# Controversy erupts as councils remove St George’s Cross flags amid political tensions



Labour-run Brighton and Hove Council has joined a growing list of local authorities removing St George’s Cross flags from public streets, sparking tension and debate across parts of England. The flags, erected as part of an online campaign called Operation Raise the Colours, have been systematically taken down by several councils, including those in Tower Hamlets, east London, and Birmingham. Brighton and Hove city council confirmed that flags displayed along the town’s seafront were being removed in accordance with the 1980 Highways Act, which governs the use of roadside fixtures. However, the removal has encountered significant resistance. Contractors tasked with taking down the flags have suffered verbal abuse, leading to a temporary halt in their work until police can be present to ensure their safety. Sussex Police have indicated they will be unable to provide this support until the following week, prompting the council to pause further flag removals in certain areas.

The flags’ presence and subsequent removal have prompted polarized responses within the communities involved. Bridget Fishleigh, an independent councillor for Rottingdean and West Saltdean, highlighted the ongoing challenges, explaining that although removal efforts were making steady progress, new flags kept appearing. The situation mirrors experiences in Tower Hamlets, where St George’s flags raised in public spaces—some in direct contrast to the Palestinian flags flown there previously—have been removed by the council, which is run by the pro-Palestinian Aspire party. Tower Hamlets Council has stressed their responsibility to monitor and maintain council infrastructure, clarifying that flags placed without permission may be removed as part of routine maintenance. The council also issued warnings against residents risking injury by climbing lamp posts or other installations to hang flags, following incidents of verbal abuse against removal staff.

The controversy surrounding the flags reflects broader cultural and political tensions. Zoe Nicholson, Green Party leader of the nearby Lewes district council, described how the St George’s Cross has been "hijacked" by extremists, detracting from its historical associations with unity and national pride. She expressed hope that the flag’s "true meaning" could be reclaimed from those promoting divisive ideologies. Meanwhile, Conservative voices have criticised the flag removals as selective and politically motivated. Tory leader Kemi Badenoch condemned the actions as "shameful," arguing that English flags should be "welcomed" as symbols of unity and optimism rather than treated as rebellious acts. Writing in the Daily Mail, Badenoch highlighted what she described as inconsistent enforcement of local regulations, noting in particular councils’ reluctance to remove Palestinian flags, which she sees as evidence of a sectarian agenda. She warned that suppressing the English flag instead of embracing national identity risks fuelling division rather than fostering community solidarity.

Political responses have extended beyond criticism to organised efforts to maintain the flags’ visibility. Reform UK has launched a ‘patriotic flag pact’ in partnership with 12 councils who have vowed not to remove St George’s Cross and Union Jack flags from lampposts. The party’s leader, Nigel Farage, labelled the removals "shameful" and underscored the importance of celebrating national symbols. This pledge is a direct response to council actions in Tower Hamlets, Birmingham, and elsewhere, which cited safety concerns and by-law enforcement as justification for flag removal.

This ongoing flag dispute embodies a wider cultural conversation about national identity, community cohesion, and political expression. Local authorities stress their legal responsibilities in maintaining public infrastructure and enforcing relevant regulations, while campaigners and many residents see the flags as powerful emblems of national pride that should be embraced rather than removed. As tensions persist, the issue remains a flashpoint in debates over how England’s symbols are understood and represented in a diverse society.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2099314/labour-run-council-take-down-st-georges-flags), [[2]](https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2025/08/22/st-georges-flags-stay-for-now-as-contractors-removing-them-report-abuse/), [[3]](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/News_events/2025/August/Statement-on-flags-outside-Britannia-Hotel.aspx)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2099314/labour-run-council-take-down-st-georges-flags), [[3]](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/News_events/2025/August/Statement-on-flags-outside-Britannia-Hotel.aspx), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tower-hamlets-intimidated-st-georges-flags-b1243640.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2099314/labour-run-council-take-down-st-georges-flags), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tower-hamlets-intimidated-st-georges-flags-b1243640.html), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/kemi-badenoch-conservative-english-tower-hamlets-council-birmingham-b1244200.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.gbnews.com/politics/reform-uk-patriotic-flag-pact-councils-union-jacks), [[7]](https://www.gbnews.com/news/flag-row-st-georges-flags-fight-back-councils), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/kemi-badenoch-conservative-english-tower-hamlets-council-birmingham-b1244200.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2099314/labour-run-council-take-down-st-georges-flags> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2025/08/22/st-georges-flags-stay-for-now-as-contractors-removing-them-report-abuse/> - Brighton and Hove City Council contractors have paused the removal of St George's flags from lamp posts along the A259 coast road after facing verbal abuse. The flags were placed in Saltdean and Rottingdean, reportedly in response to the 'Operation Raise the Colours' campaign. The council stated that the flags were unauthorized and would be removed in line with the 1980 Highways Act. The removal has been temporarily halted due to safety concerns for the contractors. Police presence is expected during future removal attempts to ensure safety.
3. <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/News_events/2025/August/Statement-on-flags-outside-Britannia-Hotel.aspx> - Tower Hamlets Council has announced the removal of St George's flags from council infrastructure, including those near the Britannia Hotel. The council emphasized its responsibility to monitor and maintain council-owned infrastructure and stated that flags attached without permission may be removed as part of routine maintenance. The decision follows reports of verbal abuse faced by staff during previous removal attempts. The council urged the public not to put themselves at risk by climbing on lamp posts and other infrastructure to display flags.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tower-hamlets-intimidated-st-georges-flags-b1243640.html> - Residents of Tower Hamlets are divided over the display and removal of St George's flags. Some feel intimidated by the flags, while others view the removal as disgraceful. The flags appeared in areas including Manchester Road near the Britannia Hotel, coinciding with protests over asylum seekers. Tower Hamlets Council stated that flags attached to council-owned infrastructure without permission may be removed as part of routine maintenance. The council emphasized its responsibility to monitor and maintain council infrastructure.
5. <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/reform-uk-patriotic-flag-pact-councils-union-jacks> - Reform UK has launched a 'patriotic flag pact' with 12 councils vowing not to remove St George's Cross and Union Jack flags from lampposts. The move responds to the removal of such flags by councils like Tower Hamlets and Birmingham City Council, which cited safety concerns. Reform UK leader Nigel Farage criticized the removal as 'shameful' and emphasized the importance of celebrating national symbols. The pact aims to support the flying of these flags as symbols of unity and national pride.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/kemi-badenoch-conservative-english-tower-hamlets-council-birmingham-b1244200.html> - Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch criticized councils for removing St George's Cross flags, describing the actions as 'shameful' and accusing them of enforcing local rules 'selectively'. She argued that the flying of English flags should be 'welcomed' rather than seen as an act of rebellion. Badenoch pointed out the hesitation of some councils to address the appearance of Palestinian flags as an example of selective enforcement. She emphasized that suppressing the English flag does not stop division but fuels it.
7. <https://www.gbnews.com/news/flag-row-st-georges-flags-fight-back-councils> - In response to councils removing St George's flags, a movement called 'Operation Raise the Colours' has emerged, with locals across the UK hanging hundreds of flags. The movement aims to oppose the removal of national symbols and has seen flags displayed in cities including Birmingham and east London. Activists are using social media to coordinate the display of flags and to support others in gathering them. The movement reflects a pushback against council actions perceived as diminishing national pride.