

UK Youth for Nature: Pesticide-Free Streets Council Manifesto

UK Youth for Nature is calling on councils facing election to show leadership on pesticide use in public spaces. Routine spraying of herbicides and pesticides on streets, pavements, parks and verges is a political choice and one that has clear implications for biodiversity, public health, climate resilience and local budgets.

Across the UK, residents are increasingly concerned about declining insect populations, the safety of public spaces for children and pets, and the long-term impacts of chemical management on soil and water. At the same time, councils are under pressure to reduce costs and deliver visible, positive change in their communities.

This manifesto sets out the practical, evidence-based commitments we want councils to adopt in the next term.

Our Core Commitments



1. Commit to phasing out routine pesticide use in public spaces

Councils should commit to reducing and ultimately ending the routine use of pesticides and herbicides on streets, pavements, parks and other public land. Pesticides are costly to apply, harmful to pollinators and wildlife, and raise concerns for public health. Evidence from councils across the UK shows that alternative approaches can be just as effective for vegetation management while being safer and more cost-effective over time.

We are asking councils to:

- Publicly commit to reducing or phasing out routine pesticide spraying
- Adopt a clear review or phase-out timeline within the next council term
- Prioritise non-toxic approaches in residential and high-footfall areas

2. Invest in non-toxic alternatives and workforce skills

Effective pesticide-free management requires appropriate tools, training and planning. Alternatives such as hot foam machines and mechanical weed control have been shown to manage vegetation effectively while avoiding chemical harm. Although initial investment may be required, these approaches often reduce long-term costs and liability.

We are asking councils to:

- Trial and invest in non-toxic weed control methods
- Provide training and support for staff transitioning away from chemical use
- Assess long-term cost savings and health benefits as part of procurement decisions



3. Adopt nature-friendly verge and street management

Managing road verges and green spaces with nature in mind can deliver biodiversity gains while significantly reducing maintenance costs.

UK councils have demonstrated that adapting mowing regimes and allowing wildflowers to grow can reduce expenditure while improving habitat connectivity and public enjoyment of streets.

We are asking councils to:

- Review mowing and verge management policies
- Implement nature-friendly approaches such as reduced mowing and seasonal cutting
- Treat initiatives like No Mow May as part of a wider, long-term strategy



4. Support joined-up urban nature recovery

Reducing pesticide use is most effective when combined with wider measures to support urban biodiversity and climate resilience.

Trees, sustainable drainage systems and habitat features all work together to improve air quality, manage flood risk, reduce urban heat and support wildlife, but their benefits are undermined by routine chemical spraying.

We are asking councils to:

- Increase tree planting in pedestrianised and residential areas
- Integrate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) into new developments and retrofits
- Support habitat features such as bee corridors, swift bricks and wildlife-friendly planting



5. Improve access to green space and community food growing

Allotments and community green spaces are vital for local food production, wellbeing, biodiversity and skills-building. Yet access to allotment space is declining in many areas.

We are asking councils to:

- Protect and expand access to allotments and community growing spaces
- Recognise these spaces as part of local nature recovery and public health strategies
- Engage communities in shaping and stewarding green infrastructure

An illustration of two butterflies, one light blue and one white with black spots, perched on a cluster of purple flowers. The background is white.

Why this matters

Reducing pesticide use is a practical, visible action councils can take to:

- Protect pollinators and urban biodiversity
- Improve public health and safety
- Reduce long-term maintenance costs
- Build greener, more resilient neighbourhoods

Councils across the UK have already shown that change is possible. This manifesto calls on councils standing for election in England to match that ambition and deliver pesticide-free streets in the next term.