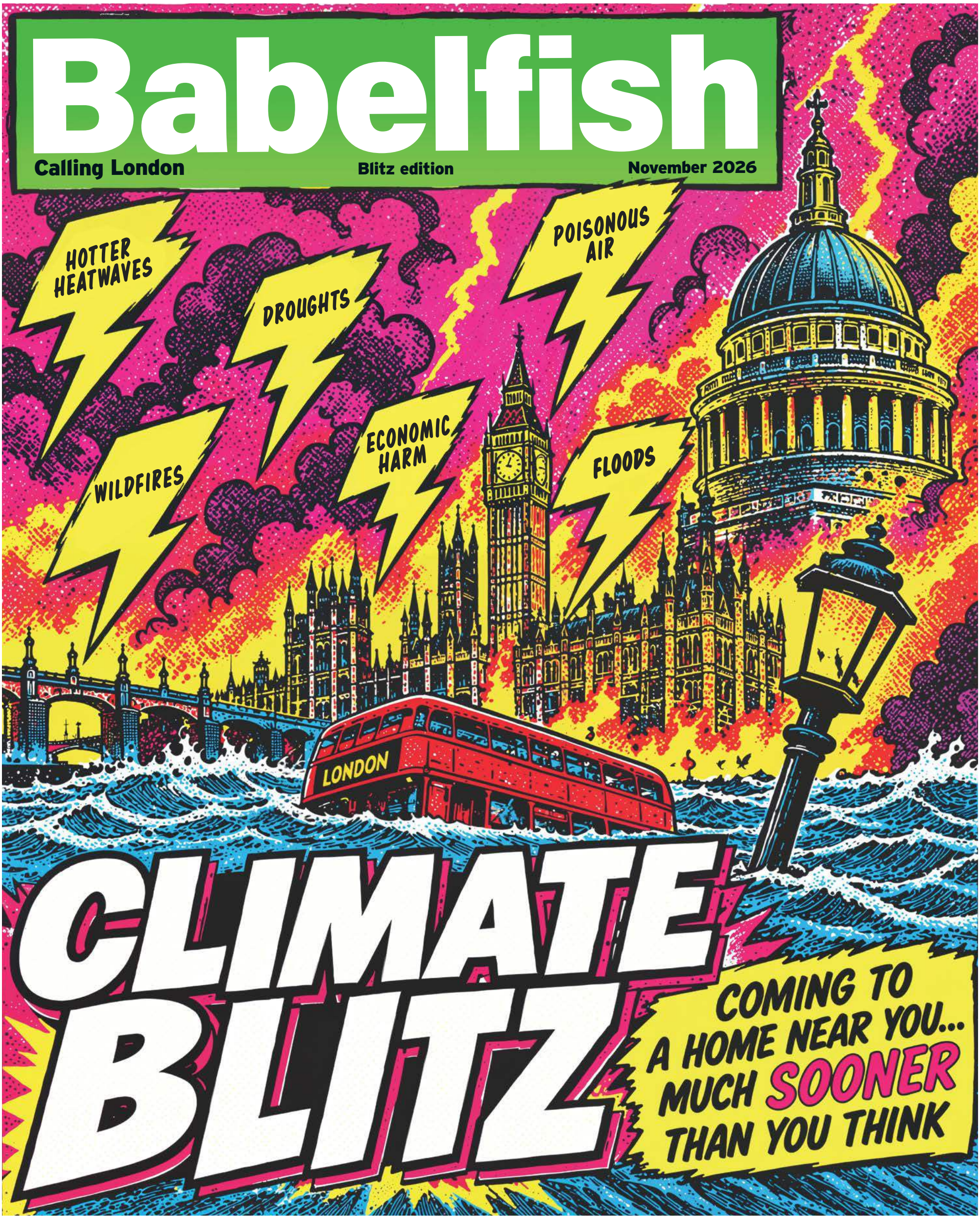
Babelfish

Calling London | Blitz edition | November 2026



All you need to know

SCREEN 3 • TALKS

12:00-13.00 **Rewilding London: Chris Packham and Dale Vince in conversation**

13:30-14.10 **Can climate be fun and sexy? Alternative climate storytelling**
Issey Gladston, Jessica Riches, Ben Carey, Ray Hopkinson and Ala Zakrzewska

14:30-15.10 **The inequality of air pollution**
Dr Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, Tulip Siddiq, Anjali Raman-Middleton and Amy Reid

15:30-16.10 **Food for a changing world**
Dale Vince, Sara Ayech, Connor Jackson, Alex Smith and Lloyd Bickham

16:30-17.10 **Building a better future: housing and the climate crisis**
Sagal Abdi-Wali, Alice Brown, Cameron Ford, Jane McWilliams and Caitlin Maskell

SCREEN 5 • TALKS

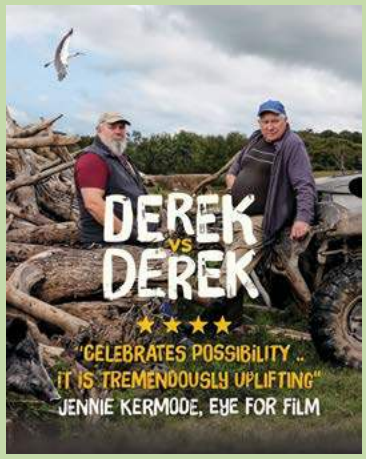
13:30-14.10 **The cost of living in a climate crisis**
Emily Compston, Tansy Hoskins, Benali Hamdache and Dan Carrier

14:30-15.10 **Does disruption work? The future of climate protest**
Rosie Latchford, Ben Abrams, Anna Hyde and Dr Roger Harrabin

15:30-16.10 **Climate and conflict: why does it matter?**
Andrew Gilmour and Tom Clarke, Sky News

16:30-17.10 **Is nature a luxury?**
Louis VI, Martina Mina, Katrina Ridley and Anna Lamche

17:30-18.10 **The case for optimism with Fred Pearce**



Heat SERIOUSLY

EXTREME heatwaves over the summer had a wide-ranging and devastating impact on the health and wellbeing of Londoners, our exclusive survey reveals.

Seven in 10 of those polled said they had difficulty sleeping and nearly half recalled how their physical and mental health was negatively affected.

