

Submission by Diane Ketcher and sue Lines on behalf of Letchworth Organic Group  
NHDC Climate Panel Meeting 11 Sept 2019

Diane Ketcher and Sue Lines have lived much of their lives in Letchworth and have interested themselves in local issues especially with those that are about the environment. They have a good idea of the other towns and surrounding countryside in North Herts. The following paper is intended to support the contributions made by the different environmental groups at the Panel on 11th Sept but is too detailed to submit for presentation.

Our main thrust is about how at local level the green environment must contribute to mitigating the climate emergency and in particular, start the reverse to the demise of insect life. The following proposals are intended to highlight the need for changes to practices carried out by NHDC on land in its charge and that it looks after for HCC and local Housing Associations.

We believe that local people simply taking their environment for granted, allotment holders accustomed to using weedkillers, paid staff and volunteers carrying out horticultural work under old regulations will not necessarily understand or accept the kinds of managed changes we outline. It will be a tough job for NHDC to work out how best to communicate quite great changes to practices. We suggest articles in Outlook, screenings of suitable films, installing information panels in areas no longer gardened conventionally, staff talking to the public at public events while horticultural staff being training and supported to get on board and be the ambassadors speaking up for changing practices.

As British people we have a strong relationship with grass; lawns, bowling greens, green verges, recreation grounds, tennis courts and football grounds. However, with climate change, hotter summers and intense rain storms, where grass is simply a convention, mown simply from custom and practice. It can quickly become sodden and populated with moss or laid bare in droughts.



Put together these are large green areas that can help substantially to bring back our insect life by changing them bit by bit to wildflower meadows and some can be peppered with glades of trees, bringing in other insects and birdlife. It has been found that trees will take surface water deep into the ground and help to deal with some of the flash floods after rain storms.

In recent years small islands of wild flowers have been planted at Letchworth Gate and on the Cambridge Road leading into Hitchin (among other places). We think most people welcome these splashes of colour but surely this is the beginning of planting for wildlife; however, mixes of British wild flowers would be even better because amazingly it has been found that insects in Britain prefer British wild flowers probably because species thrive in particular weather and soil conditions! Much has to be learnt about how to support this approach- there is plenty of experience and information on line to learn for example how when regular mowing is reduced, what other horticultural practices will need to be taken on; for example it is important to know when to mow and how to rake up and remove the hay. Interestingly, where wild flowers have been grown, insects are quickly attracted and on large areas, little tunnels indicate the presence of mice and voles and very quickly barn owls and other predating birds will complete the food cycle. We don't underestimate that as a long term policy if the soil is rich, it will need rotavating and a seeding programme undertaken.

Vancouver, Toronto and Paris to name but a few of the cities and towns have made decisions not to use pesticides and herbicides; including. Many French towns have sought an accreditation for banning pesticides. The word 'pesticides' is often used in this context but it includes fungicides and herbicides in order to create a comprehensive change to the culture of caring for the green environment. We are used to road edges and cracks in pavements being sprayed with herbicides which are very likely to contain glyphosate.

There is a wide-scale acceptance of this very dangerous chemical but there is evidence that it is responsible for a lot of damage to human health. Glyphosate is rarely used on its own but is part of a cocktail. Dr. Robin Mesnage, Kings College London claims that as a cocktail 'Roundup' is 1000 x more toxic than on its own. The other chemicals include Arsenic, Chromium, Cobalt, lead and Nickel. The European Food Safety Association (an organ of the E.U.) claims that these chemicals are safe but most of their research is provided by industry. Flame guns for small weeds and firing hot steam are ideas that can be used and with the present awareness of the climate emergency, other non harmful methods are being developed. As a potter Sue Lines knows that these chemicals are kept locked away, so great is their risk assessment and yet we permit these chemicals to be walked over and tracked into our

homes on animals paws and our shoes. Traces of glyphosate is found in our food and there is increasing evidence that many serious illnesses and conditions can be attributable to glyphosate.

The E.U. wearing a different hat recommends for its use:

“to minimise its use in specific areas such as public parks and playgrounds. it is so far unclear if the British government has accepted these recommendations. “



This photograph is of a friend in a suburb of Berlin. Later the verges caught my eye that they have not been cut short and there are weeds at the pavement edge.



This photograph shows a party of people, quite accustomed to sitting and playing in the uncut grass in a public park in Berlin. Grass is cut at a specified time to enable the regeneration of grass and flowers. This is important as there are grasses and flowers that will tend to take over otherwise.



Summer planting outside  
Letchworth town Hall facing  
the Broadway Gardens

Traditionally, major roundabouts and focal points in our towns have been planted up seasonally with annuals that are removed at the end of each season and the plants are probably disposed of. This kind of annual planting plan while enjoyed by many people for the splashes of colour in otherwise uninteresting townscapes and traffic laden roads are not chosen for being insect-friendly. Hardly a stone's throw from the bed in front of Letchworth Town Hall, there are two beds spilling over with perennial plants chosen for being insect friendly. they have lasted throughout the spring and Summer and probably will continue late into the Autumn. Currently isolated from other such planting they are an exemplar rather than a solution at present. We don't doubt there will be a lot of voices raised in support of tradition.



