

Reducing the Use of Pesticides on Council Land Scrutiny Review Questionnaire.

Portsmouth Friends of the Earth (PFOE) comments

Please answer the following questions as far as you can. All responses are useful so leave questions unanswered if you need to.

1. Does your organisation have a policy about the use of pesticides? If so, please can you share it with us?

N/A

2. Have you done any research into what works to manage vegetation/ gardens and other green spaces without using pesticides? If so, can we see them?

N/A

3. What actions do you think organisations that own /manage land in Portsmouth should take?

It is PFOE's view that a key element for achieving PCC's Vision of Portsmouth as "a green city" by 2040 should include making the entire city pesticide free as soon as possible. This means that actions to eliminate the use of pesticides need to be taken by all landowners, INCLUDING householders with private gardens. PFOE would like to draw attention to findings from research by the University of Sheffield [<https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=11853>] which shows that domestic gardens are the most biodiverse part of urban green infrastructure.

Biodiversity Net Gain regulation is coming into effect in November <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-net-gain> . This states that large developments will have to show 10% gain in biodiversity. This will be followed by smaller sites next year. We should be aiming to adopt the strategy of Biodiversity Net Gain and the Biodiversity metric everywhere, across all land management and we should be looking for a greater % gain in our parks and green areas where it might be possible.

The sale of pesticides by retailers in Portsmouth should be banned.

All contracts should include a pesticide-free clause.

	Actions	By when	Comments including evidence of what works
Reducing total amount of use of pesticides (including Glyphosate used).			
Reducing the dosage used.			
Reducing the places where pesticides are used.			
Reducing the frequency of use			
Using alternative pesticide free solutions	100% . NB Alternatives to pesticides should not include plastic grass and paving/ tarmac such that plants cannot grow.	ASAP	

4. Please suggest the principles that should guide any new policy that the council might choose to adopt. This could include any exceptional situations where pesticides might be necessary, the use of alternatives, the extent to which unmanaged green spaces should be extended etc.

PFOE suggests the following principles:

- conserve and enhance biodiversity [this is a LA duty set out in the Environment Act 2021]
- create nature recovery networks [Environment Act 2021] to help mitigate climate change eg by absorbing heat, pollutants in the air and rainwater
- ensure accessibility is not compromised [The Disability Discrimination Act recommends that a minimum of 1200mm width of footway should be kept free of obstructions.]
- maintain 'good' aesthetics [bearing in mind that aesthetics are subjective]
- do not look at the reduction of pesticide use in isolation, but as one workstream in the plan to become a green city
- avoid alternatives to pesticides that include plastic grass and paving/tarmac such that plants cannot grow.

We accept that a nuanced approach is necessary in an urban environment, with some areas requiring greater and more frequent management than others; however ALL urban green spaces need some management.

No-mow areas should be significantly increased and signage used to help local residents and visitors understand the importance of and enjoy the results of increases in biodiversity.

Wild plants (sometimes known as weeds) grow in areas where soil builds up. In areas where there could be trip hazards (eg narrow streets) debris-build-up needs managing. This alternative approach will reduce the number of wild plants.

Many streets and public spaces have corners and build-outs where there is no footfall. Reduced management of pavement plants to create wilder areas in these places would be appropriate and an alternative approach.

Removing only those plants that would cause a trip hazard or structural damage to a pavement is an alternative approach mentioned in the Pesticide Action Network's recent publication [July 2023], "*Greener Cities: A Guide to the Plants on our Pavement*" [<https://www.pan-uk.org/pavement-plants/>]. This states that in most cases pedestrian footfall prevents annual plants from growing in busy areas so trip hazards are not that common, with annual plants mostly confined to areas where people do not use. Woody perennials (eg buddleia, valerian, ash & sycamore saplings) can cause problems – both to the structure of the pavement and as trip hazards and need removing when young. Training in the identification of woody perennials for pavement cleaners would help.

Comments

1. Removing pesticide use throughout the city is an essential pre-requisite for the achievement of PCC's vision of a 'Green City' with a biodiverse and healthy environment.
2. PCC should measure how successful they are in delivering a green city by monitoring biodiversity in a small number of urban areas, including streets and small parks.

There will be many different views amongst councillors and members of the public about what a green, more biodiverse and pesticide-free city should look like. One of the most contentious areas is likely to be pavement plants. The following comments may help:

3. Language such as 'nature recovery networks' (rather than biodiversity) and 'wild plants' (rather than 'weeds') is helpful.
4. It is important that PCC sets out on this journey with councillors, council officers, local residents and businesses from the start. PCC needs to explain (eg via Flagship magazine, events, displays, signage) why nature recovery networks are important, the benefits of leaving wild plants to grow where possible and of improving soil health (eg maintaining the web of life so we have more insects and birds, helping to keep the city cool in the summer, reducing the potential of flooding from heavy rain, increasing carbon capture).
5. Ensure the focus is on increasing biodiversity & creating nature recovery networks rather than on stopping pesticide use.
6. It is important to explain that accessibility is not to be compromised; that aesthetics remain important; and that the focus in streets will be on places where no-one is walking – on corners, buildouts and verges.
7. Explain to councillors, council officers, residents and businesses that creating nature recovery networks in our streets is a partnership; we are all stewards of the planet with a responsibility to look after nature; that urban gardens are vitally important habitats; and there are many things we can do to help in our forecourts and back yards (in particular, no pesticides, allowing plants to grow on forecourt walls and over fences, creating a small pond, having a compost heap, depaving) and in the wider community (eg community gardens).
8. Provide opportunities for positive stories and photos about increased nature in streets and public places to come forward, so PCC and the public does not just hear the complaints.
9. Support local residents and businesses who wish to know or do more eg gardening for wildlife signs; common pavement plant and insect 'bingo cards'; adopt-a-tree pit scheme; community street-weeding schemes that allow a small number of annual wild-plants to remain; wildlife garden/street/business category(s) in Portsmouth in Bloom.
10. Celebrate successes – perhaps with an exhibition of photos of increased biodiversity.

Contact details:

Redacted