London's ambulance service dealt with 25,000 more calls this summer than last – exceeding the record number set during the Covid pandemic – with the deaths of 1,000 people attributed to the first two of the five punishing heatwaves.

Those living in the capital are the most at risk in the country from excessive temperatures, with older residents most concerned about "what happens next" with regards to climate change, according to our poll by Survation.

London suffered from record-breaking temperatures, starting with the first heatwave at the end of May and peaking at 38.1C during mid-August. Some 67% of people now believe the capital is "not well prepared" to cope with extreme heat in future summers, rising to 79% among over-65s.

Sewage

Residents of rented properties felt the impact of extreme heat most severely, with 76% reporting they had trouble sleeping against 62% of homeowners.

Asked which single measure would be most worthwhile to invest in, Londoners chose better cooling systems on public transport (32%), followed by funding to help existing homes become cooler (22%), and planting trees for shade (15%).

While the cost of living dominates as the most important issue concerning Londoners, three out of four said they are worried about climate change, with 31% ticking the "very concerned" box.

When questioned about how they rate the importance of a range of environmental issues, respondents placed all of them highly, but water pollution and sewage stood out: 63% said they are important, ahead of air pollution (55%), recycling and waste (53%), summer heat (51%) and green spaces (51%).

Air quality has long dominated the environmental debate in the capital, but these results show how water pollution has achieved greater awareness from the public because of successful campaigning by the likes of former rock star Feargal Sharkey.

The failure by water companies is the leading concern of those aged 55 to 64, at 72%, and 67% of over-65s say it is very important.

The public is broadly extremely supportive of incentives to use cleaner or more active transport measures – something that is backed by 69% and opposed by only 7%.

There is also widespread backing for publicly accessible pollution monitors near schools and on high streets, at 65% in favour and only 8% against, plus public education on the risks of air pollution is supported by 65% with 6% opposed.

The controversial Ulez scheme, expanded across most of Greater London three years ago, now has more supporters (39%) than opponents (28%) with one-quarter of those surveyed being neutral. However, despite the health benefits that have been scientifically proven – for example studies which have shown impressive improvements in children's lungs that had previously been stunted by bad air quality – Londoners are not convinced it has worked.

Only 31% think Ulez has made air in the capital better, 43% think it has made no difference, 18% are unsure and 9% believe it has made it worse.

London Mayor Sir Sadiq Khan's bold decision to make Oxford Street pedestrian-only has won plaudits from the public with

Babelfish: Climate blitz facing our

WE'RE Babelfish and we're here to green up – AND shake up – the capital by urging Londoners to adopt the blitz spirit to stave off catastrophic climate change.

Not quite straight out of The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy – but in the same vein. A voice in your ear, making sense of the nonsense. Talking your language. Un-spinning the spin. We're a pop up. New media, here to intervene – bearing facts, tongue in cheek, for fun, with purpose.

In this our sixth edition, we are confronting the big environmental and societal issues in our great city.

We commissioned exclusive polling which showed 70% of Londoners suffered a debilitating loss of sleep during the five summer heatwaves, with nearly half of those surveyed saying they experienced mental and physical distress.

And children had a terrible time. Poorly children fell victim to heat exhaustion at one London school during the summer and had to lie on the floor of the staffroom – the only room with air-con. It was one of 1,300 London schools that City Hall said are located in high heat risk areas. The name of one child will resonate with many people aware of the dangers of air pollution.

Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah was only nine years old when she became the first person in the UK – and the world – to have air pollution officially listed as a medical cause of death. Read her mother Rosamund's heartbreaking story in this edition.

We have also found the proliferation of fast-food outlets is massively contributing to the deterioration in health. Our research shows Camden has the highest concentration in England – with the average school in the borough having 12 takeaways within just 400 metres. So, there you have it. Londoners are facing an existential threat. But there's much to be hopeful about.

Please do let us know what you think.

Your voice has a right to be heard for the simple reason your quality of life is dependent on politicians making the right decisions for us all. We are here to help. Keep an ear out for us.



about LDN COP

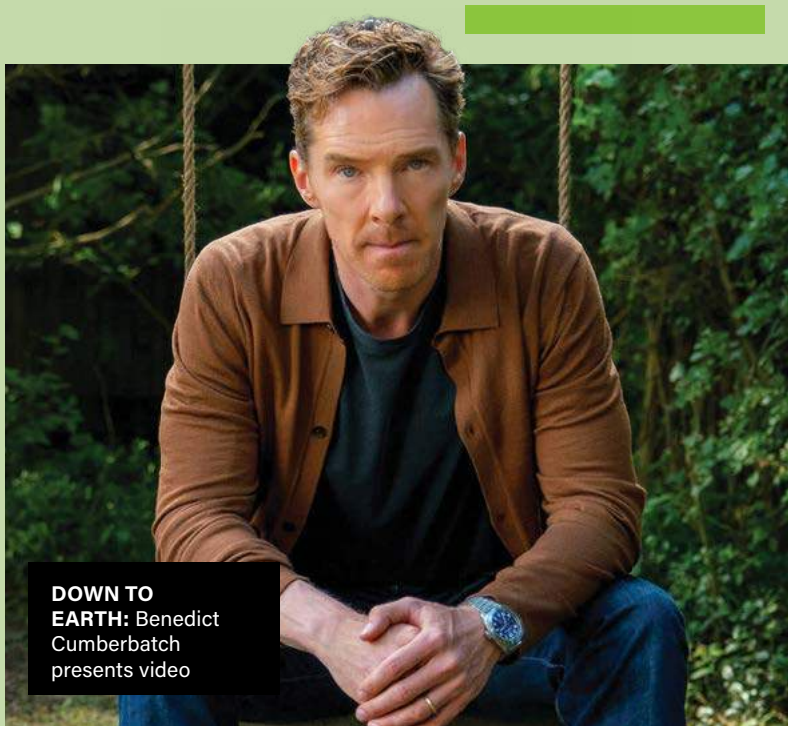
LDN COP

SCREEN 2 • DOCUMENTARIES

11:30-13.00 **How to Live on Earth**
Presented by Benedict Cumberbatch, this ultimate "how-to" video features inspirational, cutting-edge stories and powerful cinematography from around the world to reveal how humans are learning to team up with nature to solve our biggest challenges.

