

MDA No.: 1742

Title: London's Trees in a Changing Climate

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Environment Committee meeting on 14 May 2025, the Committee resolved that:

Authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with the party Group Lead Members, to agree any output from the discussion.

- 1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair agreed the Committee's letter regarding London's trees in a changing climate, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

2. Decision

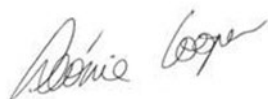
- 2.1 **That the Chair, in consultation with the party Group Lead Members, agrees the Committee's letter regarding London's trees in a changing climate, as attached at Appendix 1.**

Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Printed Name: **Léonie Cooper AM, Chair of the Environment Committee**

Date: **15 July 2025**

3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the former Chair, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members and Deputy Chairs, on 6 May 2025 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the letter and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the letter regarding London's trees in a changing climate will be formally noted at the Environment Committee's next appropriate meeting.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): *Sal Fazal*

Printed Name: Saleha Fazal

Date: 15 July 2025

Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.


Signature (Finance): Not Required

Printed Name:

Date:

Legal Implications:

The Chair of Environment Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): 

Printed Name: Rory McKenna, Monitoring Officer

Date: 16 July 2025

Email: rory.mckenna@london.gov.uk

Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Zack Polanski AM;
- Thomas Turrell AM; and
- Gareth Roberts AM.

4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

Lead Officer / Author

Signature: *Richard*

Printed Name: Richard Clarke

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 15 July 2025

Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature: *Helen Ewen*

Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 15 July 2025



Léonie Cooper AM
Chair of the Environment Committee

Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
Greater London Authority

(Sent by email)

18 July 2025

Dear Sadiq,

Managing London's trees for a changing climate

As you know, trees play a vital role in London, improving air quality, improving climate resilience by lowering temperatures and reducing flood risk, providing important habitats, and having a positive impact on Londoners' wellbeing. However, we know that many of London's trees will be vulnerable to climate change as average temperatures rise and the city experiences more extreme weather events.

This is an area that we know your Green Infrastructure Team is engaged with as part of the London Urban Forest Partnership. We welcome that the Greater London Authority (GLA) has commissioned the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew) to carry out research on the impact of climate change on London's tree stock. As part of the Committee's work examining this issue, we held a meeting with experts in May 2025 and visited RBG Kew last month, to see for ourselves the work that Kew is doing to cultivate trees better suited to London's future climate.

Informing species selection through research

Trees in London are facing multiple challenges, including heat stress, soil compaction, and significant variation in rainfall levels – including both drought conditions and heavy rainfall. These issues are set to increase in the coming years as the climate changes. As Kevin Martin, Head of Tree Collections at RBG Kew told us, *"a lot of the species that we are currently planting in our urban environments are just not suited to be planted in urban environments. We have to think really carefully now on getting the species selection right of trees that we know have the plasticity to deal*

*with drought stress, like we are seeing now.*¹ He highlighted ongoing work to source seeds from regions which already have a climate similar to conditions that London can expect in the future, such as variants of species of oak that are able to cope with hotter and drier conditions.² Without careful selection, trees planted today may fail to reach maturity, resulting in a net loss of canopy cover.

Keith Sacre, Director of Barcham Trees, confirmed that Kew's research would give insights into *"which species might be useful in the urban environment"* as *"there are species now that are not currently available in the nursery trade but which have the potential to offer some of those characteristics we are looking for in terms of resilience in the tree population."*³ As it will take time – potentially ten years or more – for such trees to be grown at sufficient scale by nurseries to be commercially available, Keith Sacre told us that a strategic approach that establishes long-term relationships with shared outcomes is needed.⁴ We heard that a joint approach to stock ordering would be highly beneficial, leading tree nurseries to have confidence that new species variants should be grown now, as they will be purchased in ten years' time.⁵

Aftercare and community involvement

Several of our expert guests highlighted the vulnerability of trees in their early years and the challenges associated with long term survival. Kevin Martin highlighted to us the crucial importance of ensuring that planting conditions give young trees the best chance of survival. He shared the example of Malmö in Sweden, which has taken a city-wide approach and developed its own planting soil using a mix of perlite, biochar and also soft organic mulch, which holds moisture for longer. In addition, Malmö has increased the size of planting pits.⁶

Craig Ruddick, Committee Member, London Tree Officers Association, and Arboriculture Manager, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, told us that water stress can be a particular challenge for newly planted trees, and it is often difficult for local authorities to provide the amount of water that may be needed to ensure that trees thrive.⁷ Greater community involvement in tree care presents a significant opportunity to address this.

