

A Manifesto for Public Space

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# London's Great Outdoors

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MAYOR OF LONDON



# My ambition for London's public space

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Throughout history, cities, towns and villages have been places where people have come together to live, socialise and exchange goods and ideas. In so doing, they have contributed to tremendous human progress. The very word 'civilisation' is connected to the Latin word for a city and we would not be the sort of people we are today if we had not learnt to live together in towns and cities, those amazing engines of creativity and prosperity.

Public spaces are part of what defines a city. They are the places where people come together to meet, talk, eat and drink, trade, debate or simply pass through. They shape the way communities and neighbourhoods mesh together. They inform the way everyone sees the city, and they contribute to the lives of its residents and the experiences of its visitors. Well designed and decently maintained public spaces can bring communities and people together and encourage physical and cultural activity, recreation and play. They can restore a sense of place, identity and pride in an area, and play a big part in attracting businesses and jobs.

Shabby and hard to use public spaces can form barriers between people and places, create the impression that an area is

struggling and unloved, and usher too many people into their cars to hurry through and away. While huge resources are focused, rightly so, on improving our housing and transport infrastructure, in recent years too little has been happening to make our network of outdoor spaces fit for the future.

And there is another pressing imperative. Climate change is now one of the biggest challenges that we face. As one of the world's leading cities we have a responsibility to act to reduce our emissions and set an example through innovation and best practice. We will also need to adapt London to cope with a radically changing climate if urban life is not to become unpleasant by the middle of the century.

Fortunately there is a coincidence of objectives here. A welcoming and culturally vibrant city, with great parks, waterways and trees is more likely to be a sustainable city. And a city with a wonderful well-used network of public space, which can offer a great quality of life, is one in which people will want to live and invest. By investing in high quality public space now, we can begin to adapt London to continue to be a great, a successful, and an eminently 'liveable' city for the 21st century.

# My objectives



My ambition is to work with the boroughs to revitalise public space to make a big difference to London’s quality of life. A great outdoors encourages walking and cycling, breathes life into densely populated areas, and provides inspiring places where people want to stay. Through bold improvements we can help create:

- A beautiful city where the spaces between the buildings can inspire, excite and delight visitors and Londoners alike.
- A more humane and healthier city where pedestrians and cyclists feel as if the space belongs to them as much as to cars.
- A prosperous city that can compete nationally and internationally attracting and fostering businesses that bring jobs and growth.
- A connected city that brings together diverse communities and neighbourhoods with unique character.
- A safer city where people are free from crime and fear of crime.
- A London with spaces that are fit for a world city, suited to changing lifestyles and responsive to the challenges of climate change.

# Initiatives, partnerships and prizes



The principles and initiatives I intend to pursue to achieve significant improvements in London’s public spaces are presented in detail in this and the accompanying

documents *Better Streets* and *Better Green and Water Spaces*. In each one I am setting out the practical steps that I can take, during my term in office, to improve streets and squares, green spaces, rivers and canals, and, at the same time, promote and encourage greater access and use by Londoners.

I cannot do this alone. The role of the boroughs will be crucial. I would hope that these documents will bring together all agencies under the common aim to make London a better place. The boroughs will be the critical agencies for translating many of the ideas I am promoting into action on the ground. They will be assisted, amongst others, by Design for London, the London Development Agency, Transport for London and the Homes and Communities Agency.

# Better Streets



The quality of London’s streets and squares plays a big part in our experience. Clearly they need to allow people to move around the city efficiently, but they must also be places that are simply good to be in. I will use my powers and resources to refine and improve London’s network of streets, squares, passageways, arcades and pocket parks to help achieve this.

The GLA group, working with the boroughs and local communities, can help restore a sense of civic pride in the look of our city by taking a balanced approach to the needs of cars, cyclists, users of public transport and pedestrians. *Better Streets* will help to do this by establishing some important principles in our approach to the design of public space. These principles are not to be applied slavishly but with imagination and

### **Somerset House**

Public spaces are part of  
what defines the city



flexibility to respond to the multitude of types of streets and squares in London and their rich history and character.

