

# Greening Kingston upon Thames – an Open Letter

***To Kingston Councillors, Council Officers, Kingston's green networks and stakeholders***

## **Introducing Transition Town Kingston and our interest in greening Kingston**

The Transition movement's interest in fostering sustainable living and resilient communities has evolved over the years from concerns about peak oil to worries about the climate crisis and biodiversity, increasingly making connections between the climate and nature crises; for example, trees, meadows and wetlands can absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, but only if they are enabled to flourish.

## **Work in progress**

We welcome the Council's [reduced use of herbicides](#), specifically Glyphosate, since 2019, its [Biodiversity Action Plan](#), its support for [Biodiversity Projects](#), [Kingston's nature reserves](#) and "Biobeds", occasional (accidental?) patches of long grass on roadside verges, and the planting of new roadside trees. We appreciate community projects such as the [Beeline Way](#) connecting New Malden and Raynes Park, Queen's Promenade, and the many nature-friendly community and private gardens in our borough.

We also welcome Kingston Council's [Climate Emergency Declaration in June 2019](#), its [ongoing action on climate](#) and its [initiatives on air quality](#), and note that nature, wilding, greening ... have important roles in mitigating climate change and pollution, and should be extended and enhanced via, for example, green roofs (such as the new one over Cromwell Road Bus Station) and biodiversity corridors.

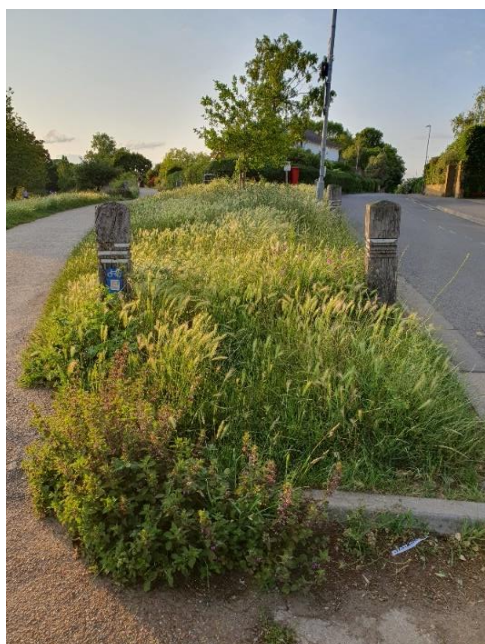
Kingston is surrounded by huge natural spaces (Ham Lands, Richmond Park, Bushy Park just over the river, Wimbledon Common, the Green Belt to the south – and has the potential to be a really wild green borough, but -

## **Is Kingston a leafy suburb or suburban desert?**

Though Kingston is often thought of as a leafy suburb, with its many gardens, parks, green spaces, grass verges and street trees... these isolated green oases and biodiversity corridors are