13:15-15.30 **People's Emergency Briefing + discussion with director of political strategy Jo Macrae and creative director Ben Carey**
An eye-opening film bringing together nine leading UK scientists and experts with the latest evidence and why it matters. The film is based on the National Emergency Briefing in Westminster, with appearances from Chris Packham, Deborah Meaden, and a range of voices from across the UK. After the film there will be an open discussion about what it means for our community and what we can do locally.

16:00-18.00 **Derek vs Derek + Q&A with director James Dawson**
Two neighbouring Devon farmers – both named Derek – find themselves on opposite sides of a battle for the future of the countryside. While one champions intensive farming, the other is rewilding his land, transforming it into a haven for nature. As tempers flare, wildlife escapes, and the landscape changes around them, their neighbourly dispute becomes a funny, revealing, and timely exploration of who gets to shape the land – and what the future of farming should look like.



DOWN TO EARTH: Benedict Cumberbatch presents video

damages your health

Londoners endorsing the move by 55% to 18%, a three-to-one margin. But Kahn's opposition to plans for a third runway at Heathrow – he argues that the expansion threatens environmental targets – has yet to convince Londoners, who lean towards supporting the project by 42% to 21%, with a third neutral.

The issue also divides the progressive vote: of those who voted Labour in the 2024 election, 47% support expansion, with 19% against. Lib Dems are split 38% in favour and 35% not, and Greens opposed the third runway by 42% to 33%.

great city





UP IN SMOKE: Firemen tackle a wildfire on Wanstead Flats, London, in summer last year

RECLAIM OUR



BY **SIR SADIQ KHAN**

WHEN I was first elected mayor 10 years ago, one of the first places I visited was Aldgate School. Open since 1706, the school sits next to one of London's busiest roads.

Every day as children studied in lessons and played tag in the playground, they breathed toxic air – air that was so filthy it was in breach of legal pollution limits.

This invisible poison was damaging the health and limiting the life chances of kids, not just at Aldgate but right across our city, with some even growing up with stunted lungs. As I left through the school gates, I knew I had to act.

Today, thanks to our bold efforts to create the world's largest clean-air zone – the Ultra Low Emission Zone (Ulez) – levels of one of the most toxic forms of air pollution – nitrogen dioxide – have been cut by more than half in central London. Ten million Londoners are now breathing cleaner air, and this year data showed that deaths linked to air pollution in our capital have fallen, while children's lung health has improved.

Ulez is just one example of what we've done over the last 10 years to make London cleaner and greener than at any time in our capital's history. We've also transformed the way people travel – building the largest zero-emission bus fleet in Europe and delivering a fivefold increase in protected cycle lanes. We've pedestrianised Oxford Street and made London wilder and greener, planting more than 640,000 trees and welcoming wildlife such as beavers, bats, bees – and soon white storks – back to our city. And we've made record investments in clean energy – putting solar panels on school roofs and distributing funding to nearly 200 clean-energy projects across our city.



WALKING THE WALK: Pedestrianised Oxford Street; a white stork, bottom left; and a busy bee, below



But the real measure of our success isn't in these numbers or statistics. It's in the cleaner air that millions of Londoners now breathe every day. The green spaces where friends and families can spend time together.

The warmer, more energy-efficient homes that are helping people save money on bills, and the good, green jobs, that are offering exciting opportunities. I've always believed that protecting the environment and improving people's lives go hand in hand. And here in London, we're proving that it's true – by building a city that is not only greener, but healthier, fairer, more affordable and more prosperous too.

In a decade, London has overcome climate doomerism and shown that ambitious action works – for the planet and for people. Our ambition has extended well beyond our own borders. As we know, this is a global crisis, and we will only beat it by working together.

That's why we've teamed up with mayors across the globe through the C40 Cities Network, to share ideas and drive collective action. And I've been proud to see other cities following London's lead – with more than 10 other cities around the world now committed to delivering clean-air zones by 2030 – covering an area where more than 15 million people live and work.

But while I'm proud of the progress we've made, I know we have much further to go. This summer, our city endured an unprecedented series of heatwaves, with soaring temperatures that cost lives, fuelled wildfires and stretched our city's critical infrastructure and emergency services to their limits.

Our firefighters grappled with some of their busiest days since the Blitz during the Second World War, and the latest research suggests that across Europe, more than 50,000 people died from heat-related causes in urban areas.

Mission

It's yet another terrifying reminder that climate disaster is no longer the stuff of distant dystopia – it's right here on our doorsteps.

This summer showed us that we need to do more to protect Londoners from the effects of extreme heat, and we need to move faster in our mission to achieve net zero.

That's why we published Heat Ready London – a comprehensive vision to prepare London for warmer temperatures in the years ahead. And that's why at COP31 in Turkey this month, I met with other urban leaders to discuss what more we can do to accelerate the transition to a greener, brighter future.

When I first stood for office, I promised to be the greenest mayor London had ever had. Ten years on, I'm proud to say my administration hasn't just talked the talk, we have walked the walk. It hasn't always been easy.

At every turn, we've had to contend with climate deniers, vested interests and co-ordinated disinformation campaigns. But we've overcome every obstacle, turning ambition into action and changing lives for the better.

In the years ahead I'm determined that we will continue to raise the bar, showing the world what bold action can achieve and building a greener, fairer, safer and more prosperous city for everyone to enjoy.

STREETS (We need cities fit for people)



BY **DALE VINCE OBE**
GREEN INDUSTRIALIST

Dear London,



BATTLE TO BREATHE: Clean air campaign in London and, below, Dale and Sadiq with the last edition of Babelfish

CITIES face unique problems in this climate crisis – from the concentration of people, of traffic and of concrete.

Britain has just had a five-heatwave summer and London was hit the worst, with temperatures up to 10 degrees higher than in the countryside.

Two summers ago it was wildfires – and more fires in London than at any time since the Blitz of the Second World War.

London is facing a new blitz, the Climate Blitz. And that's why we're holding this LDN COP which follows the UN COP – the annual global climate meeting, held in Turkey this year.

And as ever, the world wrestles with words – the enlightened seeking firm commitments to end fossil fuels; the entrenched, seeking obfuscation.

While what we need is action to halt the worsening, and adaptation to deal with what's occurring – never more so than in our cities. London is at the sharp end of the climate crisis, facing all the usual problems, with a city twist, driven by its concentration of people, traffic and concrete.

