If there are significant changes through the extension, this will need to be reviewed and factored in moving forward.

Health and Safety

Nothing arising from this report.

Human Resources

Nothing arising from this report.

Human Rights

Nothing arising from this report.

Legal

Legal and Procurement have been consulted, in principle, on the extension of the contract.

Specific Wards

All

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix A - KPI performance summary

Contact Member

Cllr Sarah Hopewell
Executive Member for Wellbeing
sarah.hopewell@eastherts.gov.uk

Contact Officer

Sara Saunders
Director for Place
Contact Tel. No. 01992 531656
sara.saunders@eastherts.gov.uk

Report Author

Emily Tickridge-Marshall
Leisure and Parks Development Officer
emily.tickridge@eastherts.gov.uk