WAKE UP WANDSWORTH 2025!

Our Demands of Wandsworth Council

AIR POLLUTION

The Problem

Air pollution is a public health emergency.[1] The pollutants that are causing around 4,000 premature deaths[2] every year in London alone also contribute to the worsening climate emergency. Emissions from road traffic are a major source of air pollution in London.

The most toxic components of air pollution are NO2 and PM (particulate matter) especially, PM2.5. The most toxic particles are from diesel engines,[3] followed by petrol engines, wood-fire smoke, coal smoke, and road and construction dust. This means people living near busy roads are likely to breathe the most toxic air.

The people most vulnerable to the toxic short- and long-term effects of air pollution are children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with pre-existing health conditions, as well as people more exposed to air pollution through their jobs and housing environment. Although air pollution in London has improved over the past years, areas of higher deprivation and with higher rates of some ethnic minorities are the most polluted areas, leading to exposure inequalities.[4] This is often compounded by those areas having less access to green spaces.

Tackling air pollution has enormous co-benefits for public health, social equality and NHS costs as well as greenhouse gas emissions. Many measures that improve air quality will also indirectly improve public health, eg more green infrastructure reduces the urban heat island effect leading to reduced heat stress in cities, as well as having a positive impact on mental health.

We recognise Wandsworth Council's positive actions in relation to air pollution,[5] especially:

- The Citizens' Assembly on air pollution
- The introduction and support of air quality ambassadors
- The work on school streets
- The continued objection to a third runway at Heathrow

but much remains to be done.[6]

The Solution

According to a 2020 Public Health England Review,[7] the most effective interventions are characterised by the following:

> '*Potential to improve air quality and public health outcomes is associated with the co-implementation of a mix of various measures that provide/improve green and active travel infrastructure, prioritise road safety, provide public transport and discourage travel in private cars, together with policies focussing on reducing the emissions of vehicles.*'

In addition:

> '*The interventions with the highest potential to be effective both at national but mainly at local level are related to traffic.* ***Driving restrictions*** *produced the largest and most consistent reductions in air pollution levels.'*

We have therefore highlighted a number of areas where positive and effective actions could be taken.

Smart parking management

Reviews of smart parking management,[8] including increasing parking fees and introducing differentiated parking fees (for resident and non-resident parking), have been shown to reduce parking demand and on-street parking space, which effectively reduces levels of car ownership, car use and traffic flows. Emissions-based parking charges have been effective in reducing the number of high emissions vehicles in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham[9] and other London boroughs. A consultation by H&F Council showed that 49% of respondents agree that parking charges should be used to reduce the number of higher polluting vehicles in the borough. Higher parking charges for heavier cars would reflect the excessive damage SUVs cause road surfaces and the consequent higher levels of particulate matter released as air pollution.

Other positive effects include increased parking revenue, which can be used to encourage sustainable mobility. Reduced number of parking spaces can have a positive impact on public spaces, commercial areas and housing projects by freeing up space for other uses, such as bicycle parking, green infrastructure and community spaces.

Promoting active travel

Promoting active travel and providing the safe infrastructure for it has multiple co-benefits for air quality and public health. If combined with measures that increase green infrastructure, like green corridors, the co-benefits will be even greater.

Introducing 'school streets'

Children are particularly vulnerable to pollution[10] from vehicle emissions. Many children are unnecessarily driven to school by their parents, increasing traffic and air pollution around

drop-off and pick-up times. School streets reduce[11] air pollution around schools, as well as increasing road safety. Active travel to school has significant health co-benefits.

We acknowledge that the council has done some good work in this area and successfully implemented school streets around many primary schools, but this should be extended to all schools in the borough where feasible. Aligned with the campaign by Mums For Lungs,[12] we suggest that where schools cannot have motor traffic restricted on their road, alternatives should be considered. These include green screens to reduce the level of pollution within the school grounds, moving school entrances and playgrounds, and implementing controlled parking zones from 8.30am to 6pm in a radius of about 300m around schools to discourage parents from driving to school. This should be complemented with a public information campaign about the dangers of air pollution aimed at parents, teachers, nursery workers, and health professionals who see children and their parents.