In *Better Streets* I have included an Implementation Plan for the GLA group working with the boroughs and other key partners to achieve bold improvements to London’s streets and squares. Whilst finances will clearly be limited in the current economic climate, these schemes represent an investment in excess of £180 million in our streets.

My Street Trees programme has already led to over 1,400 trees being planted in ten boroughs in the first year of the scheme. Transport for London will continue to develop its Streetscape Guidance as a benchmark for good practice for its own streets and as a tool to assist the boroughs. The Light London initiative has also set core principles for sensitively and creatively lighting London’s public space.

**Better Green and Water Spaces**



London already contains some amazing green spaces, from the parks and historic squares of central London, to the sweeping set piece of Greenwich Maritime, and the heathlands and wild marshlands at the edge of London and its surrounding countryside.

The River Thames, other rivers, canals and reservoirs are among the city’s greatest assets. The Thames forms a majestic public

space that flows through the heart of the city. For many years it was dominated by industrial and trading uses, which led to many buildings turning their backs on the river. In recent decades, de-industrialisation has given us the opportunity to reclaim access to the Thames and to tracts of lost riverside.

Great progress has been made in opening up the river, particularly on the South Bank, which is now one of the greatest riverside walks in the world. New developments have created a mix of uses and public spaces on the riverside and drawn more people to the river. However I believe much more can be done. Working with the boroughs and other partners I want to create better links to waterside places and new public spaces along its banks. I also want to open up the Thames to new and improved river transport both for goods and for people, and to nurture fuller use of the water for sport and play.

I am determined to protect, enhance, link and add to these assets, so that new and existing communities can enjoy a unique network of high quality and imaginatively designed green spaces. For this reason, I am focussing more than £40 million over the next three years on great green and water space projects. The Implementation Plan in *Better Green and Water Spaces* provides details on this investment.

The new Olympic Park will be the most important new green space in London for over a century. It will be linked to the Thames through the proposed Lower Lea Valley Park and to the wider area by the East London Green Grid. I am working with the east London boroughs to deliver these projects. I will also encourage the improvement of our existing open spaces through a range of new initiatives with the boroughs including the Priority Parks programme.

### London Fields

Well designed parks can  
allow many different activities  
for Londoners to enjoy



## The Mall

London's streets are a useful platform for events and celebration





## Promoting our public spaces



A successful public space is a well-used space. No matter how beautiful the design, or how costly the materials, if people do not use the space it is not fully contributing to city life. But public spaces can and should be used in all sorts of different ways, by the widest possible range of people, by families and children, for picnic and play, or for organised activities like markets, performances, festivals, fetes and marathons. London’s diversity is one of its greatest assets, and its public spaces should be places which embody and celebrate this.

Festivals and special events can boost use and enjoyment of public space. Temporary closure of streets for one-off events like the fondly remembered Sultan’s Elephant, or regular events like Car Free Day, New Year’s Eve and the Lord Mayor’s show, are becoming more common and popular. With good management these can be accommodated alongside the other quieter and more passive enjoyment of our public spaces, whilst still maintaining efficient movement around the city. Thinking about places in a more holistic and creative way, engaging with different viewpoints, can also improve the experience of public space.

By promoting fuller use of London’s great outdoors people can enjoy life in the city and keep healthy. If we can improve the quality of London’s public spaces people will be able to get the most out of London’s open places. I want to make sure that all Londoners old and young know what London’s outdoors has to offer. I will promote schemes and support schemes from the boroughs that show people what

is on and where it’s on, that encourage use and new uses and bring spaces to life with activity, energising our city.

Some additions to London’s public space infrastructure are already under way. I will keep pushing the Cycle Hire scheme as well as ‘Legible London’ to give us the best ways of helping people understand and navigate London. Band stands, drinking fountains, seating and cafes on the river edge are amongst the simple facilities I want to see more of to enable people to congregate and enjoy public space, and to encourage them to explore places they have not been to before.

