

A More Natural Capital

An agenda for the Mayor of London

The first 100 days: a review of progress

‘A cleaner, greener London?’

It is just over four months since Sadiq Khan won his second term as Mayor of London following the elections in May 2021.

That’s about 100 working days in office. The Manifesto of the newly elected Mayor outlined a ‘Green New Deal for London’ to be delivered by the London Recovery Board with one of its main aims being to ‘accelerate the delivery of a cleaner, greener London’. This was a promising start but 100 days on what progress has been made towards the agenda set out by the More Natural Capital coalition before the election?



October 2021



This is a joint publication on behalf of the above group of environmental NGOs who share a common vision for a greener London. Individual policy proposals are not necessarily the policy of each individual organisation.

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The More Natural Capital coalition

The More Natural Capital coalition is a group of leading environmental organisations supporting action to improve London for people and nature.

We came together in 2019 to prepare a joint agenda which we promoted in the run up to the elections in meetings with leading Mayoral candidates and their teams. We also organised the Mayoral Environment Debate in April, an online hustings chaired by environmentalist and presenter Julia Bradbury and attended by over 360 people, providing an opportunity for candidates and their representatives to set out their stalls.

The coalition was heartened by cross-party support for our agenda for a More Natural Capital which outlines 24 'calls to action' around the following four main themes:



Reduce pollution and waste



Secure nature's recovery



Mitigate and increase resilience to climate change



Improve health and wellbeing for all

We were hopeful that our agenda would be taken up with some enthusiasm by the new Mayor, whatever their political persuasion. This optimism was reinforced by the manifesto put forward by the successful candidate, Sadiq Khan, which reflected many of our own priorities.

Sadiq Khan's Manifesto

In his manifesto, the new Mayor promised to 'strain every sinew to help build a better, brighter future for London... tackling the inequalities which scar it... with a bold, positive vision to renew, rebuild and refresh London'.

He outlined his desire to 'partner with local authorities, landowners, businesses, and residents to develop better public spaces, safer streets and more walking and cycling friendly schemes.' In the run up to election day the new Mayor promised 'jobs, jobs, jobs' with an emphasis on environmental sustainability linked to a Green Finance Initiative, a Green Skills Academy and a Good Work Fund.

Sadiq Khan's manifesto covered six main topic areas: London as a global city; safer communities; a Green New Deal; supporting the next generation; a fairer, healthier and more equal London; and London's local communities. Most of its environmental commitments are set out in the chapter which outlines the proposed 'Green New Deal for London' with a ten-point plan including:

- a commitment for the capital to be 'zero carbon/carbon neutral' by 2030
- greening 400 hectares of parks and green spaces
- pursuing the target of 80% of all journeys by 2041 to be by sustainable modes
- continuing to tackle air pollution, including by expanding the Ultra Low Emission Zone by October 2021 and opposing airport expansion
- bringing nature closer to Londoners with a commitment to 'protect, restore and improve green spaces, improve biodiversity and increase habitats' so that 'all Londoners should live no more than a 10-minute walk from green space'
- improving green corridors and open spaces connecting town centres and transport hubs
- supporting greening initiatives by communities, schools and landlords, including encouraging more green walls and roofs
- protecting the Green Belt and London's playing fields from development, with the caveat that 'exceptional circumstances' may allow such developments to go ahead.

The manifesto calls for a 'clean energy revolution' with strong promotion for solar energy, especially community and neighbourhood-based projects. It outlines the Mayor's aspiration to lead the country on carbon reduction, especially with new build and retrofitting homes, but states that this will depend on new Government standards and funding.

The manifesto also sets out the Mayor's aim for London to be a 'zero-waste' city with a re-use, recycle and recover strategy, and for a doubling of the size of London's green economy by 2030. But there are also areas of weakness such as his continued commitment to the Silvertown Tunnel and a lack of any substantive commitment on future tree planting.



Walkers at
Hutchinson's Bank:
London Wildlife Trust

The London Recovery Board

Before the election the Mayor established the London Recovery Board to oversee the city's long term recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Involving representatives from local government, the NHS, universities, trade unions, community groups and the business and voluntary sectors, the Board is supported by the London Recovery Taskforce. We welcome the Board's recognition of the importance of putting the environment at the heart of the recovery. One of the Board's aims, reflected in Sadiq Khan's election manifesto, is to 'accelerate delivery of a cleaner, greener London' through nine 'missions', including the 'Green New Deal', 'Healthy Food, Healthy Weight' and 'Mental Health and Wellbeing', to address the challenges facing post-pandemic London.