Our Demands

1. **Addressing and assessing for social and health inequality must be the overarching principle for all climate action:** to address 'exposure inequality', all measures and actions the council takes to address the climate emergency must be assessed for their impact on poorer, disadvantaged and more vulnerable communities (including ethnic minorities); and those areas should be prioritised for urgent climate action that will improve air quality and public health. Thus this should also be applied to all other demands.
2. **Introduce emissions- and weight-based fees for parking permits and parking charges**, as well as surcharges on diesel vehicles and multi-permit households. (Emissions-based measure should take into account PM and NOx.)
3. **Repurpose 10% of public road parking space for other complementary air pollution measures** such as bicycle parking, green infrastructure and social spaces.
4. **Improve cycling infrastructure –** By 2026: double the local network of protected/ segregated cycle lanes and quiet cycle routes; install 25% more cycle parking at every tube/ train station including secure cycle parking; designate 10% more road space for pedestrian and cycle use rather than cars.
5. **Commit to introducing 'school streets' to every school in the borough where feasible**, and implement alternative options where it is not.

GREENING WANDSWORTH

The Problem

The UK is widely considered to be one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and cities are on the frontline of biodiversity and habitat loss. 'Biodiversity' is a term used to describe the abundance and variety of life on earth. It refers to all living things: animals and birds, trees and flowers, insects and fungi.

In cities like London, specific varieties of flora can provide essential food sources and shelter for a wide variety of species, including pollinators, insects, birds, bats and small mammals. By making improvements to the quantity and quality of trees, shrubs and wildflowers, a city can evolve to become a successful network of connected green spaces. Measures could include creating wildflower meadows, restoring wetlands, increasing dead wood for fungi and invertebrates, increasing substrates suitable for invertebrates like solitary bees, and creating artificial habitats like bird and bat boxes. Specific habitat creation is an essential factor in supporting biodiversity and must be given equal importance to new planting.

Improving biodiversity and climate resilience in large cities brings many additional benefits: improving citizens' mental and physical wellbeing, reducing noise, regulating water infiltration, facilitating storm water drainage and minimising the risk of local flooding, and storing carbon. Trees lower the temperature during heatwaves and counter the urban heat island effect through evapo-transpiration and by providing shade. Certain trees can also absorb harmful pollutants. Sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) reduce the risks of flooding and drought as well as bringing wider benefits.

Green spaces are not joined up

Wandsworth Council has made considerable advances in the promotion of its green spaces, especially with tree planting and improving local parks. In 2023-24, 800 trees were planted across the borough and six Wandsworth parks received Green Flag awards.[13]

Connecting green spaces remains a key area that has not yet been fully addressed by the Council. Habitat connectivity is one of the most important factors in helping nature to survive. With careful planning, cities can play a major role in making links from rural areas through peri-urban, suburban and inner-city areas.

The importance of creating 'step-stones' and 'connections' between green spaces was highlighted by Professor Sir John Lawton in his ground-breaking report, *Making Space for Nature* (2010). The report stresses the need to have connections between 'high quality wildlife sites containing biological diversity … enabling species, or their genes, to move'.[14]

Government at all levels is committed to the recovery of nature, including connecting habitats. The Environment Act 2021 introduces a 'biodiversity duty' and tasks 48 regions, including London, to prepare a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). 'Our aim is for London's ecological network to be bigger, better, and more joined up,' says London's LNRS.[15]

However, Wandsworth's Climate Action Plan (CAP),[16] while affirming the intention to 'Deliver the Wandsworth Biodiversity Strategy',[17] makes no mention of 'joining up'.