We heard that Borough-led schemes, such as community watering initiatives, have proven effective and are well-received by residents. As Kate Sheldon, Chief Executive Officer, Trees for Cities, told us, *"We have trees that need looking after, we have people who want to do stuff to help, we have expertise, and it is bringing those things together and making sure that the actions that people take are meaningful and useful and regular."*⁸

The Committee received evidence from the London Borough of Bromley about its approach, which includes a tracking system using QR codes on trees, which enables the Council to monitor which trees have been watered.⁹ This kind of innovation could be shared across London and create a culture of local responsibility for trees.

¹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.3

² London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.5

³ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.22

⁴ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.22

⁵ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.21

⁶ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.3

⁷ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.3

⁸ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.11

⁹ [Written evidence submission from London Borough of Bromley](#), p.5

Measures such as mulching, watering, and structural maintenance should be core components of any planting initiative, and community involvement in these efforts can be beneficial both to the trees and for fostering a feeling of connection to trees among residents. The GLA is well placed to facilitate the sharing of best practice across boroughs, and to provide funding through the new Green Roots programme.¹⁰

Management of existing stock

Keith Sacre told us that it is “*an illusion*” to think we are going to be able to meet the GLA’s ambitions to increase canopy cover by simply planting more trees.¹¹ Ensuring mature trees survive as long as possible will be critical, alongside a planned approach to ensuring new trees flourish.

This includes work to prevent trees from being unnecessarily felled due to the risk of insurance claims around subsidence. As we heard in the meeting from Kevin Martin, “...*at what point do we still allow the insurance companies to dictate taking that tree out? That tree providing the ecosystem service is going to be worth a hell of a lot more over the next 70 years than it will be to underpin a house.*”¹² The Committee agrees that this attitude needs to change, putting systems in place which give appropriate value and protections to existing trees.

We also heard that there is the potential to share data across London to inform future tree-planting decisions. This includes routinely recording the species and location of trees planted and monitoring their long-term health. While the GLA does have a database of London’s tree stock, more could be done to share data between London Boroughs about which trees are not surviving and why. At the Committee meeting held in May 2025, we heard that survival and establishment rates remain largely unknown. As Abby Crisostomo told the Committee, “*we do not have a long-term tracking mechanism*” and so, whilst some information is available through the organisations responsible for planting each tree, there is no single database kept.¹³

The following recommendations are intended to inform the implementation of further work in this area.

Recommendations:

1. Following the completion of research by Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the GLA should publish clear, evidence-based tree species selection guidance, based on current and projected climate conditions in London. This should include guidance around structured aftercare (including watering, mulching and pruning).
2. The GLA should work with the London Urban Forest Partnership to develop and publish an action plan with nurseries, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and trade representatives to identify priority climate-resilient species, and set agreed milestones to increase their commercial availability by 2035.

¹⁰ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.9

¹¹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.6

¹² London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.26

¹³ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Transcript of 15 May 2025 meeting](#), p.8

3. To give nurseries greater certainty around future demand, the GLA should play a role in convening local authorities to consider pre-ordering climate resilient species and planning multi-year planting strategies.
4. The GLA should provide innovation funding through the Green Roots Fund, to:
 - evaluate the potential benefits of new approaches to street tree aftercare, such as QR-code based community watering schemes and specialised planting soils for street trees and disseminate the results.
 - provide seed funding for nurseries to work in partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens Kew to make the most promising new tree species commercially available.
5. The GLA should require annual updates on the survival status of funded trees and reasons for tree failure for at least the first five years post-planting. With the London Urban Forest Partnership, the GLA should work with boroughs and other stakeholders to collate and analyse London-wide data on types of trees planted and survival rates.
6. The GLA, together with the London Urban Forest Partnership, should develop a working group to review the impact of tree-related insurance claims and develop recommendations to strengthen tree retention.

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by 29 August 2025. Please send your response by email to the Committee's Clerk, Saleha Fazal (Saleha.Fazal@london.gov.uk).

Yours,



Léonie Cooper AM
Chair of the Environment Committee