

26th November 2024

Dear Councillor Bella Sankey (copying in Cllrs Tim Rowkins and Theresa Fowler)

We are writing to you from a broad coalition of Brighton & Hove based civil society organisations which have come together to call for the city to revert to being pesticide-free in 2025.¹

Our organisations represent a plethora of different communities and voices from across our city that are all deeply unhappy that the Council has returned to using glyphosate on our streets. We are united in our call for Brighton & Hove Council to protect the health of residents, workers, children, pets, wildlife and the natural environment by once again ending its use of glyphosate and all other toxic herbicides.

Glyphosate exposure has been linked to a range of chronic diseases, most notably Non-Hodgkin lymphoma (a type of blood cancer)² and Parkinson's³. It has been shown to harm bees and other wildlife, both by impacting upon their health directly and removing habitat they rely on for foraging.⁴

Glyphosate applied to hard surfaces – as it is in our city – runs off into water sources impacting aquatic species.⁵ This contamination is particularly concerning in Brighton & Hove where we rely upon the aquifer for drinking water. That is why both the Environment Agency and Southern Water advised the Council against returning to using glyphosate and other herbicides in December 2023. Southern Water told the Council: “...from a groundwater quality risk perspective we do not support the use of glyphosate within any of the groundwater catchments in Brighton and Worthing from which we abstract drinking water for customers”.⁶

As acknowledged by the Council's own document from January 2024, even when applied using a controlled-droplet approach, the return to glyphosate will have negative impacts on “biodiversity and nature conservation” and “...does not support the council's objectives relating

¹ See list of supporting organisations at the end of this document.

² International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), World Health Organization (WHO), IARC Monograph on Glyphosate (2018): <https://www.iarc.who.int/featured-news/media-centre-iarc-news-glyphosate/>

³ Kulcsarova, *et al.*, Pesticides and the Microbiome-Gut-Brain Axis: Convergent Pathways in the Pathogenesis of Parkinson's Disease, *Journal of Parkinson's Disease* (2023): <https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-parkinsons-disease/jpd230206>

⁴ PAN International, Glyphosate Monograph (2016): <https://pan-international.org/wp-content/uploads/Glyphosate-monograph.pdf>

⁵ Brovini, *et al.* Glyphosate concentrations in global freshwaters: are aquatic organisms at risk?. *Environ Sci Pollut* (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-021-14609-8>

⁶ Brighton & Hove Council, Appendix 7: feedback from the Environment Agency and Southern Water on the use of glyphosate (December 2023): <https://democracy.brighton-hove.gov.uk/documents/s196394/Weed%20Management%20APX.%20n%207.pdf>

to the climate and biodiversity emergency". The same paper also acknowledges the potential risk to public health.⁷

Fifty towns and cities in the UK are entirely pesticide-free⁸, as is every town and city in France, Denmark and Luxembourg. These places have proven that it is entirely possible to end pesticide use without affecting accessibility or infrastructure. There are plenty of non-chemical alternatives available and many UK councils have managed to save money while moving away from pesticides. For example, the London Borough of Kingston saved £44,000 from its street cleaning service budget while reducing pesticide use by 76 percent.⁹

Ending urban pesticide is not a party political issue. Councils of all types have gone pesticide-free, including many Labour administrations such as London's Westminster and Manchester's Trafford. There is increasing parliamentary support for a nationwide ban on urban pesticide use, including from a growing number of Labour MPs and Peers.¹⁰

We therefore urge Brighton & Hove Council to do the following:

- Stick to its promise that 2024 would be a 'reset' year and commit to reverting to being pesticide-free in 2025.
- Create a clear and comprehensive draft pesticide policy for Brighton & Hove which sets out a road map for how the Council plans to end its pesticide use. Run a well-publicised public consultation on the draft pesticide policy, making sure to engage with all relevant groups, including (but not limited to) residents' groups and disability and environmental organisations.
- Commit to communicating the health and environmental benefits of being pesticide-free with local residents, in order to bring them with the Council on its journey.

We would be grateful if you could please respond to let us know if the Council plans to take these actions. We would also appreciate it if you could include in your response the Council's plans for pesticide use on urban land under its control for the remainder of 2024 and the whole of 2025, including a detailed schedule of planned interventions.