Gardens are being paved over

Front gardens in particular are being increasingly paved to provide hard standing for vehicles and to reduce the need for maintenance. Replacing front gardens with hard surfaces such as brick, concrete and tarmac has a number of negative environmental and social impacts in addition to those already noted above:

- Increasing surface water run-off, as water cannot soak into the ground.
- Rapid fluctuations in flow in rivers, leading to scouring of river banks, destruction of habitats and increased pollution in rivers.
- Water entering our drainage systems more rapidly than they can cope with. This can lead to local flooding, affecting properties and infrastructure, and sewage overflows into rivers.
- Grey, depressing neighbourhoods and less community interaction

This activity, individually small in scale, has a large cumulative effect: according to a 2007 report,[18] 3,124 hectares of London front gardens were paved. In 2015 the Royal Horticultural Society reported that half of London gardens were paved, representing a three-fold increase in the preceding 10 years.

In 2007, there were no statutory restrictions on impermeable surfaces on front gardens. The 2007 report recommended that 'local planning authorities use supplementary planning guidance to minimise the use of hard-standing, and require the use of permeable surfaces for paving and car parking'. Following this, the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2008 introduced the requirement that any hard surfacing over 5 sq m in a front garden must be made of a porous material unless run-off is directed to a permeable or porous area within the garden. These regulations have been enshrined in law for 16 years. But it seems that Wandsworth, like other London boroughs, routinely fails to enforce them.

The Solution

Create biodiversity corridors to join up green spaces

What is needed is the creation of connections, also known as 'biodiversity corridors', between existing habitats. According to the Wandsworth Biodiversity Strategy,[19] 'Contributory habitats can be managed or created through housing estates, across existing green spaces, using road verges, along river and railway corridors, jumping through private domestic gardens and leaping across the roofs of tall buildings.' A first step towards making this a reality would be to map Wandsworth's existing habitats and to focus on specific biodiversity corridors to link them together.

Jumping through private gardens is clearly more challenging for the Council than making changes to areas under their direct management or working with other public bodies like Transport for London or train operators. But private domestic gardens cover 716 hectares in the borough, almost exactly 20% of the total area (3,522 hectares), so they are extremely significant.

Enforce regulations relating to paving of front gardens

Officers of Wandsworth Council should fulfil their obligations to enforce the regulations, and members of the Council should insist that they do. In almost all cases front gardens are paved to facilitate car parking, and planning permission is required for a dropped kerb. Thus

the Council can and should refuse permission for a dropped kerb unless and until the associated hard standing complies with the regulations.

Better public information
We urgently need to improve the quality and promotion of information about the distribution of local priority species; how individuals can benefit wildlife by good gardening practices; and the regulations relating to impermeable surfaces in front gardens. The Council should actively encourage planting in front gardens. This could include education and improved information sharing – eg leaflets through doors, posters in libraries and bus stops – as well as wildlife gardening advice sessions.

Our Demands

1. **Create a map of all Wandsworth green spaces and demonstrate how they could be linked.**
2. **Plan how to implement biodiversity corridors across public land and through our streets.**
3. **Demonstrate how to create specific habitats for threatened species.**
4. **Enforce regulations relating to the paving over of front gardens –** The Council should refuse permission for a dropped kerb unless and until the associated hard standing complies with the regulations.
5. **Educate/encourage the public to foster biodiversity in private gardens** through leafleting houses, posters in libraries and bus stops, etc.

PLANNING FOR CLIMATE EMERGENCY EVENTS

The Problem

Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, it is a governmental responsibility to guide and support responses to catastrophic events – both centrally and at local government level. Yet across London we remain practically and significantly unready for the cascading effect of climate change on our residents. The Fire Brigades Union are very concerned.[20] 2024 was the hottest year on record[21] and the wettest ever in the UK.[22] The Climate Change Committee's 2024 Progress Report stated that 'adaptation must become a fundamental aspect'.[23] Last year, catastrophic local events decimated some wealthy areas in Europe and America. Local government response was criticised during the Valencian floods[24] and the Californian wildfires.[25] These events act as a warning that anything can happen anywhere in these turbulent times.

