

Full briefing note: Weed Spraying in Swindon – Position and Next Steps

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Survey findings

- 10 of 21 parishes and towns replied.
- 5 want SBC to keep providing weed spraying. 4 are open to it. 1 depends on cost and quality.
- No clear majority has confirmed 2025/26 contracts.
- Most asked for two sprays per year, though some carry out more frequent treatment through their own contracts.
- Main risks cited: planning disruption, budget impact, service continuity, contractor ties.
- Parishes want at least six months' notice tied to budget setting.
- Common treatment areas: pavements, kerb edges, public spaces.

Respondent parishes with current plan

- Nythe, Eldene & Liden Parish Council – Yes. All Build. £9,000. One-off 2025/26.
- South Swindon Parish Council – No.
- Chiseldon Parish Council – Yes. Allbuild. Once a year. 3-year term. £800 per year.
- Highworth Town Council – No.
- Castle Eaton Parish Council – No.
- Covingham Parish Council – Yes. Grounds maintenance contractor. Twice yearly.
- Haydon Wick Parish Council – Yes. Complete Weed Control. Two applications per year.
- South Marston Parish Council – Yes. Allbuild. Two visits per year.
- Blunsdon Parish Council – No.
- Stanton Fitzwarren Parish Council – Yes. Willow Gardening Services. £3,705 (combined contract). Seven visits per year. Annual contract. No cancellation option without penalty.

Non-respondent parishes

- Bishopstone and Hinton Parva Parish Council
- Central Swindon North Parish Council
- Hannington Parish Council
- Inglesham Parish Council
- Liddington Parish Council
- St Andrews Parish Council
- Stratton St Margaret Parish Council
- Wanborough Parish Council
- West Swindon Parish Council
- Wroughton Parish Council

Analysis

Service clarity and responsibility

- Weed spraying has not been formally devolved to parishes. SBC remains responsible.
- Public statements suggesting “devolved responsibilities” are misleading and risk confusing residents.
- Without formal agreements, parishes are exposed to complaints over services they are not legally obliged to deliver.
- SBC must either recommit to service delivery or establish a clear service-level agreement if transfer is intended.

Cost, consistency, and equity

- Parish costs range from £800 to £9,000, with some integrating spraying into wider grounds maintenance.
- Smaller parishes may not afford regular treatments, creating unequal service levels.
- SBC's late-season spraying is unlikely to reduce parish costs or improve consistency.
- A fair funding formula or joint model could prevent postcode-level disparities.

Timing and operational impact

- October spraying has limited impact before winter die-back.
- Most parishes set budgets in autumn.
- Late SBC announcements undermine planning and risk double spending.
- Poor coordination wastes money and causes confusion over responsibilities.

Communication and governance

- All respondents raised timing and communication concerns.
- There is no joint operational plan between SBC and parishes.
- Residents receive mixed messages on who is responsible.
- Better joint planning would reduce waste and improve service clarity.

Strategic options

- Push SBC to confirm:
 - Full retention of service with clear delivery schedule, or
 - Formal transfer with funding.
- Propose an annual joint service planning meeting each spring.
- Require SBC to publish a borough-wide weed control plan including schedule, frequency, and expected standards.
- Consider regional procurement by parishes if SBC will not deliver.
- Document and use resident demand to strengthen the case for change.

Public messaging and accountability

- Parishes have stepped in to help, not taken over.
- Current arrangements create service inequity across Swindon.

- Clarity on accountability and funding is essential.
- Weed spraying directly affects visible street scene standards and public perception of local services.

Proposed draft reply to SBC social media post

Swindon Borough Council has recently stated that “a borough-wide programme is underway this month to remove weeds from 642 miles of adopted pavements” and that “the work will complement the efforts of parish councils as part of their devolved responsibilities.”

This needs to be clear. Weed spraying has not been formally devolved to parish and town councils. Many have stepped in because SBC has not kept up with the work, not because the responsibility has been transferred.

Weed spraying is one of the most common concerns raised by residents. Parishes have been funding and organising treatments to keep public spaces safe and clean. They have done this without a formal agreement or financial support from SBC.

If SBC plans to change how this service is delivered, that requires clear communication, defined responsibilities, and early notice so parishes can plan their budgets properly. Responsibility for weed spraying remains with SBC unless formally transferred.