I want to expand the awareness of the recreational offer for Londoners and visitors, revealing to all the remarkable diversity of places, from high streets and squares, forests and marshes. There are thousands of things to do and to be experienced. I want Londoners to have the idea to take a picnic in the Green Belt, and to know how to get there, as readily as they would think of taking a trip to the seaside or the cinema. One important aspect of this will be to encourage public transport as the preferred way to get to recreational spaces, of taking memorable day trips, going for a special evening and calling on a favourite park.

In certain circumstances I will also directly promote events and festivals and will push forward the possibilities of more temporary road closures, building on the success of the weekend closure of the Mall and one-off closures for some of our wonderful festivals. I will also, wherever possible assist the boroughs when they wish to do the same.

## Whose spaces?



There is a growing trend towards the private management of publicly accessible space where this type of ‘corporatisation’ occurs, especially in the larger commercial developments, Londoners can feel themselves excluded from parts of their own city. This need not be the case. At Kings Cross it was agreed that the London Borough of Camden will adopt the streets and public areas. Elsewhere unrestricted 24-hour access to the area has been agreed. This has established an important principle which should be negotiated in all similar schemes.

Many of London’s larger public parks are fenced and locked at night. This can create severance as sections of the city are literally decommissioned. It can also turn many surrounding streets into inactive cul-de-sacs. The main reason for locking London’s parks at night is fear of crime and antisocial activities. However many parks, such as Highbury Fields and Streatham Common, are not fenced or gated. This suggests that 24-hour access could be made to work in more of our parks and green spaces with the right design and right lighting and management regimes. High quality, creative lighting can increase feelings of safety and encourage ownership and use.

I want to ensure that access to public space is as unrestricted and unambiguous as possible. The needs of different users and age groups can be accommodated through intelligent design. With proper consideration at the outset of safety issues, the usage of public spaces can be extended well into the evening without the need for unnecessary barriers.

## Making it happen



This document is not, however, a prescriptive guide. Grand designs do not work in London, nor do the precise and controlled approach to public space design and management used to such good effect in Scandinavian countries. London is a multi-centred city made up of towns and districts, each with a unique character and culture. A balance of interventions at different levels, from the conceptual to the very practical, is needed if we are to shape London for the better. In this document I have presented a series of different ideas and examples that, taken together, can go towards making London a better city.

My aim is to work boldly and collaboratively with Londoners, our partners at the boroughs and the best design professionals to push this manifesto forward. I will put my resources behind a coherent set of initiatives and actions some of which we are already rolling forward, such as the Mayor’s Great Spaces initiative, the Green Grid, Transport for London’s Major Schemes (formerly Area Based Schemes), the Street Trees programme and Priority Parks. I have also kick-started a series of smaller initiatives promoting drinking fountains, bandstands, and assorted other good things to improve the day to day experience of public space.

My ambitions do not require huge new resources just determination, enthusiasm and a willingness to spot and seize opportunities. Having said this, I am proud to be able to direct more than £220 million into public space projects over the next three years. I doubt that there has ever been such a concentrated effort to make a great outdoors for London.

London is an ever changing city which needs to adapt to accommodate a growing population and the associated growth in housing and employment. The planned improvements to infrastructure, such as Crossrail and the investment associated with the Olympic and Paralympic Games, provide the opportunity to reconnect neighbourhoods and improve the quality of life in previously deprived areas. With good design and creative thinking around public space, including the imagination of architects, designers, artists and others, and with the active participation of the London boroughs, we can make the most of this investment and ensure that change is managed in a well thought out way that brings tangible benefits to everyone.