Yours sincerely,

Fifty organisations and community groups from across Brighton & Hove

(Full list of signatories provided below with email addresses for Council response)

⁷ Brighton & Hove Council, City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee, Agenda Item 41 on Weed Management, (23rd January 2024): <https://democracy.brighton-hove.gov.uk/documents/s195979/Weed%20Management.pdf>

⁸ PAN UK, Map of UK Pesticide-Free Towns: <https://www.pan-uk.org/make-my-town-pesticide-free/>

⁹ Kingston-Upon-Thames Council, Place Committee report (2023): <https://moderngov.kingston.gov.uk/documents/s99477/Use%20of%20Herbicides%20on%20Kingstons%20Streets%20-%20FINAL.pdf/>

¹⁰ House of Commons Early Day Motion calling for a national ban on urban pesticide use (2024): <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62239>

Organisations

Ashurst Organics
Brighthelm Centre
Brighton & Hove Organic Gardening Group
Brighton & Hove Food Partnership
Brighton & Hove Green Party
Brighton and Hove Wildlife Forum
Brighton CSA - Fork and Dig It CIC
Brighton Permaculture Trust
Burton Twitchers
Buzz Club (bees)
CPRE Sussex, the Countryside Charity
Dorothy Stringer School
Extinction Rebellion Brighton
Friends of Blakers Park
Friends of Brighton Greenway
Friends of Craven Woods
Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods
Friends of Preston Park
Friends of Withdean Park
Froglife
Growing Hollingdean
Hallyburton Horticulture
Hanover Action - towards a sustainable community
Happy Mountain Community (Coombe Road Area)
Hearts and Flowers Brighton

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**Hanover
Action**

friends of
Preston
Park

Brighton & Hove
FOOD
Partnership

**SEEDY
SUNDAY**



**BRIGHTON
PERMACULTURE
TRUST**



faith. community. sustainability
BRIGHTHELM CENTRE

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Infinity Foods
 Moulescombe Estate Allotments Nature Site
 New Roots
 Old Tree Brewery CIC
 ONCA Climate Cafe
 PAN UK
 Pesticide-Free Fiveways Community Group
 Plot 22
 Roundhill Green Spaces
 Saltdean Climate Action Network
 Save Our Starlings
 Seedy Sunday
 Special Branch Tree Nursery Stanmer Park
 St Peter's Churchyard, Preston Park, Volunteers
 Stanford & Cleveland Community Garden
 The Cancer Prevention and Education Society
 The Green Centre
 The Old Green Community Garden
 The Secret Garden Group
 The Sussex Peasant
 Varndean School
 Whitehawk Community Food Project
 Wish Park Community Garden
 Withdean Crescent Residents
 Woodingdean Wilderness Group

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A selection of quotes from the above organisations:

“As residents we oppose the use of pesticides on our streets. We must be doing more for wildlife and whilst some level of weed control is necessary for better accessibility, the majority of plants on our pavements are a very welcome addition to our neighbourhood.”

Pesticide-Free Fiveways

“At a time in which climate, our ecosystem and water quality are so clearly under so much strain the return to glyphosate is a huge step back in our policies. Efforts to improve insect populations and biodiversity around the city have been noticeable and appreciated. Other towns have gone and remained pesticide-free so it is possible, if there is pushback all that is needed are proper plans and also communications campaigns to educate residents. We cannot continue to poison our world and ourselves in this matter because it is the "easy" way out. It is much more difficult in the long run and only stores problems for the future.”

New Roots

“As a business focused on restoring nature and improving people's health, we feel strongly that our local areas should not be sprayed with toxic chemicals, which are poisonous for all living organisms, including people.”\

Old Tree Brewery

“CPRE Sussex works to bring the countryside into the city, to protect valued green spaces and to ensure that everyone has access to nature. We're well-known for our Brighton & Hove street tree planting project with residents' groups and the council (Plant Your Postcode) and for helping to organise the city's first Tree Festival. Going pesticide-free is a critical step to helping biodiversity recover and wildlife to flourish.”

CPRE Sussex

“We strongly believe that the reintroduction of glyphosate, takes us in the wrong direction, both in terms of dealing with the street plants and on an environmental level. We understand that there are issues across the city, but we do not believe that the health and wellbeing of those who have to apply it, residents, their children and pets, and the natural biodiversity that we need to continue to thrive on this planet, should be put at such high risk.”

The Old Green Community Garden

“...we want to be able to walk our streets, play in the park, and swim in our sea, all while avoiding toxic chemicals - especially when there are alternatives.”

Infinity Foods Shop & Bakery

“We're appalled that Brighton and Hove Council have decided to use the horrible poison Glyphosate.”

Withdean Crescent Residents

“As a group we feel very strongly about this issue.”

Hanover Action

“As an organic gardening group we are concerned that glyphosate is being used in Brighton and Hove when it really is not necessary and other methods to control weeds are effective without harming the environment.”