St John Priory
Garden:
CPRE London

The Board has met three times since the election, with the most recent meeting in September focusing on the 'Green New Deal'. We look forward to hearing more about the Board's plans for a green economic recovery and working together to make this a reality.

Progress against the More Natural Capital agenda



These are very welcome aspirations which reflect many of the measures proposed by the More Natural Capital coalition.

But how much has the Mayor of London been able to achieve against the agenda set out by the coalition in the first 100 days of his second term?

The following headline assessment seeks to make a balanced judgement on the extent of progress on each of the 24 'calls to action' set out in the More Natural Capital agenda, grouped according to our four main themes. We use a simple colour code to summarise our collective assessment with a view to recognising where good progress is being made while encouraging greater attention to the actions identified as red. While 100 days is not a long time, efforts have been hindered by the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, and although the Mayor's powers are limited, he has great influence as a leader, convenor, and advocate for a More Natural Capital.

The key to our colour coding is as follows:

Green (G) for actions covered by the Mayor's manifesto or clearly being delivered as part of it.

Amber (A) for actions where positive progress is being made but further action is required.

Red (R) for actions not mentioned in the Mayor's manifesto or where there is no obvious progress on delivery.

Reduce pollution and waste



The More Natural Capital agenda calls for tougher action to tackle all forms of pollution, reduce wasteful use of land, and secure major improvements in the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste.



Waltham Forest
Mini Holland:
Living Streets

Overall, we assess progress under this theme to be **amber**: there are good signs of progress with respect to air quality, but also some backward steps, such as the proposal to end the Congestion Charge at 6pm. We are disappointed at the lack of attention being given to reducing light pollution, limited progress on improving water quality, and insufficient urgency over the need to cut greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.



The actions and targets we identified, along with our headline assessment of progress, are as follows:

G

Extend the 'Streetspace' programme to encourage more walking and cycling,

A

fund the creation of 200 new low traffic neighbourhoods across London, and support the 'Healthy Streets Borough Scorecard' to encourage best practice to reduce car use.

A

Showcase at least ten major development schemes involving the GLA group to demonstrate better use of 'greyspace', land previously devoted to car use, and other developed land not of high environmental value.

G

Deliver the expanded Ultra Low Emission Zone by October 2021 to reduce pollution

A

while further incentivising moves to cleaner, more sustainable transport options, including by developing an integrated road user charging strategy.

A

Support a 'Zero Waste Borough Scorecard' approach to waste reduction and recycling,

G

to encourage best practice and develop a plan to achieve food waste reduction targets.

A

Reduce water pollution and leakage by working with Thames Water, London Boroughs and the Environment Agency to rectify pipe failures and misconnections, and coordinate action to reduce road run-off.

R

Develop best practice guidance for lighting design in London to reduce light pollution, and to safeguard and extend dark sky areas.

Secure nature's recovery



The More Natural Capital agenda calls for more ambition to work with local communities and others to secure and expand accessible, well managed, nature-rich green and blue space.



The actions and targets we identified, along with our headline assessment of progress, are as follows:

- A** **Develop an ecologically coherent 'nature recovery network'** with targets to restore and enhance species and habitats, requiring new development to deliver net biodiversity gain, and enabling more multi-functional land use such as community farms and rewilding in the Green Belt.
- A** **Oppose all development proposals** that would result in the loss of Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land,
- R** **high quality farmland or land with the potential** to be used for nature-friendly farming with public access.
- A** **Fund and support the maintenance of 150 new community orchards** and increase the area of land used for nature-friendly farming and community food growing.
- A** **Endorse the Parks Charter and the Charter for Open Spaces**, including calling for adequate Government funding for parks and supporting the dedication of green spaces as town or village greens, and
- G** **develop a green space improvement programme** to increase the number of parks receiving a Green Flag Award.

R

Create ten new district parks to reduce deficiency in access to green space, and fund borough partnerships to coordinate delivery of green space networks across three 'regionual park' areas such as the Wandle Valley, Brent River Park, and a Quaggy River Park.

A

Oppose development that would damage ancient woodlands and veteran trees,

R

reduce the heritage significance of designed landscapes, or result in unacceptable loss of sunlight from green spaces.



Kingfisher:
Woodland Trust.

Overall, we assess progress in this area as **red/amber**: there are some welcome signs of progress but insufficient ambition given the scale of the challenge posed by wildlife decline, especially with respect to the provision of new nature rich, publicly accessible green space and protecting existing green space from damaging development.



Mitigate and increase resilience to climate change



In A More Natural Capital we called for action to deliver a significant reduction in carbon emissions from transport and buildings, a major increase in renewable energy capacity and a range of nature-based solutions to the climate crisis.



