



**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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>*

### ***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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup>*

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.<sup>9</sup> This kind of innovation could be shared across London and create a culture of local responsibility for trees.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>9</sup> [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.<sup>10</sup>

### ***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.<sup>11</sup> 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.*”<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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.

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

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

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

<sup>13</sup> 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**