Low emission and congestion zones have done much to clean London's air, to make it less poisonous – along with the electrification of our roads. But London air is still poisonous – ask mum Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah. Her daughter Ella, nine, was the first person in the world to have pollution listed as a cause of death.

Look at the statistics. Great progress has been made but we still allow traffic to poison the air that we need to breathe. And climate driven, extreme temperatures make air pollution worse.

We need to break the tyranny of the car, rebalance the right to drive with the right to breathe. Clean air should be a human right and this week we launch a campaign with Ella's mum – to make that a thing.

Pedestrianisation of Oxford street has been an incredible success in just weeks – and of course it should be. People need space to walk freely, from the noise, pollution and physical danger of traffic. Who knew pedestrianisation was good for business, because it's good for people – well, actually, it's an obvious thing.

Why do we allow traffic to drive a metaphoric coach and horses through the places that should be for people.

We need to reclaim the streets. We need more pedestrian zones – we need less traffic. Only half of Londoners even have a car, the other half suffer pollution for their convenience. We have it all wrong.

Heatwaves in London are up to 10 degrees higher than in the countryside. Why? The concentration of concrete and tarmac, the enormous thermal mass that holds the heat of that day, well into the night – and the next day.

And a lack of nature. London needs more trees. We need to re-wild the city – this week we make a start in Camden, at this event we imagine how that could look.

Fewer cars, more trees, cleaner air and better spaces, to walk, to shop – to hang out. Cities fit for people. And fit for the climate crisis.

London can make more of the energy it needs, green energy from its abundance of roof tops. Solar power is a superpower – massively economical, simple and democratising. We can use it to tackle energy poverty, the heinous economic affliction that kills thousands every year.

Our diets are driving the climate crisis, wildlife extinction, human health crisis and now Britain's emerging water crisis.

This is the one thing all of us can do something about. We make food choices every day – we can choose to eat less meat and dairy – it's actually the biggest thing any and all of us can do.

Fast food dominates our streets – cheap and dirty, enormously harmful, especially to our kids – for whom this is growing-up food. We have to break the dominance of Big Food – we need to reclaim the eats. Control fast food like we control tobacco.

Energy, transport and food – making room for nature – these are the core issues we need to pursue everywhere, to hold back the climate crisis and to adapt to what we already can't avoid.

This is a manifesto that works for London – let's make green energy here, create some energy independence, solve energy poverty. Plant more trees, suffer less heat.

Re-imagine our streets with fewer cars, cleaner air, better health, more space for people – better lives. Reclaim the streets, reclaim the eats, make our own energy – bring back nature. We need cities fit to live in. Fit for people. And fit for the climate crisis.

Let's do it here, and show the world how it's done. London Calling...this is how we beat the Climate Blitz.



Politicians are failing us on the climate crisis... enough is enough

SAYS CHRIS PACKHAM



BY **GARY JONES**

"ENOUGH is enough," says Chris Packham, with some considerable feeling. "We are at war with the climate and we need a war-driven Government. We, the people, need politicians to make the right decisions and choose the ones that are best for the preservation of ourselves and the planet."

Packham is angry. No, it is stronger than that, he is raging – in his trademark very controlled way – built upon 40 years of experiencing first hand how nature and the climate have been decimated by mankind.

On the day I spoke to Chris, a parliamentary debate was taking place following his petition which attracted 138,000 signatures calling for a live, prime-time TV national emergency briefing on the climate and nature crisis. That 75 MPs attended the debate will have proven to Chris that a sizeable number of politicians are concerned that the public needs and deserves greater knowledge.

"I am aggrieved that so many people signed the petition and I wasn't able to be there," said Chris, "I'm sceptical that it was held when I was not available.

"I am frustrated. We are being misled, and unregulated social media and the dark forces investing in misinformation are to blame.

"Mainstream media is not telling the truth. It is highly irresponsible and despicable.

Anarchy

"We are being failed by politicians who are not grasping the gravity of the climate crisis and investing in opportunities to address it. Time is not on our side. Dawdling is going to cost our children and their children dearly."

Chris believes "antiquated, short-term thinking" leaves us vulnerable to fast-moving changes in society that risk "anarchy".

"We've seen the impact of cyber attacks," said Chris, "and technology failure, flights grounded across the US, Microsoft's global outage. We've got so much at risk."

Only if society fights back and individuals play their part does Chris believe anything will be done. "Stand up and be counted," he said, "it's no use getting maudlin over a few drinks. We entrusted politicians and now it is time to hold their feet to the fire.

"It is absolutely crucial we explain to people that when they vote they are electing representatives who have a manifest duty to look after their future and make it secure and sustainable. We have a collective duty to stand up to government and question poor decision -making that is not in the interests of us all."

Chris is encouraging more action on his live tour, World of Wonder: A Planet on the Edge, which as the title suggests involves a mixture of the marvels of wildlife that have enraptured Chris since childhood and his fears and hopes for our planet's future.

"I've enjoyed meeting my community," said Chris, "I tell them the truth about the gravity of climate breakdown but I want people to leave feeling as if they're in a better place to address the problems."

Chris says he has seen "catastrophic changes" during his lifetime.

"The world sounds, smells, and looks completely different... a lot of things have disappeared and are disappearing," he adds.

He is far less charitable to corporates who he believes avoid paying a fair share of tax.

He is especially critical of Amazon and Costa. "They've no interest in securing our future," says Chris. "I am a great believer in windfall taxes to put things right." But Packham does approve of London Mayor Sir Sadiq Khan's efforts to make the capital cleaner.

"We are seeing significant improvements in air quality thanks to Sadiq Khan," he says. "His policies were savaged at the time by Reform in particular but now we have proof that if you take action you can make a difference."

Then in a rapid-fire expulsion of things Chris wants to get off his chest, he lambasts firstly the government's approval of drilling at the Jackdaw gas field. "There are just 27 jobs with Jackdaw, it is bullshit," he says. "It shows the power of the fossil fuel lobbyists."

Then there's food strategy. "People don't want to change their diet, to eat less meat and dairy. You never hear anything about the food crisis. You can still eat a sausage sandwich in a hospital for God's sake." On housing, Chris says "we need a proper building programme. Affordable homes that insulate against the heat and can provide warmth."

