

Appendix 1: weed management on hard surfaces 2020 to 2023

2020

From March 2020, the country was in lockdown due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Lower footfall on hard surfaces, due to lockdown, impacted weed growth. Lockdown also had a significant impact on resources to undertake weeding as a high percentage of staff followed government advice and self-isolated. Those staff still working were deployed to urgent frontline duties. Recruitment agencies struggled to provide additional resource because people were receiving pay whilst on furlough and were not seeking alternative employment.

During 2020, hoes were mainly used to manually remove the weeds. Weed rippers were also utilised.

2021

The council included six additional operative vacancies as part of seasonal recruitment to work on weed management. Once again, the recruitment was severely impacted due to a national shortage of manual workers and the continuing furlough scheme, along with the difficulties people faced coming out of the benefit system to take on temporary work.

To ensure the weed removal did take place, contractors were used for three weeks to target areas of the city. This was funded from the underspend arising from not being able to recruit operatives.

During 2021, weeds were mainly removed using hoes and weed rippers. A specialist low vibration weed strimmer was trialled which was introduced the following season.

2022

Additional recurring funding of £0.070m for six additional seasonal staff for weed removal was added to the budget. This increased the number of seasonal staff to remove weeds to twelve, however Cityclean were only able to secure, on average, two to three agency staff per week.

An additional £0.172m in a budget amendment for more street cleaners was also added. The funding was used to recruit one Street Cleansing Driver and four Street Cleansing Operatives. Whilst these staff are not dedicated to weed removal, they do support this work as they undertake weeding in their patch.

For the 2022 weeding season, a different approach to recruitment was undertaken. Recruitment events were held to attract applicants who may struggle to complete an online application. Cityclean also worked with the Adult Education Manager to recruit seasonal staff through a pre-employment course called 'Get started at Cityclean'. Despite these additional measures, Cityclean was not able to fill all seasonal vacancies. Several recruitment campaigns were run from January to July.

Recruitment agencies were not able to regularly supply staff. This did not just affect Brighton & Hove City Council, but other industries.

Community Payback were also approached to provide resources but unfortunately, they were not able to supply anyone.

Contractors were engaged between June and mid-August to support weed removal. During this period, they completed 40 days weed removal at a cost of £0.042m.

During 2022, twelve strimmers were purchased. Delays in the supply chain resulted in these arriving in July. An extendable arm, that is attached to a sweeper and removes weeds, was also purchased.

In addition to the above, operatives continued to use hoes, shovels and weed rippers.

2023

Due to the extreme difficulty recruiting seasonal staff, a decision was made to recruit six permanent Street Cleansing Operatives instead of twelve seasonal staff. Three staff were allocated to the east of the city, and three staff to the west of the city to focus on weed removal all year round. Staff were recruited by February and undertook preparatory deep cleaning work over the winter to reduce the occurrence of weeds in the spring/summer.

A traffic light system was introduced to identify hot spot 'red zones' across the city based on access, trip hazards and damage to highway infrastructure. Highway Inspectors notified the Street Cleansing Team of issues, in addition to feedback from street cleansing staff, Councillors, and members of the public. Once notified of an issue, Street Cleansing Supervisors made a site visit to assess the area. If the weeds were categorised as 'red,' the weeds were removed. There could have been other weeds present, but not causing a hazard and these were not removed.

An additional mechanical weed ripper was purchased, which has increased the time staff can weed due to fewer vibrations.

Where parking suspensions took place, Cityclean were notified and crews attended the area using sweepers and weed rippers to remove weeds without the risk of damaging vehicles.

The Tidy Up Team undertook some weed removal using volunteers, and The Big Clean Up event was run in August. Community Payback carried out weeding, edging, hedge cutting, litter picking, painting and other improvements.

Managing weeds

In central areas of the city, weeds are predominantly managed in two ways: high footfall (which reduces the occurrence of weeds) and barrow operatives who remove weeds as part of their daily routes. Barrow operatives use hoes, brushes and strimmers to remove weeds, alongside their other duties including litter, flyposting and sticker removal. Streets in central areas are tended to by more barrow operatives than the east and west of the city.

In the east and west of the city, barrow operatives also manage weeds as part of their daily duties. The staff follow a schedule which is weekly in higher footfall areas, such as near shops, or fortnightly in the quieter areas.

They are supplemented by a team of three (one in east and one in west) who use a vehicle to transport additional equipment for weed management, such as weed rippers. They are a dedicated weed removal teams and also use hoes, brushes and strimmers, alongside the weed ripper machine.

The weed removal teams follow a schedule of work. Once an area has been weeded, the crew are unlikely to return until the following season, even when there are requests to do so. This is because they do not have capacity to return to areas already weeded because there is not capacity to do so. This team also responds to 'red zone' hazards.

Barrow operatives are advised not to exceed two hours weeding on any given day due to difficult manual work and the risk of musculoskeletal injuries. There are also measures in place to manage the use of machinery by the weed removal teams to prevent injuries.