Rain Garden:
Wildfowl and
Wetland Trust

Overall, we assess progress under this theme as **green/amber**. We welcome significant signs of progress in relation to a green economic recovery and climate change adaptation. With growing signs of climate breakdown the challenge is immense, and progress is undermined by the Mayor's continued commitment to the damaging and outmoded Silvertown Tunnel. We are also concerned at changes to housing procurement rules that discourage the use of timber construction materials.



The actions and targets we identified, along with our headline assessment of progress, are as follows:

A

Form a Climate Emergency Alliance to help develop and adopt an ambitious, detailed, timetabled and costed plan to deliver net zero by 2030 or sooner, based on

G

a green jobs and business strategy to ensure post pandemic economic activity delivers on climate targets.

A

Commit to a zero-carbon transport sector by 2030

through a presumption against new roads as solution to travel challenges, including electrification of buses and taxis, opposing expansion of Heathrow and London City airports, creating zero-carbon delivery zones, and

R

abandoning the proposed Silvertown Tunnel.

A

Develop the action plan to deliver 1GW of solar power in the London area by 2030 through planning policy,

support for community projects, loan finance, and convening commercial players.

A

Incorporate 'de-paving' into all major development by the GLA group,

G

and promote sustainable drainage and urban cooling measures, including rain gardens, for all new development as part of a vision for adapting to inevitable climate change.

A

Increase tree canopy cover sensitively and sustainably by at least 20% by 2050, including through large scale

G

woodland creation in the Green Belt and 100 new street tree schemes where they are needed most for shading.

G

Lobby Government to ensure all new homes are built to zero carbon standards by 2023, and fund an ambitious programme to retrofit and sensitively adapt existing housing stock.

Improve health and wellbeing for all



Our agenda for A More Natural Capital recognised the potential for action on climate and nature to deliver significant improvements in public health. We called for Londoners to be enabled to lead greener lifestyles and for greater community involvement in green spaces.



The actions and targets we identified, along with our headline assessment of progress, are as follows:

A **Establish a London-wide 'green living' social prescribing programme** to connect people with local green and blue spaces, improve public health, and reduce health inequalities between London's diverse communities.

R **Fund the creation of 100 'tranquil areas' in new and existing green spaces** for rest and relaxation, including by landscape enhancement schemes and removing through-traffic from parks.

A **Continue to improve the Central London Footways Network** and roll it out more widely to secure attractive, safe, low pollution streets connecting iconic destinations and public spaces.

A **Develop a strategic plan to expand and improve the Walk London network** with at least six new, high quality green walking routes, to improve connectivity, link green spaces, create greener streets, and help bring nature closer to people.

A

Support the preparation of food strategies and plans in every Borough incorporating good food retail and procurement policies to improve access to fresh food and

G

champion healthier, plant-based diets and less low welfare meat consumption.

A

Double the funding currently available through the Greener City Fund for community green space projects, with specific programmes for disadvantaged communities and schools to connect children with nature and review other funding streams to ensure they deliver beneficial and inclusive climate, nature and health outcomes.



Summer Family Day:
Woodland Trust

Overall, we assess progress under this theme to be **amber**. While welcoming the green recovery mission on healthy food and commitments to expand and improve green walking routes, there is considerable untapped potential to improve the local environment for health and wellbeing particularly for London's most disadvantaged communities.



Conclusion

It is encouraging that there are many areas of agreement between the Mayor and the More Natural Capital coalition around priorities for a green recovery.

While we are disappointed that some aspects of our manifesto have not yet been picked up by the Mayor and there are some significant inconsistencies and concerns, there is a great deal of alignment in the direction of travel. A lot has already been achieved in a relatively short time but much remains to be done to realise our shared ambitions.

The unprecedented challenges we face in recovering from the pandemic and tackling the growing reality of a changing climate and natural environment in crisis reinforces the need for more urgent action to deliver our agenda for a More Natural Capital. It is striking how a concerted effort to tackle many of the issues we identify could help deliver the aspirations of the Mayor's manifesto and the priorities of the London Recovery Board. Our agenda can also help give greater meaning to his support for London as the world's first National Park City.

With closer collaboration and continued commitment by the Mayor, we are hopeful that, in the next year or so, more of our 24 'calls to action' could be assessed as green or amber. We stand ready to work together constructively to deliver our shared agenda for positive change. To help with this, we would like the Mayor to establish baselines, and set targets and deadlines to deliver the cleaner, greener, and more resilient London we all want to see.

A simple, graphic Mayoral 'green dashboard' would help us all to visualise and communicate progress towards A More Natural Capital for the benefit of all Londoners.