Wandsworth Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and the Council recognises that climate-related extreme weather events such as flooding, heatwaves and storms are increasing in frequency and severity, posing an immediate threat to residents, infrastructure, and local biodiversity. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that poor food

security is an increasing concern as climate-related disruptions threaten supply chains, availability and affordability of essential goods.

Wandsworth Council has recently taken steps to develop an Adaptation and Resilience Strategy,[26] linked to the wider GLA London Climate Resilience Review.[27] However, these documents, which include broad principles but which have yet to translate into meaningful action, lack urgency and do not sufficiently address the issue of public awareness and inclusion. Wandsworth's Climate Action Plan for 2025[28] now includes a section on Climate Adaptation and Resilience but as yet has no performance indicators for this area, and the very real potential for civil disorder in the wake of extreme weather events is insufficiently addressed.

So, while a framework and strategy have been proposed, there is a concerning gap between planning and action. The Council must recognise that climate risks are not a distant problem but an immediate crisis requiring rapid response and preparation. Public engagement on these issues remains low, leaving residents unprepared for extreme weather events.

The Solution

We urgently need locally owned, well-communicated and properly resourced disaster response plans. Every neighbourhood, at ward level, needs a hub, underpinned by a local network that can swiftly respond to urgent needs in the event of a disastrous climate event.[29]

This includes ensuring that emergency response plans are local, well-communicated, and engage the public in terms of both development and embedding.

The Council should take proactive steps to increase awareness at local (ward) level through public assemblies, its publicity organs such as *Brightside*, education campaigns, workshops, and accessible print and online resources.

A key priority must be the development and distribution of **local and concrete emergency resilience plans** to all households. These plans should include clear instructions on what to do in an emergency, designated refuge locations, and the location of resources available for residents. A model example is Bridport's local plan,[30] which provides practical details such as generator locations and community response mechanisms. Wandsworth should adopt a similar approach to ensure every resident knows how to respond effectively in a crisis. Without urgent and decisive action, Wandsworth risks being unprepared for the climate crises that are already upon us. The Council must act now to protect its residents and infrastructure from the growing dangers posed by climate change.

Our Demands

1. **Roll out an immediate public awareness campaign –** Launch a borough-wide initiative to educate residents about climate risks and proposed emergency preparedness, using multiple communication channels.
2. **Hold a series of public assemblies at ward level to outline both general and local risks and gather feedback on local needs and resources.**
3. **Develop local (ward-based) emergency resilience plans** with specific guidelines for residents, businesses and public services.
4. **Disseminate the resulting Local Emergency Resilience Plans to all households** – Ensure every household receives a practical, location-specific plan outlining emergency procedures and resource access, similar to Bridport's model.
5. **Commit to regular public engagement** – Hold quarterly public forums on a ward basis to update planning and discuss climate emergency planning, allowing residents to contribute and stay engaged.
6. **Commit to transparent progress reporting** – Commit to annual public reports detailing actions taken, challenges faced, and future targets in climate emergency planning.

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[2] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/21/years-breathing-traffic-pollution-increases-death-rates-study-pollutionwatch
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[18] Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) report, *The Urban Environment*, 2007
[19] https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/media/8574/biodiversity_strategy.pdf
[20] https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2024/06/25/starmer-will-have-face-emergency-underfunded-fire-service-firefighters-warn
[21] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd7575x8yq5o

[22] https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/progress-in-reducing-emissions-2024-report-to-parliament/#post-48594-_Toc171525130 – see Executive Summary
[23] Ibid
[24] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/15/valencias-president-carlos-mazon-admits-mistakes-in-flood-response-but-will-not-resign
[25] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czj3yk90kpyo
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