



The Rt Hon Steve Reed MP OBE,
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
United Kingdom

Date

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you as leaders in local government and councillors from across the country, urging the new UK Government to implement a phase-out of the use of pesticides in our villages, towns, cities and public spaces.

Pesticide use in urban areas only constitutes approximately 10% of the UK's total usage, but it is the second most common route through which people are exposed to pesticides. Committing to a phase-out is a tangible and achievable action that will support biodiversity in our towns and cities while also protecting human health. We should follow the example of France, who have successfully gone even further and have banned all pesticide use apart from in agriculture.

Why do we need to stop using pesticides in urban areas?

In March 2015, the UN World Health Organisation declared glyphosate to be a 'probable carcinogen' for humans, meaning that repeated or long-term exposure is linked to cancer. The herbicide 2,4-D is also a probable carcinogen and suspected endocrine disruptor, and MCPA is acutely toxic and a possible carcinogen. **These are the three most widely used pesticides by local authorities in public spaces.** Glyphosate is also increasingly being linked to Parkinson's. While much of the health debate around glyphosate has focused on whether it causes cancer, independent scientists from around the world largely agree that long-term exposure to glyphosate is harmful to human health in a range of ways and can cause conditions such as kidney and liver disease, act as an endocrine and immune system disrupter, and result in reproductive and neurological problems.

Many of our councils have commitments to protecting and improving biodiversity in our local areas. Due to habitat loss in the countryside, and the large quantities of pesticides used in UK agriculture, our urban spaces can be a refuge for wildlife (including birds, insects, bees and hedgehogs). But the overuse of pesticides by local authorities is destroying many of the areas where they forage for food, and contaminating the natural resources they depend upon. In addition, pesticides will often run off hard surfaces such as pavements and paths, contaminating water courses and harming aquatic wildlife in the process.

What are the alternatives?

There are many effective and sustainable alternatives to herbicides available for controlling weeds in the urban setting. As there is no single approach that will accommodate the needs of every council, a range of solutions have been adopted by councils across the UK. In addition to replacing pesticides with non-chemical alternatives such as hot water, foam and brushing, many pesticide-free councils are also taking preventative measures which reduce habitats for weeds to establish in the first place. Others are allowing areas to become wilder, while communicating with local residents to accept more 'weediness' and using community groups and volunteers to clear areas that have to be maintained for accessibility or infrastructure reasons. Usually it is a combination of techniques that provides the greatest level of success. As demand grows for non-chemical alternatives the existing techniques will become more refined and new methods will come on-stream.

Two examples of successful approaches include:

In **Lambeth, London**, since April 2020 the use of glyphosate for routine weed management has been banned across all parks, open spaces and tree pits and on housing estates across the borough. The council has also cut its use to treat weeds on pavements by a third and continues to trial alternative methods, in part thanks to residents weeding their streets by hand.

East Devon District Council phased-out the use of weedkillers by September 2022 on all council-managed land which includes paths and pavements, parks, gardens, playgrounds and hospitals. These will now be managed using a combination of vinegar solution, manual weeding and two 'hot foam' weed control machines.

There is more detail on success stories [here](#), as well as the alternatives to herbicides - a guide for the amenity sector - [here](#) and a guide for local authorities [here](#).

Why we need a phase-out at a national level:

It is well-known that local councils' budgets have been squeezed and there is a lack of resources and funding for basic services. Those of us that have managed to go pesticide-free have done so with no support, simply because we are committed to better protecting human health from chemicals and bringing nature back to our towns and cities. If a UK-wide ban was introduced by the new UK Government, then it wouldn't be up to individual local authorities to

chart our own course when it comes to going pesticide-free. There would be much needed vision and ambition from above, providing leadership that enabled councils to learn from each other's experiences so that best practice could be followed easily.

To conclude, we urge you to consider introducing a phase-out on the use of pesticides in public spaces run by local authorities as soon as possible, across the UK for the sake of the environment and our health. We would like to request a meeting with you to discuss the contents of this letter further, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Signatures here