

2. Delivering the phasing out of pesticide/weed-killers in Bristol

Motion submitted by: Cllr Antony Negus, Liberal Democrats, Cotham Ward

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Council notes:

- there is an increasing body of evidence concerning the dangers of unrestricted use of glyphosate. This is often referred to as a pesticide but although it is actually a herbicide it has deleterious effects on fauna as well as flora so diminishing our biodiversity.
- there is considerable debate about the carcinogenic risks from glyphosate and a recent high profile court case in the United States. Concerns for those particularly vulnerable, including children, are even more sustainable.
- The 2016 Labour manifesto pledged to ‘stop using harmful pesticides’ and ‘eliminate the use of the most harmful substances and ensure proper safety for employees and contractors using pesticides.’
- Mayor Marvin Rees’ column in the November 2018 SERA *New Ground* magazine which highlighted the administration’s work ‘exploring alternatives with other councils so that we can be able to phase out the use of glyphosate’:
https://www.sera.org.uk/bristol_a_leading_green_city
- glyphosate is applied at present in parks and green spaces and in highways by Bristol Waste Company.
- it is also used by many different contractors and agencies commissioned for the city’s housing estates, schools, nurseries, hospitals and other institutions.
- discussions about the use of this weed killer have for some time been less about its health risks and more about the viability, particularly financial, of suitable alternative treatments. Nevertheless cities and Local Authorities in this country and abroad have taken a variety of measures to limit or exclude the use of glyphosate pesticides for treatment of weeds. Recently Croydon Council has confirmed they are phasing out glyphosate for this purpose over the next three years. Bristol’s Labour administration are already actively working with other councils to identify viable alternatives to glyphosate.
- there have been several attempts within Bristol City Council over recent years to examine this problem and to seek a resolution. In 2014 the then Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission confirmed a study of alternative treatments based on a year-long trial in Cotham ward. This study did not deliver its objective as it did not practically trial any alternatives, except the use of vinegar, with all other options considered on a desktop study basis only. There is still some doubt as to whether the correct number of treatments was carried out during this trial period.
- subsequent attempts, including a well-attended meeting of all relevant parties and pressure groups in 2017 did raise one alternative option, pelargonic acid, for which this council failed to obtain a licence and so was unable to trial. All attempts to arrange a follow-up meeting over more than 12 months were rebuffed.
- the Mayor’s response to a members question on 11th September 2018 was that “our options are based on finding affordable alternatives”.

Council believes:

- this council has a duty of care to its citizens regarding concerns over the use of glyphosate. In the same way that this council is looking to address the risks from air pollution caused largely by vehicles under the control; of others, it should establish the risks to all of its residents from unrestricted spraying of certain types of weed killers.
- this council should use its considerable influence and leadership to impress and inform all other users of such weed killers of its study's findings of the risks and alternatives.

Council resolves:

- to request the Mayor to produce a report on the risks to human health and to our biodiversity from unrestricted use of glyphosate as a weed killer, using evidence including but not limited to that from the European Chemical Agency, which relicensed the substance until 2022, the World Health Organisation, who have expressed concerns, and the European Food Safety Agency, which felt it 'unlikely' to pose a public health risk
- to request the Mayor to meaningfully test and evaluate the practicality and the cost of alternative forms of treatment in parks and highways, informed by the report produced and work with other councils.
- to request the Mayor to set up a stakeholder forum/task force as requested by the Pesticide Safe Bristol Alliance. The University of Bristol, Sustrans, Bristol Zoo and the Soil Association have shown interest in being part of such a body. It should be charged with planning and delivering a phased withdrawal from the use of glyphosates over a period of three years based on the information from the studies commissioned by the Mayor building on the experience of other authorities.
- to request the Mayor to provide regular updates to members on the progress of this initiative