'Prairie' type planting outside  
the Broadway Cinema,  
Letchworth

Some towns, parks and land owners have already been experimenting with prairie planting for some time. While they need annual maintenance the plants are intended to be permanent. Friends of the Earth have an on-line document "Helping Pollinators Locally"- Developing a Local Pollinator Action Plan or Strategy. Another valuable leader in this movement is Piet Oudolf, a well known Dutchman mainly responsible for bringing prairie planting to public attention; his "High Line Walk" on a disused railway track becoming a path in New York city becoming famous world wide.



Why are there metal grills or resin-based gravel set around town trees? Is this to stop the trees being uprooted and stolen? If horticultural workers are going to do less grass mowing, they should in the future have the time to explore the kinds of shrubs that could be planted around the trees that would need to be both drought and frost resistant and if possible they should be evergreens



A bug hotel in an unlikely spot. Along the outside of a building next to Guy's Hospital in the city.

Dave Goulson, Professor at Sussex University talks and writes about the insect side of the conversation both knowledgibly and lightly in The Garden Jungle. We have given you a copy to pass round. It's a great read!

Broadening the conversation to the use of pesticides, Diane relates her experience several years ago when she was teaching at Norton St Nicholas School. She witnessed several incidents relating to the use of herbicides in the school grounds where the edges of raised beds were sprayed. These beds were used by the gardening club and on one occasion the spray was used on paving half a metre away alongside the butterfly garden. On both occasions the gardens were killed off and the children missed out on active piece of learning.

Many gardeners are not converted to the idea of hand weeding and composting, using barriers methods of suppressing weeds, or of actually letting them live because their blue as food, nectar sources etc are undertood! We understand that NHDC sprays vacant allotments with herbicides before handing over to new tenants. We realise that there is a whole culture about keeping ground clear of 'weeds' and there will be a massive job for allotment holders and staff to understand the part they currently play in ecocide and to change their practices. We believe it is no longer a question of choosing how one maintains green spaces; the time has come to understand that alternatives have to be understood and adopted.

The ideas that we have presented here are a beginning of a discussion between those with knowledge, experience and an understanding of biology with those steeped in tradition. In future, towns and their outskirts in North Herts may not look so spruce but they will be better able to withstand climate changes, help to bring back our insect life, add oxygen to the air we breathe and we will be part of the solution, not the problem.

Sue and Diane

**The following is taken from Pesticide Network UK**

**PAN UK has looked at the health effects associated with the fifteen most frequently used active substances in the amenity sector and presented the findings in the table below. The classifications are taken from a **wide variety of sources** and different regulatory authorities around the world.**

Active	KG applied in 2016	Use	Acutely Toxic	Carcinogen	Developmental or Reproductive Toxin	Endocrine Disruptor
Glyphosate	61,249	Herbicide		Probable		
2,4-D	4,757	Herbicide		Probable		
MCPA	3,983	Herbicide	Yes	Possible		
Mecoprop-P	3,929	Herbicide	Yes	Possible		
Triclopyr	1,610	Herbicide				
Diflufenican	1,212	Herbicide				
Fluroxypyr	891	Herbicide				
Dicamba	685	Herbicide	Slight		Yes	
Trinexapac-ethyl	177	Growth Regulator				
Aminopyralid	158	Herbicide				
Iprodione	141	Fungicide		Yes		Suspected
Flazasulfuron	131	Herbicide				
Ferrous sulphate	130	Herbicide				
Clopyralid	99	Herbicide	Yes			
Azoxystrobin	92	Fungicide				

## What are the health hazards?

In the most recent UK-wide survey (dated 26th April 2018), there were a reported 38 different types of pesticide used in the towns and cities of the UK.

### Herbicides

2,4-D, Acetic Acid, Aminopyralid, Asulam, Carfentrazone-ethyl, Citronella Oil, Clopyralid, Cycloxydim, Dicamba, Diflufenican, Ferrous Sulphate, Flazasulfuron, Florasulam, Fluroxypyr, Glufosinate-ammonium, Glyphosate, Isoxaben, MCPA, Mecoprop-p, Pinoxaden, Propaquizafop, Propyzamide

## Fungicides

Azoxystrobin, *Bacillus subtilis*, Carbendazim, Chlorothalonil, Fludioxonil, Fluopyram, Fosetyl-aluminium, Iprodione, Prochloraz, Propiconazole, Pyraclostrobin, Tebuconazole, Trifloxystrobin

## Insecticides

Diflubenzuron, Imidacloprid

## Growth Regulator

Trinexapac-ethyl

**Glyphosate** is the most widely used herbicide in the world and has been focused upon in recent years as a result of its classification as a ‘**probable human carcinogen**’ by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). However, pesticides are poisons designed to kill living organisms and many of the others are also associated with harmful human health effects.