He goes on: "Access to nature is so very important to mental and physical health and yet we are building on green land. People living in cities who are impoverished have less access to nature, and suffer mental and physical harm because of it.

"Politicians are too scared – and haven't got the balls – and are not brave enough.

Get chatting and texting... for the sake



Switch to ecotalk nature's network

GIVING nature a helping hand by using a mobile phone provider that cares passionately about our planet – that's the power of Ecotalk.

The world's first network to use its profits to restore the environment is proud to sponsor LDN COP and help highlight the challenges the capital faces in combating climate change.

Launched by green industrialist Dale Vince, Ecotalk uses its profits to protect nature in Britain, instead of lining shareholders' pockets.

It works closely with its Chief Ecologist, Chris Packham, to reintroduce, rewild and replant across two sites in Sussex and Devon.

Vince, who also owns Forest Green Rovers, the greenest football club in the world, said: "Ecotalk is the most sustainable phone service out there. Every time you use your phone you'll be doing good for nature, helping to restore Britain's natural landscapes and species."

Ecotalk's customer base has nearly quadrupled in the past year, helping to support the expansion of its flagship rewilding projects, where 2026 has brought encouraging signs.

At Downicary in Devon, a flat field is now a functioning wetland, with ponds, marshland plants, otters, kingfishers and beavers.

Three thousand tons of earth have been moved to create new habitats for reptiles, invertebrates and small mammals, and a 55-acre tree planting programme is under way, sourced from the Woodland Trust. Local primary school children helped Chris Packham to plant some of the 3,500 trees and shrubs. At Bowyers Wood, beavers have returned to East Sussex for the first time in 400 years, with a family now settled and young kits born.

Nine tawny owl chicks have been ringed after two new owl boxes were occupied in their first breeding season, and surveys have found 37 bird species, including lesser spotted woodpeckers and spotted flycatchers. Eighteen black poplars, one of the UK's rarest native trees, have been planted. Bat surveys,



SPADE-WORK: Chris Packham plants a tree near the V&A in Kensington, with Deputy London Mayor Mete Coban, Kate Sheldon of Trees for Cities and TV and radio presenter Qasa Alom

# of beavers!

carried out with bat expert Professor Fiona Matthews, have confirmed multiple species, including the rare barbastelle.

Broadcaster and campaigner Packham said: "We are in a crisis, wildlife is disappearing before our eyes, measured, quantified, analysed... beyond question.

"It's easy to think 'But what can I do?' The answer is simple, you can talk and text on your phone, turn chatter into conservation!

"It's fantastic to see London having its own COP, bringing together so many organisations and people committed to making the capital greener, cleaner and better for nature. I'm delighted to be playing a part. C'mon, let's Ecotalk a better future for nature."

■ Ecotalk is powered by green energy, and delivers the best coverage and the fastest data speeds, with amazing customer support, at a competitive price.

Lobbyists rule the day. It is all about the short-term and financial gains."

Though Chris's call to action is despairing in so many ways, he still remains hopeful. "There are so many ways we can repair, restore, reinstate and reintroduce nature."

There can be no better crusading ambassador for the planet than Chris Packham. "Earth is so precious," he says, "you can't put a value on it. We cannot f*** this up."

Action on festivals is music to the ear

A GLOBAL summit highlighting the contribution of live entertainment shows to a more sustainable future is to be held at The O2 in February.

Claire O'Neill, one of the world's leading experts on the environmental impact of festivals, live music and events, said: "We are bringing together the brightest minds to tackle the most poignant and pressing topics relating to sustainability, climate change and social action."

O'Neill's organisation, A Greener Future, which she co-founded, is hosting the expanded Green Events & Innovations Conference (GEI19) at indigo at The O2 and the O2 Blueroom. Last year's conference was attended by more than 450 delegates from 26 countries.

O'Neill, CEO of the not-for-profit body, said: "LDN COP is a brilliant way of getting the public actively involved in climate action and nature restoration. In helping raise the issues that are so crucial to a healthier, greener lifestyle.

"I work closely with the music and festival industry to play its part in helping drive change. Our conference next year at The O2 will, I hope, be a catalyst for more organisations, artists and individuals to make a tangible difference to the future of our planet."

O'Neill added: "After spending the last decade in the same venue as the International Live Music Conference, both events have expanded. The expansion of GEI will allow for even greater action and amplification of the issues of climate, nature and people through the lens of the live sector – from music to sport."

Sam Booth, director of sustainability at AEG International which owns and operates The O2, said: "We look forward to supporting industry conversation that shapes a sustainable future."

O'Neill has led the way on sustainable efforts to make major music festivals less reliant on fossil fuels and co-founded Grid Faeries x Ecotricity with green entrepreneur Dale Vince, which supplies grid-connected renewable power and battery storage for live events, including Massive Attack's Act 1.5 Climate Action Accelerator, Arcadia Dragonfly at Glastonbury Festival and Womad.

■ *For more information visit agreenerfuture.com*



Resilience is key in battle to protect vital green spaces



BY **DAN CARRIER**

AN ALARMING drop in funding for London parks ignores the hidden benefits of nurturing green spaces in the city – and those managing them need to find new ways to build resilience, according to a report from an influential think-tank.

The annual report for campaign group Parks for London focuses on how parks can thrive, and highlighted the vital role they play in Londoners' wellbeing. In a 15-year period, spending on parks by councils and local authorities has fallen by nearly a third in real terms – during times when the climate crisis requires urgent action and access to fresh air and places to exercise take on new importance as obesity rates soar.

Babelfish research has uncovered a parks budget crisis that includes a spending drop of 69% across London in the past 15 years, adding up to just £16.07 per person a year.

Executive Director of Parks for London, Ed Stannard, says in the report that a key concept in the management of parks is resilience.

"Parks and green spaces, and those who manage



them, are increasingly being asked to do more than ever before," he says. "From adapting to climate change, restoring nature and supporting health and wellbeing, to strengthening community cohesion and providing vital spaces for recreation and relaxation, parks are front and centre.

"Yet these growing and vital demands come at a time when those responsible for managing our green spaces continue to face significant financial, operational and organisational pressures."