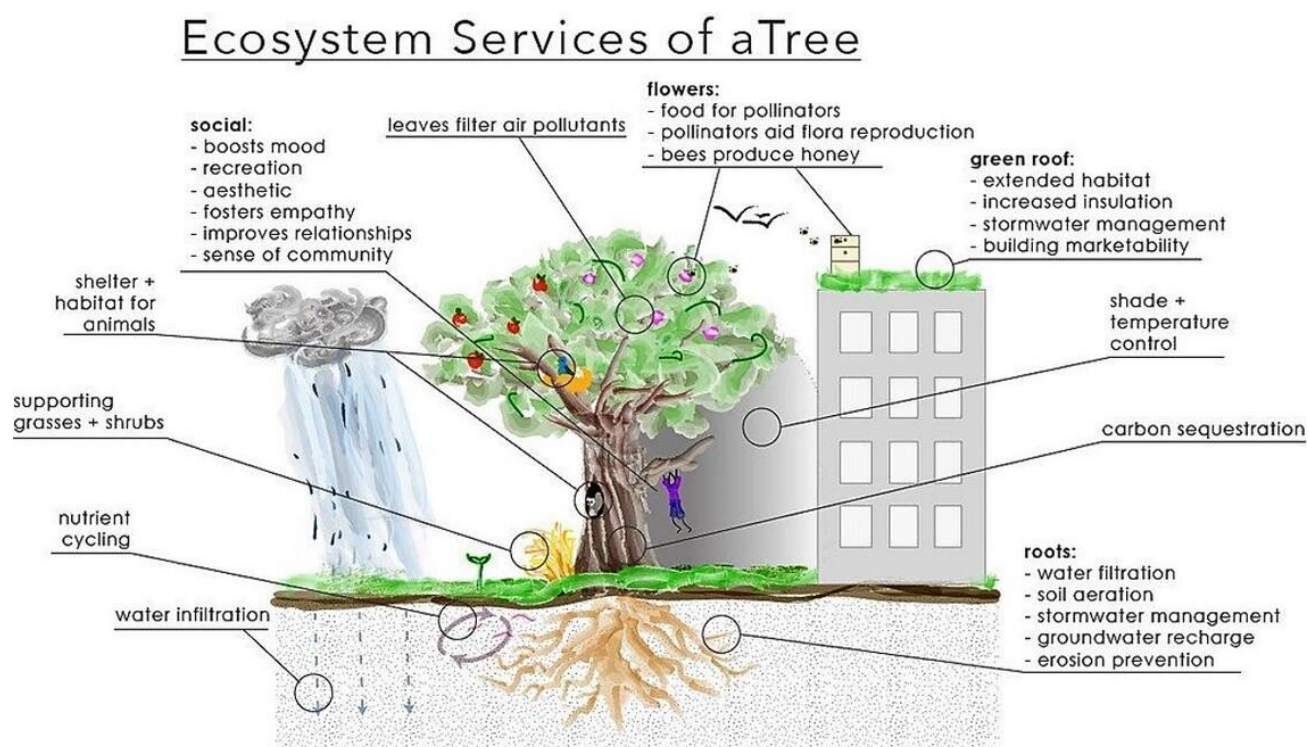
not well connected to each other and are often separated by miles of denatured space, a suburban desert of buildings, paving, over-mown grass, neat hedges, pollarded trees and manicured gardens.

The photo on the right shows closely mown dry grass on a verge on Richmond Road in summer 2025, and the one on the left, taken in the same week for comparison, shows an attractive wild patch of long grass going to seed beside a footpath.



Disappointingly, once again in 2025 Kingston did not participate in No Mow May, despite the growing interest in, and positive publicity for, this annual awareness-raising event. There was even a proposal from [Bug Life](#) in 2025 to extend reduced mowing well beyond May.

Additionally, developers and landowners are too often allowed to neglect or annihilate biodiversity (for example, at the potential wetland nature reserve of Seething Wells), or to remove mature trees that are in their way, with replacement saplings frequently struggling to survive in their first few years. In any case, young trees are no real substitute in terms of natural habitat and their capacity for absorbing carbon and other pollutants. The illustration below shows how much we need trees – and preferably mature well managed trees rather than vulnerable newly planted saplings.



## Why go wild? Why “Kingston Green Chain(s)”

Why is biodiversity important? “Biodiversity, the variability among living organisms from all sources, underpins all life on Earth,” [says WHO](#), and plant-life is one of the foundations of life on Earth, providing habitats and food for pollinators, other insects, birds, small mammals... as well as absorbing carbon and other pollutants. To safeguard and enhance biodiversity in Kingston we should be increasing tree cover, wilding green spaces, gardens, roadside verges... and ensuring that they are joined up via “Kingston Green Chains” – our working title for local biodiversity corridors (some of them dark or sensitively lit at night to help nocturnal wildlife) criss-crossing the borough from one end to the other, enabling wildlife to move around and thrive, thus improving Kingston for wildlife, people and the planet.

There are Green Chains and Green Corridors elsewhere, but the USP of “Kingston Green Chain(s)” is the proposed inclusion of residential streets, estates and private and rooftop gardens, encouraging them to become “Green Links” in a “Kingston Green Chain” and enabling freer movement of wildlife across the borough. Kingston could become a model for other boroughs if this initiative succeeds.

*“Imagine trying to travel around the UK without our road and rail network. Or imagine if nine out of every ten miles of road just didn’t exist – life would be impossible! That is the situation faced by our vital pollinators and other bugs. [B-Lines](#) is Buglife’s unique solution.”*



There is plentiful guidance available to gardeners who want attractive gardens (as in the photos on following pages) that nurture wildlife and support pollinators and other insects important in the food chain, for example from [Kingston Council](#) and [Transition Town Kingston](#).

## Nature, health and wellbeing

If nature/biodiversity itself is not a sufficient motivation, human wellbeing may be. A 2022 [study, led by academics from King's College London](#), found that everyday encounters with birds boosted the mood of people with depression, as well as the wider population, and suggested that visits to places with a wealth of birdlife, such as parks and canals, could be prescribed by doctors to treat mental health conditions. See the [Guardian report](#) on this study and [Nature and mental health - Mind](#) for more ideas on how nature benefits us.

