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VOTE FOR 'A MORE NATURAL CAPITAL' ON 5 MAY! URGES POWERFUL COALITION OF ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

With the local elections just one month away, a coalition of 17 environmental groups [1] are calling on voters to press all candidates to commit, if elected, to taking action to improve and protect London's natural environment for people and wildlife.

In *A More Natural Capital - an agenda for the London local elections* launched today (Wednesday 6 April) the groups have come together to present a shared vision for London that places the environment at the heart of policy and decision-making. The agenda identifies 28 actions the coalition want to see Borough Councils take under four themes: reducing pollution and waste, securing nature's recovery, mitigating and increasing resilience to climate change; and improving health and wellbeing for all [2].

As we emerge from the pandemic it is clearer than ever before that the beauty and quality of London's green and blue spaces are critical to the future health and success of the capital, and the country as a whole. The agenda enjoys widespread public support with:

- More than three quarters of Londoners' wanting action on air pollution to be a priority [3]
- Eight out of ten Londoners concerned about climate change [4]
- Almost two thirds of Londoners wanting higher priority to be given to protecting and enhancing green space following the pandemic. [5]

Neil Sinden, convenor of the coalition and Director of CPRE London, says:

'From the threat posed to the city by climate change, to the depletion of our natural world, and the growing inequalities in health and wellbeing revealed by the pandemic, Londoners need local leaders who are up to the challenge of delivering a better future for people and nature. We therefore urge voters to press all local candidates to pledge their support to a More Natural Capital and to commit to taking action to deliver it.'

Bridget Fox, Regional External Affairs Officer at the Woodland Trust, says:

'We want all Londoners to enjoy the benefits of tree-lined streets and to have easy access to woodland. We are asking London's councils to protect the trees and woods we have, plant more, and extend the benefits for people, climate and nature across the capital.'

Mathew Frith, Director of Policy & Research at London Wildlife Trust says:

'The Trust recognises the good steps many borough councils are taking to protect, conserve and enhance the Capital's ecological assets, but the nature and climate crises affects us all. The majority of London's 1,600 important sites for wildlife are owned and managed by borough councils, and all of them are afforded some levels of protection from inappropriate development through the councils' respective Local Plans. However damage to these continues. Given the parlous state of nature across the UK, and the public support for its recovery and to be able to experience close to home, we urge voters to push for all candidates to commit to raising the bar for nature's recovery, and to give greater weight to nature and its access for people in councils' management and stewardship of their green and blue spaces.'

David Harrison, Vice Chair of London Living Streets, says:

'Walking is the cheapest, healthiest and most environmentally-friendly mode of transport. We urge prospective Councillors to adopt measures which will get more people walking and walking further. That is why we are delighted to support the More Natural Capital campaign's call for more Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, support for developing 'Footways London' walking routes, and the development of new Greenways.'

Des Garrahan, Chair of Inner London Ramblers says:

'Green, nature-filled walking routes and good connections to green spaces encourage people to enjoy the simple pleasures of walking more. We are healthier and happier when we walk more, and communities where people walk are better connected communities. We hope borough councils will commit to expanding and improving our network of greenways. We look forward to working together with them to make a real difference to the health and wellbeing of Londoners, contribute to lowering pollution levels and to help London to lead the way as a greener, more walkable, nature-rich city.'

Debbie Leach, Chief Executive of Thames21, says:

'We are pleased to add the voice of Thames21 to call for ambitious action to promote blue spaces. It is critical that council leaders put blue and green spaces at the top of their agendas. Rivers are crucial in our response to the climate emergency and are vital tools if we are to tackle more extreme, accelerated and intense periods of drought and flood and manage their impact on people and

wildlife. The next few years will be vital in establishing the investment, infrastructure and innovations needed to make improvements to the River Thames and its tributaries. It is important that we all work together to protect the health of our rivers and Londoners will expect clear action and leadership on this from its politicians.'

