



WAKE UP WANDSWORTH!

Our Four Demands of Wandsworth Council

1 Reduce air pollution

The problem

New research shows that air pollution caused by the burning of fossil fuels such as coal and oil was responsible for 8.7 million deaths globally in 2018, a staggering one in five of all people who died that year.¹ The same report makes it clear that children, older people, those on low incomes and people of colour are disproportionately impacted in urban areas like Wandsworth. It is estimated that air pollution is responsible for around 36,000 premature deaths annually in the UK, and up to 9,400 in London² as well as having many other adverse effects on health. Poor air quality is a social justice issue, as people who live in deprived areas are on average exposed to higher levels of air pollution.

On 16 December an inner south London coroner made legal history by ruling that air pollution was a contributory cause of the death of nine-year-old Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah in February 2013.³ The coroner said she was exposed to nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter (PM) pollution in excess of World Health Organisation guidelines, the principal source of which were traffic emissions. A 2020 study conducted by Queen Mary University of London found black particles that closely resembled PM2.5 in the placental cells of all 15 healthy women in the study.⁴ Analysis strongly suggests that these particles originated from traffic-related sources and the metals found were associated with fossil fuel combustion and vehicle brake-wear. Wandsworth itself has a major problem with air pollution. Recent research revealed that so far this year, 10 monitoring sites at pollution hotspots in and around the capital are registering average levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) well above the 40 micrograms per cubic metre of air threshold enshrined in UK law. Of these, four are in Wandsworth

¹ https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/09/fossil-fuels-pollution-deaths-research?CMP=share_btn_tw

² <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/33227>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/16/girls-death-contributed-to-by-air-pollution-coroner-rules-in-landmark-case>

⁴ <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/media/news/2020/smd/air-pollution-particles-and-metals-found-in-the-placenta.html>

– two in Putney (Putney High Street – Montserrat Rd (53); Putney High Street – near river (52)), on Lavender Hill near Clapham Junction (46) and at Wandsworth Town Hall (42).⁵ Fine particulate matter (PM2.50), which presents the greatest health risk, is not even measured.

The solution

The solution is at one level simple and straightforward: reduced car use and increased reliance on cycling, walking and public transport. Wandsworth Council must support Wandsworth residents to make fewer car journeys. Section 20.4 of the Draft Local Plan sets out the Council’s ambitions in this respect:

‘The Council will be champions for the delivery of sustainable travel initiatives and projects to encourage walking, cycling, use of public transport and car sharing and to reduce carbon emissions from transport, improve air quality and create a transport network which supports a mobile, affordable low-carbon future and ensure that the transport network operates safely and efficiently to meet the needs of all users.’⁶

However, as demonstrated by the rapid abandonment of the newly introduced Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in Wandsworth last year, policies to achieve these ends are by no means simple to formulate and implement. The key issue is that buy-in from local residents is needed. Residents must agree that a reduction in car use is needed and that policies to achieve this are fair and necessary.

There are many local groups that would be keen to contribute to a discussion of how air pollution in Wandsworth can be reduced. This includes local cycling and amenity groups such as Wandsworth Cycle Campaign, Positively Putney, Wandsworth Living Streets, the Putney Society, and Putney Environment Commission; and climate groups such as Extinction Rebellion Wandsworth and Greenpeace. A number of these already participate in the Wandsworth Environmental Forum.

Our demands

- That air pollution should be within WHO safe limits at all air quality monitoring sites in Wandsworth by 5 May 2022. Oxford City Council’s scheme to create a Zero Emission Zone (ZEZ) pilot in Oxford city centre, starting in August 2021, could provide a useful model for tackling air pollution hotspots in Wandsworth.⁷
- That Wandsworth Council call a Citizens Assembly by 30 June 2021 to plan how to achieve this reduction in air pollution in ways that will be acceptable and fair for Wandsworth residents.

⁵ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/london-no2-pollution-toxic-lockdown-b900492.html>

⁶ https://wandsworth-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/planning/local_plan_full_review_2018/wandsworth_draft_local_plan_-_regulation_18_consultation?pointId=s160675436784743#section-s160675436784743

⁷ https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20299/air_quality_projects/1305/oxford_zero_emission_zone_zez

2 Protect green spaces

The problem

There is a wealth of evidence to demonstrate the importance of green spaces and trees, especially in urban areas, for the mental health of residents,⁸ for biodiversity, and to alleviate some of the detrimental effects of air pollution. Trees, especially large mature trees,⁹ can absorb pollutant particles, sequester and store carbon, reduce flood risk with their canopies, and lower temperatures in heatwaves by providing shade.¹⁰