## Education, communication and incentives

The language of “bio-beds”, “biodiversity”, “pollinators”... may not be the best way to get through to and motivate non-specialists. People may well love nature and walking in green spaces, enjoy birdsong and wildflowers, and appreciate the shelter and other benefits of trees – without necessarily knowing or caring how they connect with and depend on each other, for example how seeds and insects feed birds, and how important plants are for absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> and air pollution. It could be more effective to start from self-interest, the language non-specialists use, and the things they like or need: clean air; nature and wildlife; our food supply; birdsong and butterflies; shade in increasingly hot summers; personal wellbeing...

We hope that the arguments expressed here will convince councillors and council officers that improving links between green spaces via wild green corridors is initiative worth supporting, and we also hope that they will help in conversations with residents expressing concerns about untidiness, poor management etc.

## What next?

This open letter is a very early stage in the conversations and actions we'd like to encourage with the Council, local wildlife groups, residents, friends of parks and gardens... and we invite interested parties to get in touch and get involved in the next stages, helping to make “Kingston Green Chain(s)” happen.



If there is funding for wilding initiatives (and TTK, as a community group, and/or other green groups, could perhaps apply for such funds) money spent on disseminating information and explanation, for example on well-placed info-boards such as the one on the left, and rewarding participants, for example with “Green Link” badges for their gardens, and/or prizes for the most biodiverse gardens, could be well spent. More ideas welcome!



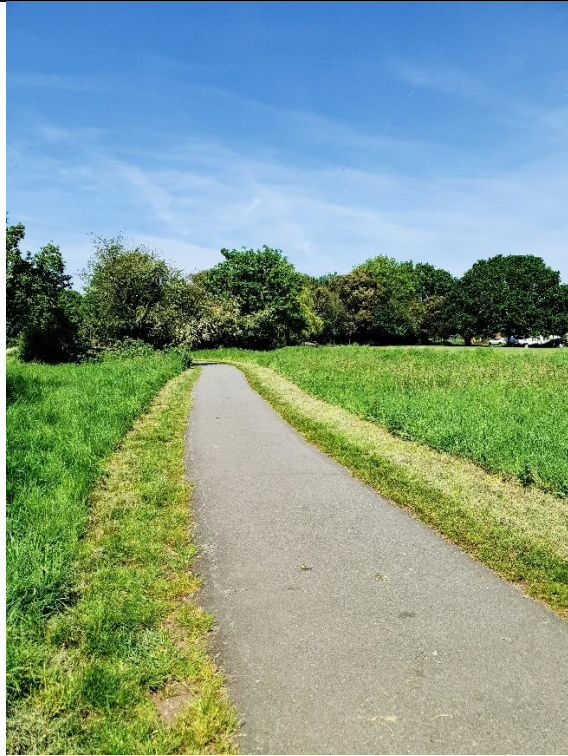
*MM and DH-D, on behalf of Transition Town Kingston, July 2025*



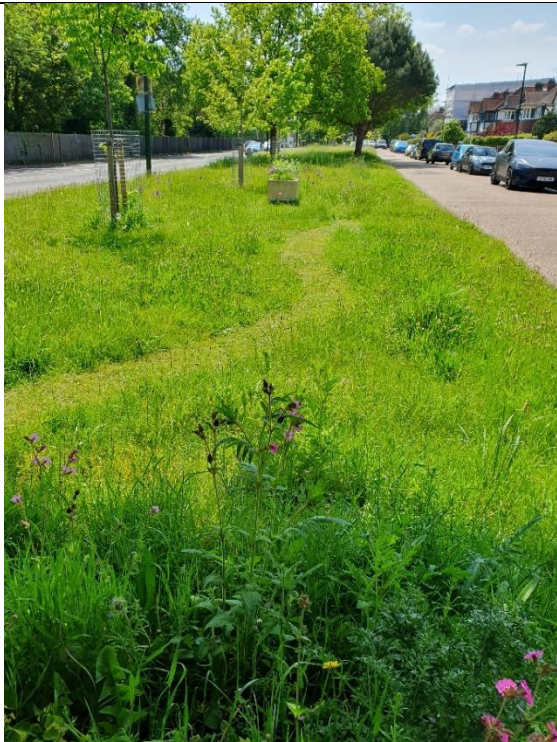
**Some attractive examples of wilding, feasible in private gardens, public open spaces and roadsides...**



