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'Save Our Soil': Our Campaign for a pesticide-free strategy: A briefing for Councillors

We are contacting you about our Save Our Soil campaign which is calling on Birmingham City Council to produce and implement a pesticide-free strategy by 2025. We invite you to show your support for our campaign by:

1. Commit to supporting the BFoE campaign for a no-pesticide strategy by 2025.
2. Communicate that support to the responsible Cabinet Member.
3. Publicise your support via social media and other communications.

Why are we campaigning

Birmingham Friends of the Earth (BFoE) are running a campaign for a total end to the use of pesticides – Save our Soil campaign. We are all increasingly aware of air and water pollution but the quality of the soil under our feet is just as important. Birmingham City Council is responsible for over 3,700 hectares of open space¹ (equivalent to more than 5,000 football pitches) as well as grass verges and other green space. As awareness has grown of the harm that chemicals in our soil causes, pesticide use has thankfully declined in Birmingham as elsewhere. BFoE is arguing that all usage of harmful pesticides needs to cease urgently.

Pollutants in soil can have a widespread effect as chemicals find their way into plants and from there further and further up the food chain. Equally the loss of one part of the food chain through chemical poisoning can have a significant impact on the rest of the local ecology as, say, birds or mammals lose their food sources. We know that nature is in decline across the UK, figures from the Birmingham and the Black Country Wildlife Trust show that 41% of UK species have decreased in abundance since 1970, 15% of UK species are class as 'threatened' and there has been a 70% decline in observation of the 20 most recorded bird species in the local region².

The greatest problem currently is the use of glyphosate which, manufactured since the 1970s, is the most widely used weed killer since that time. Glyphosate is currently approved for use in the UK until 2025 and in the EU until the end of 2023 (although reports suggest the EU will extend that approval period). Despite a strong lobby that seeks to allow continued use of glyphosate many people have concerns about it.

1 <https://tinyurl.com/yc3saata>

2 <https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/A%20Wilder%20Birmingham%20and%20Black%20Country%20-%20Our%20strategy%20for%202022-2030.pdf>

- Glyphosate was classified as a probable human carcinogen by The World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2015³.
- It has been shown to be harmful to the bee population⁴.
- It has been banned for use in urban settings by France⁵ and in all open spaces by Portugal⁶.
- A 2020 study in the US detected glyphosate in 11% of children and 30% of newborn children⁷.

What is the current situation?

Many countries in Europe and around the world are restricting the use of glyphosate and considering outright bans. In the UK over 42 local authorities have banned or restricted glyphosate⁸. Unsurprisingly the manufacturer of glyphosate, Bayer (formerly Monsanto) and others are resisting such moves. BFoE, along with many other environmental and consumer groups, believe glyphosate and a range of other herbicides and pesticides should be wholly withdrawn from use.

We welcome the fact that Birmingham City Council has stated that it is carrying out surveys with a plan to reduce the use of glyphosate by the end of 2023⁹. The Council's current plan is that in spite of this it will use glyphosate to treat invasive plants such as ivy, couch grass and Japanese knotweed three times a year¹⁰. We believe that the risk to health and the environment means glyphosate should be withdrawn altogether by the City Council.

BFoE also welcomes initiatives such as 'No Mow May' which has reduced the use of chemicals, protected pollinator insects and saved revenue. We believe a complete shift away from chemical usage is important. At present the City Council is proposing the use of alternative chemicals where glyphosate has been withdrawn, for example ICADE. Whilst there has been less concern expressed about ICADE compared to glyphosate, as with all chemicals it does have potential issues. One of the two active constituents of ICADE is aminopyralid which has been shown to remain in the environment on a long term basis potentially harming a wide range of plants¹¹. The other active ingredient, triclopyr, cannot be used around water due to its toxicity¹².

3 <https://www.iarc.who.int/featured-news/media-centre-iarc-news-glyphosate/#:~:text=In%20March%202015%2C%20IARC%20classified,of%20%E2%80%9Cpure%E2%80%9D%20glyphosate>

4 <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abf7482> and <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969721004654#>

5 <https://www.connexionfrance.com/article/French-news/France-bans-pesticide-use-in-more-places-including-private-residences>

6 [https://www.wisnerbaum.com/toxic-tort-law/monsanto-roundup-lawsuit/where-is-glyphosate-banned-/#:~:text=Portugal%3A%20Prohibits%20the%20use%20of,\(GCC\)%20have%20banned%20glyphosate.](https://www.wisnerbaum.com/toxic-tort-law/monsanto-roundup-lawsuit/where-is-glyphosate-banned-/#:~:text=Portugal%3A%20Prohibits%20the%20use%20of,(GCC)%20have%20banned%20glyphosate.)

7 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0269749119338540?via%3Dihub>

8 [https://www.wisnerbaum.com/toxic-tort-law/monsanto-roundup-lawsuit/where-is-glyphosate-banned-/#:~:text=Portugal%3A%20Prohibits%20the%20use%20of,\(GCC\)%20have%20banned%20glyphosate.](https://www.wisnerbaum.com/toxic-tort-law/monsanto-roundup-lawsuit/where-is-glyphosate-banned-/#:~:text=Portugal%3A%20Prohibits%20the%20use%20of,(GCC)%20have%20banned%20glyphosate.)

9 https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/1324/no_mow_may_pilot_project_is_announced

10 <https://tinyurl.com/yc3saata>

11 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pesticides/using-pesticides/general/issues-associated-with-the-use-of-farm-yard-manure-containing.htm>

BFoE along with many other groups are concerned that any use of chemicals to control weeds and pests poses a risk to health and the environment. It is often the case that a chemical is used for a long period of time before the health impacts become clear. Paraquat which has been shown to cause Parkinsons disease and significant increases in suicide rates was used from the 1960s until an outright ban on use in the UK in 2007¹³. The only way we can be sure about the impact we have on the local environment, the food chain and on communities across the city is to replace the use of pesticides, herbicides, insecticides and fungicides with natural and organic practices.

What we are asking for

Birmingham Friends of the Earth is campaigning for pesticide free soil in our parks and green spaces, to nourish, protect and sustain our wildlife. To reach this goal, we are calling on Birmingham City Council to produce and implement a no-pesticide strategy by 2025, which includes:

- A complete ban on the use of all pesticides including: herbicides, insecticides and fungicides.
- Stop spraying weeds.
- Go organic with all seeds and bulbs.
- Use only peat-free compost.
- Use organic growing practices when caring for all council owned spaces.
- Ensure that council owned spaces take into account all biodiversity.
- The strategy should engage at ward level during implementation and ensure it applies equally across all wards.

What you can do to show support for our campaign

We are asking Councillors to do 3 things:

4. Commit to supporting the BFoE campaign for a no-pesticide strategy by 2025.
5. Communicate that support to the responsible Cabinet Member.
6. Publicise your support via social media and other communications.

Thank you for taking the time to read the briefing.

Birmingham Friends of the Earth

12 <https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/Herbicides-factsheet-Triclopyr.pdf>

13 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-60836892>