I am therefore determined to champion and celebrate efforts to improve public space radically throughout London. I will build on the uniqueness and specific qualities of this city, its places, history and cultures to improve London's network of outdoor spaces. Achieving bold improvements to London's public spaces, its streets, parks and all the rest is one of my big priorities as Mayor of London.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Boris Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Boris Johnson  
Mayor of London  
November 2009



### **River Lea Navigation**

We must make most of  
London's natural resources for  
leisure and recreation



## A strategy for spatial investment



The following strategy for spatial investment sets out the criteria that will guide the London Development Agency (LDA) and Transport for London (TfL) when making decisions about where to invest in public realm improvements. It also outlines work that is to be undertaken to ensure a co-ordinated approach across the Mayoral family and beyond.

1  
Public realm investment that is coherent and co-ordinated and with a clear sense of priorities will be essential if it is to be effective and long lasting. This document has already set out the case for creating and maintaining a high quality public realm. The present circumstances make this even more the case. The recession and the impact on developer confidence require the public sector to take a lead in creating the places and the circumstances in which inward investment and regeneration can occur. The increasing co-ordination across Mayoral agencies, and the advent of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), have created a new and favourable set of circumstances to align spending budgets, where practical, to make a real difference.

2  
In a city the size of London and with the inevitable limits on the resources that are available to the Mayor, difficult choices will need to be made in determining the priorities for initiatives and investment. A collaborative approach across Mayoral agencies will be essential. TfL and the LDA will align their investment programmes, where practical, within the broad direction

set by the London Plan, the Economic Development Strategy and the Mayor’s Transport Strategy. This will achieve a sharper focus in the allocation of resources to ensure we get the best impact for every pound of public money spent. In order to support the process of defining spatial priorities, the LDA will co-ordinate a coherent approach towards prioritising spatial investment across the GLA group and with the HCA. This will also create a robust framework for London to bid in future rounds under Comprehensive Spending Reviews. Alongside this work the LDA is commissioning a major piece of work to map priorities and measure the impact of investment. This will be completed early in 2010, and will sit alongside the LDA’s ‘brownfield’ land database.

3  
The London Plan is the starting point for any assessment of area priorities. It recognises the opportunities of east London and the strategic growth corridors of the Thames Gateway and Cambridge – Stansted corridors. Apart from some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country, this is where the Olympics will be sited and where there is a concentration of brownfield land, much of which is in public ownership.

4  
The London Plan also sets out 28 Opportunity Areas and nine Areas for Intensification. These areas already represent 90per cent of London’s potential new housing capacity and are receiving over 95 per cent of the LDA’s programme on land remediation. Inevitably public realm investment programmes and staff resources will focus on opportunity areas and the major growth corridors in order to maximise the opportunities from the additional inward investment.

5

The whole premise upon which London's Olympic bid was made was the regeneration of east London. Huge investment has already taken place in land remediation, infrastructure and the Olympic Park and facilities. The process of delivering the legacy is now well underway. The LDA has allocated a further £16 million as part of a wider package of up to £150 million of public realm improvements in the immediate hinterland of the Olympics. These projects are being developed jointly with the five host boroughs, the Department of Communities and Local Government, the HCA, TfL and the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation (LTGDC). Public realm investment in the 'fringe' area is one of the key elements of our strategy to seamlessly connect the Olympic Park with the communities that surround it.

6

Other major developments and transport infrastructure improvements such as Crossrail and the East London Line need to be weaved into the city in a way that ensures that their economic benefits are fully realised. Investment in the public realm, around stations and the related development sites will help to achieve this objective. The recent decision of the LDA to invest a further £750,000 in public realm improvements around Dalston to exploit the improvements brought by the East London Line and the associated development is a good example of how we 'finish the job'. Similarly, as the London economy recovers there will be opportunities

to work in partnership with some of the major developments to ensure that the surrounding areas are regenerated and the communities in their hinterlands are connected. London can anticipate major developments to take place around Stratford, The Royal Docks and Canary Wharf, Kings Cross, Brent Cross, White City and Croydon. In these cases minor public realm interventions can add enormous value.