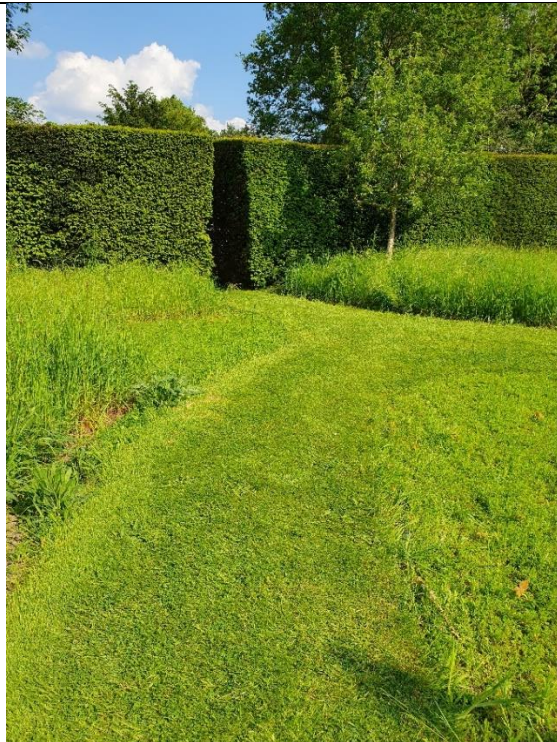
*A front garden wildflower bed*



*A mown path-side strip looks tidy while leaving plenty of space for nature*



*An attractive serpentine mown path on a wilded verge beside Richmond Road*



*A green path in a large private garden*

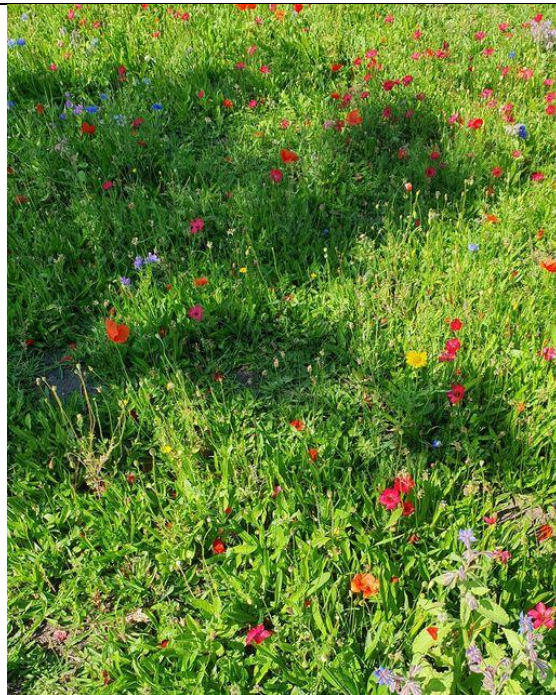




*A bed of clover in a back garden framed by a mown lawn*



*A field of dandelions providing spring foraging for pollinators*



*Wildflowers allowed to grow in Tolworth and in Ham, Richmond*



## Further reading and resources



- [Kingston Council on Biodiversity](#) and its [Biodiversity Action Plan](#)
- [The World Health Organisation](#) on our dependence on natural eco-systems and the benefits of biodiversity
- [Nature Towns & Cities](#) - a coalition of organisations committed to bringing the benefits of nature and green space to everyone in the UK
- [Nature and mental health](#) - Mind
- [Championing nature | Grow Wild | Kew](#)
- [CPRE London on the London Tree Ring project](#) and new guidance on [Residential streets: 12 design elements](#)
- [National Park City London](#)
- [Buglife's B-Lines](#)
- **Kingston Council's [Climate Emergency Declaration in June 2019](#)**, something all Council departments and contractors should take into account, ensuring that their actions and decisions do not worsen the climate and nature crises, but instead help to improve the local natural environment and mitigate climate change
- [Growing tips for green gardeners](#), TTK's useful sources of ideas and advice on sustainable and wildlife-friendly gardening, food-growing, community gardening...
- [Royal Horticultural Society](#)
- **Good examples – places to visit:** Kew Gardens; Richmond Park; Riverside, Queen's Promenade and North Kingston to Teddington; Tolworth Court Farm; local Open Garden days, Royal Horticultural Society at Wisley...



### Contact us:

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