He says resilience is often assumed to be linked to the physical impacts of the climate crisis, but it comes in many forms, of which a resilient landscape to meet climate pressures is just one element. It also means, he says, "... resilient people and organisations with the capacity, skills and leadership to navigate change, and financial resilience that enables services to sustain and invest in the future.

"It is about ensuring those responsible for green spaces, the organisations that care for them, and the communities that depend upon them, have the capacity to adapt, thrive and continue delivering for future generations."



BY **SAGAL ABDI-WALI**
LABOUR MP for HOLBORN and ST PANCRAS

Tackle the climate crisis AND

THE housing crisis and the climate emergency are often treated as separate challenges. But in truth they are deeply connected.

The people least able to afford to heat their homes are often living in the coldest, dampest and least energy-efficient properties.

And as our climate changes, those already struggling with poor housing are increasingly exposed to extreme heat, flooding and other weather events.

This is particularly important for London, and especially for Camden. As we come together for LDN COP, we need to recognise that many of the homes we live in today were built for a very different climate.

Our housing stock was not designed for the hotter summers, more intense rainfall and increasingly unpredictable weather we are now experiencing.

Camden has some of the oldest housing stock in the country. Much of it was built long before anyone anticipated the climate extremes we are now facing. For residents in poorly ventilated flats, particularly older people, young children and those with health conditions, extreme heat can make homes increasingly uncomfortable and difficult to live in.

And these pressures are felt against the backdrop of an already deep housing crisis. In Camden, the scale of the housing challenge is stark.

More than 8,000 households are on the social housing waiting list, and around 1,400 households are living in temporary accommodation. House prices and rents remain among the highest in the country. Behind those figures are families living in overcrowded conditions, young people unable to afford to stay in the borough they grew up in, and residents facing the uncertainty of not knowing where they will call home.

This is a housing inequality issue as much as it is an environmental one. Lower and middle-income households are often least able to make the improvements needed to protect themselves. They should not have to

Damp is 'destroying my

EXCLUSIVE

BY **NICK SOMMERLAD**

ADANNA Mbaso was two years old when her family moved into their rented home – but after just eight years in the damp and mouldy flat, one of her lungs collapsed.

Since then she has battled one respiratory problem after another and, now aged 14, she has a rare and aggressive lung cancer.

Between her gruelling bouts of chemotherapy, Adanna must stay in hospital as her home is not a safe place to return to.

Recent tests have found evidence of a common household fungus called aspergillus in the fluid built up around her lungs.

There is no proven direct link between the known damaging health effects of damp and mould on the human body and cancer.

But Adanna's mother Stephanie Reynolds says that she has been told the lung collapse created the conditions in which the cancer could develop.

"This was an environmental weapon that was destroying my child from the inside," she told Babelfish.



RELENTLESS: Black mould in the kitchen came back time and again over many years

Mouldy

The official English Housing Survey estimates that 1.4million – or 5% of – homes have a problem with damp and that the number has been rising for the last few years.

The World Health Organisation has found that people living in damp or mouldy buildings have "up to a 75% greater risk of respiratory symptoms and asthma" and that "children are particularly susceptible".

Stephanie, 36, recalls first moving into their housing association flat in Hackney with toddler Adanna and her baby brother.

Stephanie said: "I couldn't believe my luck. It was a big two-bedroomed property with beautiful French doors and lovely neighbours.

"But whenever we cooked in the kitchen, damp would drip from the ceiling and soon it was covered in black mould.

"The housing association told me it was because I hadn't opened the windows and they told me to paint the ceiling with a special damp paint. But the mould kept coming back. There was mould in the bedrooms, particularly my son and daughter's room. There was black mould on the windows and curtains.

"My son kept having this bad cough. His tonsils were huge. Doctors kept giving him an inhaler, even though he didn't have asthma."

In November 2022, after enduring the Covid pandemic trapped in their flat and with baby twin boys, Stephanie emailed her landlord about the ongoing "humidity and damp" problems, telling them: "With my young children in the property I'm concerned as we have been suffering coughs for the last three months which aren't letting up."

Weeks later, in January 2023, Adanna had the first of two lung collapses. Stephanie recalled: "My daughter is very stoic. We didn't know how bad it was for her. But she told us she felt like she couldn't breathe properly.

"The doctors told us it was a spontaneous collapse. Twelve days later it happened again." Adanna required surgery to prevent further collapse. Damp specialists who had visited to deal with problems in 2014 and 2019 were back at Stephanie's home in 2023, recommending injecting a chemical damp proof course and improving ventilation.

They returned again the following year and still found a "high level of condensation", recommending a string of measures, including ventilation, anti-mould paint, insulation and upgraded extractor fans.

Persistent

In January 2025, Stephanie lodged a complaint with her housing association, stating: "I am genuinely concerned that this house cannot be made safe. My daughter's health has already begun to exhibit the long-term effects of living in such a property. I can't help but fear for my children's health as my daughter could have died."

Stephanie's landlord responded: "We acknowledge that damp and mould has been a persistent issue at your property. [We have] taken several steps to address the issues."

In April 2025, the damp specialist was back again, recording "high moisture content in a number of walls". The mould in the kitchen was blamed on a cold and uninsulated ceiling. The inspector found "inadequate ventilation" and no evidence that the bathroom extractor fan was "ducted externally".

Lisa Malyon created the UK Centre for Mould Safety and Mums Versus Mould after her own "near-death" experience caused by a water-damaged home.

She said: "Millions of UK homes are damp, and that's because we don't have a regulated damp industry – consumers are not protected from being mis-sold, and often are. Landlords think they've fixed the issue but, often, it's been made worse."

Adanna's health was deteriorating again this July when she returned to hospital. More fluid was drained from her chest and Stephanie insisted that it was sent for tests.

Fungal

These showed evidence of high levels of aspergillus – a mould often found indoors that can lead to a condition called aspergillosis in the lungs. Under the microscope, "degraded hyphae" were suspected, tube-like structures indicating a possible fungal infection.

Then, in September, further tests revealed the worst news. Stephanie said: "Adanna has a rare and aggressive cancer in her lungs. They couldn't operate. She's having six rounds of very strong chemotherapy.

"I do not believe the fungus itself caused the cancer but Adanna's oncologist told me they suspect a causal link. It created the conditions that allowed the cancer to form."