Peter Lewis, Chief Executive of Epping Forest Heritage Trust says:

'A More Natural Capital is better for Londoners, better for London's plants and wildlife, and better for the planet. Like many of our green spaces Epping Forest is much loved but is facing the largest challenges it has faced in a generation. Councillors can make a huge difference to the lives of Londoners, as well as to our precious flora and fauna, by putting their commitment to a More Natural Capital at the heart of their decision-making, and creating a greener, healthier city for Londoners now, and for generations to come.'

Dave Morris, from the London Friends of Green Spaces Network, says:

'People in environmental movements across London and in each borough are calling for a range of real changes that Londoners desperately need and are entitled to. For example we welcome the More Natural Capital coalition's call for proper funding and improvements for the public green spaces throughout London. We must ensure that our society's resources are mobilised and channelled to where they are really needed.'

Tim Webb of the London Gardens Trust says:

'London needs its green and public spaces now more than ever. They are not only the places we all enjoy with friends. They are also fully functioning, naturally powered, climate protection machines; saving us from extreme heat, pollution and awful flooding. On top of all that, they support a vast number of birds, pollinators and other wildlife. Nothing else in the world gives so much for such little investment.'

Tom Fewins, Head of Policy & Advocacy at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust says:

'Our local green and blue spaces provide us with crucial outdoor spaces to enjoy and the nature that lives there underpins our prosperity and wellbeing. With care and investment, they can build the resilience of our communities to the challenges we face, from increasingly extreme weather events to plummeting wellbeing. Borough Councils need to build on existing progress and go further and faster in responding to the concerns of their residents. We urge all candidates to adopt these recommendations so that together we can make London a greener, healthier and more liveable city.'

Paul de Zylva, Chair of London National Park City, says:

'The pandemic underlines the importance of improving London's environment for everyone and making London's world leading National Park City status mean something real.'

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The *More Natural Capital* coalition includes the following groups: CPRE London, Epping Forest Heritage Trust, Footways London, London Friends of Green Spaces Network, London Gardens Trust, London Living Streets, London National Park City, London Wildlife Trust, Open Spaces Society, Parks for London, The Conservation Volunteers, The Orchard Project, Ramblers, Sustain - London Food Link, Thames 21, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, and Woodland Trust.
2. The 28 actions we want Borough Councils to take are:
Reduce pollution and waste - support the creation of new low traffic neighbourhoods; reassess parking policies; demonstrate better use of 'greyspace'; support a zero waste borough scorecard approach; develop an ambitious plan to reduce food waste; work to reduce water pollution; develop best practice guidance for lighting design.
Secure nature's recovery - develop an ecologically coherent nature recovery network; support nature friendly community farms and orchards; endorse the Parks Charter and Charter for Open Spaces; create blue space; support the creation of new district parks and street parks; refuse development that would damage ancient woodlands, meadows, hedgerows or veteran trees; refuse development that would result in loss of Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land.
Mitigate and increase resilience to climate change - support moves towards a zero carbon transport sector; lobby Government to ensure all new homes are built to zero carbon standards; improve the quality of landscape around council housing stock; form a local climate emergency alliance; promote de-paving in new and existing development; increase tree canopy cover sensitively and sustainably; help deliver the Mayor's Action Plan to install 1GW of solar power.
Improve health and wellbeing for all - support the creation of at least 10 tranquil areas; support the improvement and expansion of the Walk London network; prepare local food strategies; help to extend the Footways London network; reduce areas of deficiency in access to nature; fund community green space projects; promote the responsible enjoyment of London's 4,000 parks and green spaces.
3. <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/environment/air-quality-london>
4. <https://beta.londoncouncils.gov.uk/news/2021/majority-londoners-have-increased-level-concern-about-climate-change-new-poll-shows>
5. <https://www.cprelondon.org.uk/news/lockdown-lesson-for-government>

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