Despite this, Wandsworth's green spaces and trees are in constant danger. To give just a few examples: at least 124 mature trees will be destroyed to make way for the new mega development of the current Winstanley and York Road estates; planning permission to build over a small green space in Putney has recently been applied for; redevelopment plans for Tooting Common Triangle threaten felling of mature trees and fencing off of common land; Wandsworth continues to use glyphosate for weed control, although it is recognized by the World Health Organisation as probably carcinogenic to humans and has been banned by many countries, US states and an increasing number of councils in the UK. The recent temporary opening of Fishponds playing fields to the public, after sustained pressure from local groups, was a welcome development, but sadly there appears to be no long-term plan to continue to give access to this much-needed local green space.

The solution

The solution to this problem can be broken down into two parts:

- **Protecting what we have already.** This would mean preventing the loss of any green space or trees proposed in planning applications (see above examples). Biodiversity should be a primary consideration for any future redevelopment initiatives. The Dasgupta Review,¹¹ an independent report on the economics of biodiversity published by the Treasury, found that it is 'less costly to conserve than restore', and, furthermore, that 'natural capital should be placed at the centre of all processes in the economy'.
- **Adding to what we have for the future.** This would mean actively seeking every opportunity to plant more trees and create more green spaces, and to

⁸ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0169204614002941>; <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep11610>; <https://theconversation.com/parks-and-green-spaces-are-important-for-our-mental-health-but-we-need-to-make-sure-that-everyone-can-benefit-142322>

⁹ <https://theconversation.com/why-keeping-one-mature-street-tree-is-far-better-for-humans-and-nature-than-planting-lots-of-new-ones-154114>

¹⁰ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/1702/benefits-of-trees-outside-woods.pdf>

¹¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957291/Dasgupta_Review_-_Full_Report.pdf

encourage biodiversity. This could include planting more street trees; creating islands for trees/plants where pavements are narrow; planting native hedges; creating reedbeds along all areas of water; 'wilding' areas of green space, eg road verges; identifying areas where green space is lacking and remedying immediately – these are particularly likely to be in more economically deprived areas of the borough; banning the use of glyphosate; and creating more SINCs – sites of importance for nature conservation.

Our demands

- That Wandsworth Council immediately suspend and revise all plans that involve tree felling or loss of green space, for example by its replacement with hard surfaces or plastic grass, in line with WESS, and ensure all future planning policies have a presumption that no trees will be felled or green spaces lost. Where felling a mature tree is absolutely unavoidable, eg because it is dangerous, the tree must be replaced with trees of equivalent value using the CAVAT system.¹²
- That the Council hold ward meetings to elicit residents' ideas on where green spaces can be created in their local areas, along with new tree planting. The meetings to be held by the end of 2021 and the findings to feed into the new Biodiversity Action Plan.

3 Introduce food waste collections

The problem

At present Wandsworth Council does not have separate food waste collections, so food gets burned with general waste in the Belvedere incinerator.

In 2021 Wandsworth will burn 30,000 tonnes of food waste, a staggering 43% of our total waste, creating 14,000 tonnes of CO₂. For perspective this is equivalent to the Council operating a fleet of 6,750 Range Rovers driving the UK national average mileage.

Any extra costs of separate food waste collections will be at least partly offset by over £4.7 million in gate fees for incineration of food waste in 2021. Further, at the UK floor carbon price of £18/tonne it is a potential minimum liability of £250,000 per year.

Incineration of food waste makes it impossible to meet the Council's goal of becoming zero carbon by 2050, which requires zero-emissions electricity, heating and transport.

¹² <https://www.ltoa.org.uk/documents-1/capital-asset-value-for-amenity-trees-cavat>

At present, despite its aim to become London's greenest borough, Wandsworth ranks 341 out of 345 among local councils for recycling.¹³

The solution

Replace incineration by composting, which is recognised as a carbon NEGATIVE solution, returning carbon to the soil.¹⁴

Section 15.54 of the Draft Local Plan recognises that Wandsworth, along with the rest of London, is aiming to become a circular economy. Replacing incineration with composting would be a significant step towards this.

Our demands

- That Wandsworth Council should introduce several food waste collection pilots by the end of June 2021. The pilots should use best practices developed by other London boroughs, ie Richmond, for each type of residential dwelling (kerbside and tower block).
- That the Council should roll out the scheme across the borough by 5 May 2022, taking into account any lessons learned from the pilots. Given the damaging carbon emission and air pollution impacts of incineration, we do not feel it is acceptable to wait to make this change until the current waste management contract comes up for renewal in 2024.
- That the Council ensures that all Council-run buildings and facilities have separated food waste recycling on site by the end of September 2021.