The treatment is gruelling and Adanna has suffered side effects like blood clots, hair loss and rapid weight loss. Adanna has been in hospital for over a month already but now Stephanie fears bringing her home. She has been on the waiting list for new accommodation for nearly 10 years.

Adanna's oncology nurse wrote a letter to her landlord last month: "Exposure to indoor mould may be of particular concern in individuals whose immune systems are compromised, as certain moulds can cause serious infections in susceptible patients."

We arranged for Roger Martin, of Safe Air Quality, to inspect and test Stephanie's flat this month. He found "stale, stagnant semi-

fuel poverty together

choose between keeping warm in winter and staying safe in summer.

The scale of the retrofit challenge in Camden is significant.

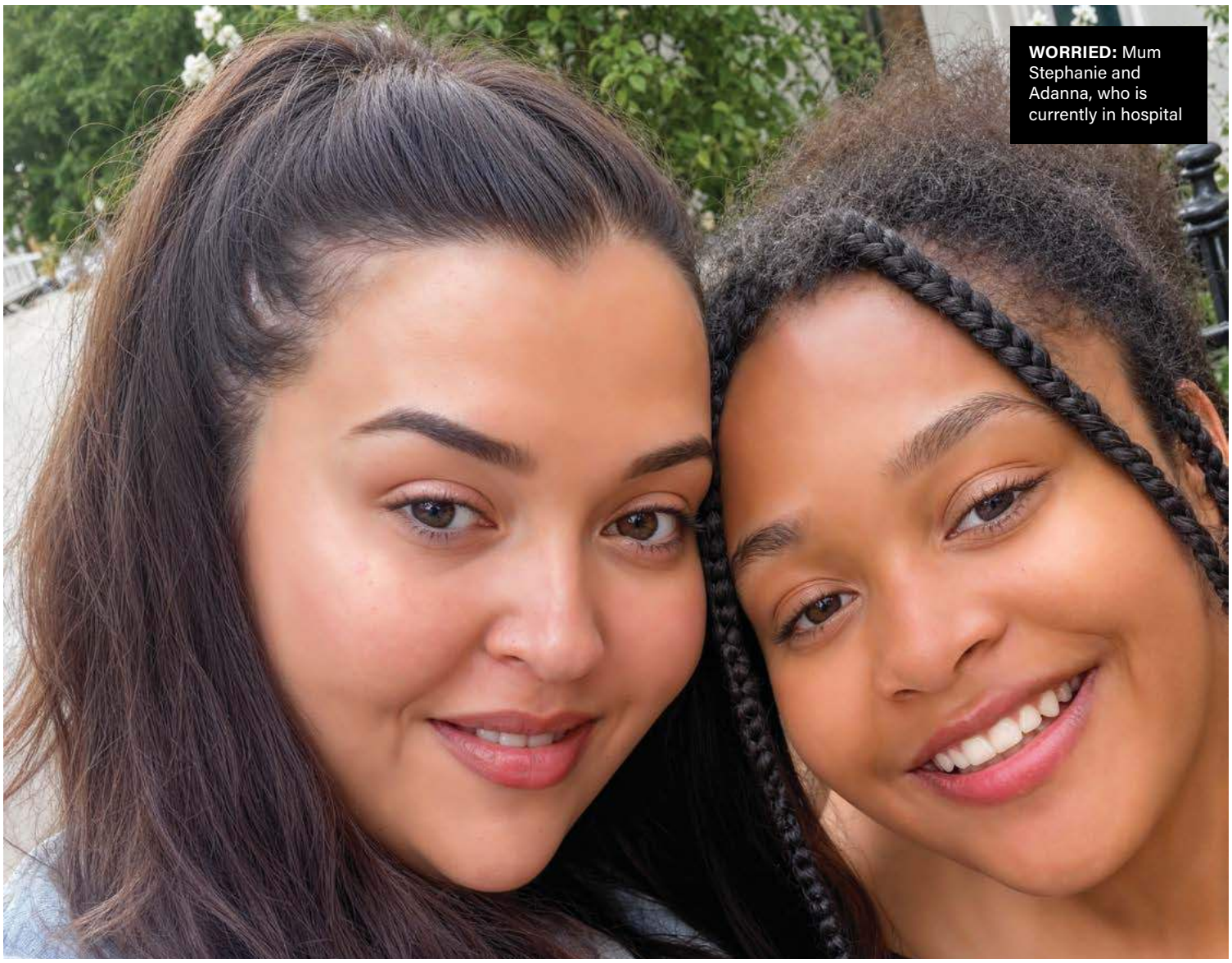
More than half of our homes were built over 100 years ago. The council owns around 33,000 homes, many of which have solid walls, ageing heating systems and other features that make improvements more complex and expensive.

The estimated cost of fully retrofitting the council's housing stock is close to a billion pounds. Having spent much of my career working in local government and on housing, I know the scale of the challenge facing councils. They cannot do this alone. We need government, housing providers, landlords and communities working together, with the investment to match the ambition.

Tackling the climate emergency should also mean tackling fuel poverty, improving housing conditions and making sure that where you live, or what you earn, does not determine how exposed you are to the climate crisis.



girl from the inside'



WORRIED: Mum Stephanie and Adanna, who is currently in hospital

basement air, poor transverse cross-ventilation, defective kitchen extraction facilities, and deep-seated surface dust reservoirs requiring thorough remediation.

"Because fungal spores are ubiquitous in the outdoor environment, poorly ventilated sub-grade properties naturally trap, concentrate, and recirculate air-borne bio-particulates over time." Tests revealed fungal spores including aspergillus in the flat.

They also found "critical" levels of PM5.0 particles (which are less than a tenth of the width of a human hair and include fungal spores) in Adanna's bedroom, where it was "more than double the chronic health risk threshold". Nationally, the number of properties with problem damp fell until 2011, according to the English Housing Survey, but has risen since 2019 and is particularly bad in properties with inadequate ventilation.

Another cause is increased heating costs – a "known driver of serious condensation". The problem is worst in rented homes, with 10% of properties affected.

Stop trapping toxic air in the homes and lungs of our children



BY **ROGER MARTIN**
MD of SAFE AIR QUALITY

THE UK's damp and mould crisis is worsening, not improving.

