

MAYOR OF LONDON

Zack Polanski AM

Chair of the London Assembly Environment
Committee 2021-23
C/o Richard.Clarke@london.gov.uk

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Date: 15 August 2023

Dear Zack,

Thank you for writing to me as former Chair of the London Environment Committee during its investigation into the management and protection of London's wild spaces, and for highlighting the three main outcomes raised by the Committee. I am committed to being the greenest Mayor of our great city and welcome the focus on this important issue.

I was pleased to see the Committee recognise the policies and programmes I have already put in place to protect and enhance London's wild spaces. London's leadership in adopting innovative approaches such as urban rewilding and the Urban Greening Factor is providing real benefits to Londoners and nature, and inspiring other cities to become greener.

As Mayor, I have limited powers in terms of the day-to-day management of London's green spaces or the local planning decisions regarding them. As the Committee has pointed out, years of government cuts to borough budgets means there are ongoing challenges for local authorities in securing the resources and expertise needed to manage and protect wild spaces.

Since becoming Mayor, I have provided strategic support to boroughs on these matters, commissioning the first natural capital account for the city, setting up a Green Spaces Commission and making tools and data on the natural environment across London available to support decision making. I have also directly funded boroughs to restore and create new green space and habitats for wildlife and introduced project development funding and access to expert advice as part of my green infrastructure grants programmes, which many boroughs have accessed.

However, given the urgency of the climate and ecological crisis we are facing, we all need to do more. Earlier this year, I was pleased to confirm London as a signatory to the Montréal Pledge, joining together with other world cities to protect ecosystems and halt the loss of nature. I am continuing to invest in the rewilding and greening of London, and there is significant work already underway or planned that aligns with the Committee's recommendations.

You will be aware of my recent appointment as a 'Responsible Authority' to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for London. While I welcome the opportunity to lead this for London, it is irresponsible of the government not to back this up with adequate financial support for the preparation or delivery of the strategy. I will continue to do all I can to deliver nature recovery in London, but given the scale of the challenge, it will be important to work with partners to make more space for nature in our city and to lobby the government for fair funding for London.

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My response to each of the Committee's recommendations is set out in more detail in the annex to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small '2' written below the 'h'.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

Cc: Léonie Cooper AM, Chair of the London Assembly Environment Committee

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Annex

Mayor of London's response to the recommendations of the London Assembly Environment Committee's investigation on Wild Spaces

Recommendation 1

The GLA should undertake a review to explore ways to ensure that London boroughs have the skills and ecological experience needed to assess biodiversity in planning decisions to protect wild spaces and enforce the London Plan.

In 2019-2020, the Mayor funded Greenspace Information for Greater London's (GiGL) [Biodiversity Evidence – Better Outcomes from Planning \(BE-BOP\) project](#). The project reviewed how boroughs were taking account of biodiversity in planning and identified some of the challenges, limitations and needs boroughs have around biodiversity. The project also produced resources to help boroughs take account of biodiversity in planning decisions.

Many of the key recommendations from the BE-BOP review related to the internal working structures and processes of boroughs in their capacity as London Planning Authorities (LPAs). The report also highlighted a need for better access to and use of relevant data, training and knowledge sharing between LPAs. Some of the ways the Mayor has supported boroughs on biodiversity in planning include:

- Funding GiGL to publish the first ever open data set of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). This has been incorporated into the free to access London Planning Data Map so that these important sites can be identified easily and early in planning decisions.
- Supporting training for boroughs on relevant topics including biodiversity and the Urban Greening Factor with external training providers the Planning Advisory Service and Urban Design London.
- Publishing a [design guide](#) on how to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through the Urban Greening Factor policy.

To continue support in this important area, the Mayor has also committed to:

- Fund London Wildlife Trust to run workshops for borough officers on BNG and produce a report for the GLA on how boroughs are prepared for BNG to inform future guidance and support from the Mayor.
- Fund a new project in response to the London Rewilding Taskforce's second recommendation, which will raise awareness and understanding about management of SINCs in boroughs.
- The GLA continuing to Chair the London Wildlife Sites Board to support boroughs to identify SINCs during their Local Plan preparation and to make recommendations on sites to be designated as Metropolitan grade SINCs (the highest SINC grade).

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should accept the recommendations of the Rewilding Taskforce to provide opportunities to engage with rewilding and the capital's nature. In particular, there should be a focus on engaging and supporting people to discover and support nature where they live and enhance access for marginalised groups.

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The Mayor agrees and wants to reduce inequalities in access to green space and nature and has put in place a number of initiatives to help achieve this since becoming Mayor. Examples include:

- Working with London Wildlife Trust to fund 40 “[Keeping it Wild](#)” traineeships to help young Londoners from underrepresented communities to develop vital new skills in the conservation sector;
- Targeting funding through the Grow Back Greener fund in neighbourhoods with poor access to green space, high climate vulnerability and high levels of deprivation;
- Targeting funding through the Trees for London programme to areas with low tree canopy cover, high vulnerability to heat risk and high levels of deprivation; and
- Targeting funding through the Green and Resilient Spaces fund to areas with poor access to green space and high climate vulnerability.

The Mayor accepts the recommendations of the London Rewilding Taskforce and will be supporting programmes and projects to increase opportunities for Londoners to get involved with rewilding and nature.

Recommendation 3

The GLA should use the opportunity of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies to ensure that local baseline data across London is refreshed and that all Boroughs have a strategy for producing accurate assessments of biodiversity. It should also look to strengthen further the Urban Greening Factor and Biodiversity Net Gain frameworks to ensure existing mature trees and ecosystems are appropriately valued and protected.

The LNRS will set out how London’s ecological network can be bigger, better and more joined up. This will include an evidence base to inform future mayoral strategies and plans and local plans.

However, the Government is yet to commit to ongoing funding to support such work or the continued monitoring of LNRS delivery, and if resources are not forthcoming, it will undermine our ability to deliver this and the opportunities this new approach brings.

The Mayor’s London Plan already provides strong protection to London’s valuable green infrastructure with policies focusing on open spaces, trees and biodiversity. The London Plan also includes the provision of the Urban Greening Factor (UGF) to ensure all new developments make an appropriate contribution to the greening of London.

The Mayor will continue to monitor the application of the UGF to ensure the policy is delivering appropriate outcomes. He has already issued guidance to boroughs on how they can set their own UGF targets, which can include higher targets or specifying the use of particular greening types such as trees, and will provide advice to boroughs on how they can set locally relevant BNG targets.