7

Whilst the opportunities around east London are enormous, it would be wrong to ignore the potential of other areas. The Outer London Commission has identified town centres as one of the key priorities in underpinning the economic performance of outer London. These places, London's local high streets also provide the vital civic focus that communities need. Again, there will be the potential for public realm investment in association with the boroughs and the Implementation Plan in the *Better Streets* document sets out some of the current and proposed proposals, many of which are in outer London town centres. The Mayor's Great Spaces initiative represents one such example.

8

Finally we cannot afford to neglect central London. This is the economic engine of our city and its showcase for visitors. Its shopping and tourist sites attract visitors worldwide and form part of the daily working and leisure experience for many Londoners. Recent investment in the South Bank, Kensington High Street and some of London's major galleries and tourist attractions has had a profound and beneficial impact. Further carefully targeted investment will be needed to maintain London's recovery especially in its principal shopping streets and around its major transport interchanges.

9

When determining where we will be investing the Mayor would expect public space projects to demonstrate an ambition to achieve one or more of the following:

- reconnect severed neighbourhoods
- contribute to revitalising and strengthening town centres and high streets
- enhance the quality of life
- encourage walking, cycling and increased use of public transport
- open up neglected water places for public use
- improve London's transport hubs and busiest interchanges
- improve the quality of green spaces and access to them, and enhance their biodiversity
- remove barriers and create spaces that are accessible for everyone
- reduce the impacts of climate change and enhance sustainability.

10

As a matter of course it is also expected that public space projects should be:

- flexible, providing the potential for a variety of activities and events
- comfortable, encouraging all types of use
- accessible, catering to all users
- safe throughout the day, night and year
- sustainable and durable
- beautiful and well designed, rich in texture and well executed
- integrated with their surroundings and respectful of the characteristics of their locality.

11

TfL's investment criteria will however be different from the LDA's. TfL investment priorities take account of transport needs across the capital. Most of TfL's investment in public realm projects is funded through the borough Local Implementation Plan (LIP) process. The bulk of these funds are now allocated through a funding formula whereby boroughs know in advance the level of funding available and develop a programme that matches the budget. Funding for projects on the Transport for London Road Network is not allocated through the LIP process and TfL uses its own prioritisation matrix to ensure that limited funds are targeted on the most important schemes. Schemes in the *Better Streets* Implementation Plan will principally be funded from LIP budgets, and the Major Schemes (formerly Area Based Scheme) programme in particular. TfL has worked with the boroughs and London Councils to develop a process whereby TfL and individual boroughs work jointly to develop and deliver major public realm schemes, with TfL's funding coming through the LIP funding system. This process has aimed to support high quality schemes and to ensure a degree of funding equity across London. Over the next couple of years, additional funds in the Major Schemes programme will be focused on public realm improvements around Olympic Games venues and other sites likely to attract large numbers of Olympic visitors and that can be delivered in time for the Games. In the future, TfL will seek bids from boroughs for fewer higher value schemes that create a noticeable improvement in the public realm.

12

For the next two years the bulk of funding from the HCA in London will be drawn from the National Affordable Housing Programme, which is target driven towards the achievement of the Mayor's 50,000

affordable housing completions target. As such the investment decisions of the HCA tend to be led by development opportunities to deliver completed homes in the short term rather than deliberated spatial regeneration and growth priorities. Nonetheless, the HCA is mindful of London Plan objectives and of the need to consider regional and local authority spatial priorities. A more strategic approach to 'localised' investment is emerging and this will potentially find expression in local authority collaboration agreements. As a potential collaboration partner and in supporting delivery of the Mayor's Economic Development Strategy, it is incumbent on the LDA to influence both regeneration priorities and investment mechanisms to secure the best return on our investment.

13

The schedules attached to the *Better Streets* and *Better Green and Water Spaces* documents identify at least £220 million of planned investment in London's public realm over the next three years. This is very much the tip of the iceberg and excludes borough expenditure and routine maintenance and private sector investment. Taken together, well co-ordinated and well designed this will have a profound effect in improving London's public spaces. Where it is possible for public agencies to work together and compliment each other's spending programmes then real and lasting regeneration can occur.



## St James's Park

London's parks have many uses



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