Brighton & Hove Organic Gardening Group

“We are a community conservation group with a remit to protect and enhance urban greenspaces and wildlife in Woodingdean. We do not want chemicals sprayed in our community due to the negative impact it has on the ecosystems and human health. We would like to see alternative non - chemical options introduced.”

Woodingdean Wilderness Group

“We do not use any artificial pesticides or fertilisers in our Wood and we try to keep it as 'natural' as possible - it would be good to see that replicated in our streets.”

Friends of Craven Wood

“As organic growers who farm without pesticides/herbicides and sell to many customers in Brighton it was a joy to behold wild flowers and herbs at the sides of the roads driving into Brighton. 'Weeds' are just herbs. When much of the world is waking up to the ludicrous mindset of clipped lawn mentality it is wrong on every level to reintroduce pesticides to Brighton for all the reasons outlined in the letter. It feels like a step backwards.”

Ashurst Organics

“As one of the oldest conservation groups in the city our members have expressed their concern about the Council re-introducing glyphosate. They feel this is a retrogressive step and call on the Council to immediately cease its use to protect our water supply.”

Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods

“As an environmental organisation based in Brighton we are saddened and concerned to hear the Council is using the pesticide, Glyphosate. We support this letter underlining the human health risks and threat to biodiversity caused by its use and urge the Council to urgently consider safer alternatives that protect all life.”

ONCA

“We are horrified that the council are again using glyphosate with all its terrible side effects to humans and wildlife. As a community group we garden organically with very good results and are passionate about protecting our environment. It is good to see that council employees have been removing weeds manually in some areas as has a team of local residents in the Fiveways area. Surely the council and local residents can work together to solve this problem. We hope the council will stop spraying with chemicals and find safe ways to control weeds as in other parts of the UK and Europe.”

Stanford & Cleveland Community Garden

“We run nature connection and floricultural organic groups for people with barriers to nature. It contradicts our wellbeing sessions if people and nature are exposed to these harmful chemicals. “

Hearts and Flowers Brighton

“As a community gardening group we do not use pesticides and feel strongly that they should not be used in our environment.”

The Secret Garden Group

“We do not want our children, ourselves and our world to be unwillingly exposed to harmful chemicals when the result is so minimal and respectively unimportant.”

Happy Mountain

“We understand the use of pesticides is damaging to wildlife and to our water supply and we do not support their use.”

The Green Centre

“It is vitally important to keep our community and wildlife safe from the known dangers of Glyphosate.”

Brighton & Hove Organic Gardening Group

“All our work creating and maintaining our small Nature Site is to protect & increase biodiversity as all life on earth is dependent on it. Insect numbers and diversity in particular are seriously threatened by pesticide use. We are very concerned that this Council is harming our local insect population by using pesticides especially Glyphosates which have a proven detrimental effect on bees. Please revert to your former policy of NO glyphosate use at all.”

Moulsoomb Allotment Nature Site

“The community garden does not use pesticides and we support the need to protect pollinators as far as possible, and to eliminate the use of glyphosate and use alternatives to deter weeds on pavements.”

Wish Park Community Garden

“We have been an Eco School for 30 years and have been educating students about the harms of pesticide use for all of this time. They understand and witness the loss of biodiversity on our doorstep. They have seen in recent years how this can be reversed when pesticides are stopped.”

Dorothy Stringer School

“Amphibian species, such as the common toad (*Bufo bufo*), use the city’s streets for passage between overwintering sites and breeding ponds. Common toads, amongst other species, are therefore highly likely to directly come into contact with glyphosate. Numerous studies have found glyphosate-based herbicides to be harmful to amphibians, in some cases causing malformation and even mortality after exposure (Herek et al., 2020). Whilst direct contact is a key risk, there will likely be further impacts from glyphosate run-off (even if applied in small quantities & targeted at weeds) into areas where rainwater collects, including ponds receiving street-run-off and negative impacts from a decline in insects (prey items for amphibians) as flowering plant diversity is reduced (from direct or indirect glyphosate exposure). Species such as the common toad are precious, with UK populations experiencing a 68% decline in the 30 years leading up to 2016, with the most pronounced declines occurring in the South-East (Petrovan & Schmidt, 2016). The re-instated use of glyphosate will provide another pressure on urban amphibian populations, on top of road mortality and habitat loss. We need urban wildlife for their sake, but also our own, with exposure to nature critically important to wellbeing and toward fostering an appreciation for the natural environment.”

The Froglife Trust