4 Divest pension funds from fossil fuels

The problem

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that emissions from fossil fuels are the dominant cause of global warming.¹⁵ In 2018 a staggering 89% of global CO₂ emissions came from fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industry. Investment in carbon-intensive industries contributes significantly to global warming and is contrary to Wandsworth Council's public commitment to 'reducing greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and reduce reliance on fossil fuels'.¹⁶

In March 2020, the London Borough of Wandsworth's pension fund had just under £103 million invested in fossil fuels, representing 4.3% of the overall portfolio. While this represents a

¹³ <https://www.letsrecycle.com/councils/league-tables/2018-19-overall-performance>

¹⁴ <https://drawdown.org/solutions/composting>

¹⁵ <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts>

¹⁶ Wandsworth Environmental Ambition Statement 2019: <https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/sustainability/our-sustainability-goals-for-wandsworth>

reduction from 2017, this is a far higher proportion of exposure than the average Local Government Pension Scheme fund (LGPS). Out of 98 LGPSs surveyed nationally, Wandsworth has the 8th highest proportion of fossil fuel investment.¹⁷

The ethical argument for divestment is clear: local governments have a moral duty as well as a legal obligation to act for the public good to protect the global and local environment, and continuing to invest in fossil fuel industries is a blatant disregard of these duties. However, the financial obligation is equally compelling. Over the last four years the value of oil and gas company shares owned by UK public pensions dropped by over £2 billion. Wandsworth's exposure was significant and the overall value of the pension fund fell by around £10 million over the time period due to their oil investments.¹⁸

Finally, Wandsworth has recently confirmed that the pension fund will look for investment opportunities for the pension fund which will outperform in a global warming scenario of 2 degrees – a strategy which is clearly at odds with its environmental commitment and the 1.5 degree goal of the Paris Climate Agreement.¹⁹

The solution

It is clear that pension funds exposed to the fossil fuel system in the coming decade will face a roller-coaster ride of disruption, write-downs, financial instability and share price de-ratings as markets adjust. At the same time, global warming due to carbon-intensive activity and the use of fossil fuels will continue to rise. While Wandsworth Council has recently declared the intention to 'progressively decarbonise its investments' in the pension fund,²⁰ this falls short in terms of both the moral and the financial obligations that the Council owes to the people of Wandsworth.

If Wandsworth Council is to honour its commitment to 'reducing greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and reduce reliance on fossil fuels', it should introduce a clear programme for rapid divestment of its pension fund from all fossil fuels and a simultaneous investment in green infrastructure projects and utilities developments.

Our demands

- That Wandsworth Council should move rapidly to completely divest its pension fund from fossil fuels, both direct and indirect investments, with complete divestment by the end of September 2021.

¹⁷ *Divesting to protect our pensions and the planet: An analysis of local government investments in coal, oil and gas* (Platform, February 2021) <https://www.divest.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Divesting-to-protect-our-pensions-and-the-planet-Feb-2021-V2.pdf>

¹⁸ Transition Economics, *Value Lost to UK Local Authority Pensions due to Oil Investments*, November 2020. http://transitioneconomics.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/TransitionEconomics_Local-Gov-Pension-losses-from-oil-investments.pdf

¹⁹ Joint Pensions Committee Minutes, Item 4, Climate Policy Presentation Paper <https://democracy.wandsworth.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=634&MIId=6616&Ver=4>

²⁰ Joint Pensions Committee Minutes, Item 4, as note 21.

- That the Council's investment strategy should be immediately revised to exclude pension fund investment opportunities associated with more than 1.5 degrees of global warming and to include a clear commitment to preventing further global warming.
- That the Council's investment strategy should be revised by the end of September 2021 to include a commitment to investing at least 5% of its pension portfolio in green infrastructure projects and utilities developments which will drive ecological repair. Thereafter the Council should commit to increase the proportion of these positive impact investments by 5% a year.

Review and accountability

Over the next year we will continuously highlight these four key areas of concern and review the Council's progress against our demands. We ask that they be met in full by 5 May 2022, the date of the next council election. We have no doubt that all the demands outlined in this document could be achieved, with sufficient will on the part of Wandsworth Council, by the dates specified.

Ahead of the next election of Wandsworth Councillors in May 2022, XR Wandsworth will assess whether the Council has met our demands. We look forward to sharing the Council's successes – and will not hesitate to share their failures – with the electorate, using local press, social media and any other means necessary to ensure we reach every household in the borough.