While tragedies and scandals like Stephanie's in Hackney have prompted reactive political scrutiny, the root problem is quietly expanding. Millions of tenants live in damp conditions, and current government guidelines are actively engineering the next public health failure.

Consider this double standard: roughly 1–2% of the UK population suffers from a severe nut allergy. In response, strict statutory regulations enforce bold "May Contain Nuts" warnings across menus and supermarkets.

Yet a comparable proportion of the population is vulnerable to severe aspergillus mould spore sensitisation – with potentially fatal respiratory consequences – yet property markets require zero biological disclosure.

We would never allow a restaurant to hide lethal allergens behind a coat of paint, yet we allow landlords and sellers to do it with airborne pathogens every day.

Ventilation

This crisis is confirmed by data. Across more than 3,000 UK indoor environmental surveys, the pattern reflects evidence I have presented to Public Health England: that government drives toward building airtightness in a bid to cut carbon emissions have systematically sacrificed essential passive ventilation sources.

Draught-proofing and insulating older housing stock without continuous mechanical airflow turns homes into unvented incubators.

Moisture from ordinary living – cooking, washing, breathing – has nowhere to go, condensing on to cold structural spots where aspergillus and toxic moulds colonise within days.

Why does it persist? Landlords still deploy £50 fungicidal washes to mask symptoms for inspection, while defaulting to blaming "tenant lifestyle" instead of buildings failure. Meanwhile, maintenance teams lack basic building-physics training to diagnose root causes.

Sealing up homes while ignoring air dynamics hasn't solved our problems, it has merely boosted the sales of steroid inhalers. Until housing policy mandates engineered ventilation alongside insulation, we are simply spending billions to trap toxic air inside people's lungs.



LONDON'S



EXCLUSIVE

BY **NICK SOMMERLAD**

CHILDREN suffering from heat exhaustion lay on the floor of the staffroom – the only room with air-conditioning – during recent heatwaves at one London school.

It's one of 1,300 locations that City Hall says are in high heat-risk areas and therefore vulnerable as the capital faces more frequent and intense periods of extreme heat.

A worker at the Victorian-era South London school told us of the toll that repeated heatwaves have taken on children and staff.

Early years practitioner and GMB union rep Emma Fair, who now works at the school she attended as a child in the 1980s, says staff at Sherington Primary School in Charlton, south-east London, do their best to care for children in extreme heat.

Emma, pictured below, said: "It's an old school Victorian building, 120 years old. There are these big high windows, no insulation.

"It's freezing in winter – it takes until Wednesday, normally, for the building to warm back up after the weekend. But in a heatwave it is unbearable.

"We had one air-conditioning unit in the staff room. We were having to take children in there as they were getting poorly in the day and needed to be properly cooled down."

Vulnerable

She added: "We sent maybe 100 children home at one point, around one in five.

"In some of the classrooms the blinds don't work so we don't even have that to try to deflect the heat.

"We got some fans but they were just desktop ones – one per classroom with 30 children. When it gets to a certain temperature, they can't go outside. Playtime can't happen.

"In my early years class, they are younger and more vulnerable as they can't regulate themselves. I wish I had a photo to show you. The children were just lying there.

"They weren't playing. Teaching had stopped. We were just there to hold them until their parents could pick them up. You couldn't expect anyone to learn in that."



Emma wants the Department for Education to intervene: "We are so ill-prepared. They know the world is changing.

"Nothing has changed at my school since the first 40C heatwave we had in 2022. It can't be down to the school to sort this out. Schools don't have money to do that. I think a task force is needed to make sure our schools are fit for the future."

A Greenwich Council spokesperson said: "We recognise the pressures that prolonged periods of extreme heat place on school buildings, many of which were not designed to operate comfortably in such conditions.

"We will support schools in implementing practical measures to manage hot weather and advocate for the national investment and policy changes that may be required to ensure school buildings are fit for the future."

Emma's GMB union polled more than 4,500 school support staff in September 2026, including teaching assistants, catering staff, caretakers and admin workers, and more than nine in 10 said their school became "uncomfortably hot this summer".

Nearly three in four reported that the temperatures in classrooms exceeded 30C and nearly half said their school, or part of it, had to close due to the heat. Stacey Booth, GMB National Officer, said: "Rocketing temperatures every summer are making our schools unbearable. Our members are desperate – they see pupils taken to hospital and colleagues collapsing during the extreme heat.

"As we face hotter summers due to climate change, we must address this problem, through insulating old school

THE CASE FOR TREES: URBAN FORESTRY

AS we grapple with extreme weather events and growing concern about the consequence for public health, there is a nature-based solution right in front of us: trees.

Urban trees remain one of our most powerful allies, making our towns and cities not just leafier, but more liveable. Trees are among the most effective and affordable infrastructure to help our cities adapt to a changing climate.

They cool neighbourhoods, improve air quality, reduce flood risk, support wildlife and create healthier places for people to live, work and spend time. Yet despite their blatant superpowers, too many communities still lack access to the benefits that trees provide.

At Trees for Cities, we work with local authorities, schools, community groups and businesses to plant and care for trees in urban areas where they are needed most.

We see first-hand the difference that trees make. Streets become cooler, offering a refuge from the sun. School grounds become greener and give children a chance to connect with nature. Communities come together around a shared sense of pride and stewardship.

The evidence is clear. Trees lower air temperatures through shading and evapotranspiration, helping to reduce the urban heat island effect that makes cities significantly hotter than surrounding areas. They filter harmful pollutants from the air, helping to improve respiratory health. Access to green spaces is consistently linked to improved mental wellbeing, reduced stress and increased physical activity.



BY **KATE SHELDON**
CEO TREES FOR CITIES

Importantly, the public understands this. Recent polling in London found that 87% of people believe tree planting and increasing tree diversity is important, with nearly half (47%) saying it is very important.

In a time when public debate can often seem divided, this is a remarkably strong consensus. People recognise that trees are not a luxury. They are essential for healthy, resilient communities.

As the threats of a rapidly changing climate increase, we need to adapt the ways in which we plant, establish and care for urban



HOSED: Children in 1976



BURNING

OVERHEATING: Thermal image of London's skyline

IS A POWERFUL ALLY

trees. At the start of a new tree-planting season and with the risk of an even hotter El Nino summer next year, we are focusing our efforts on careful species selection to increase genetic diversity, innovating our approach to tree care by mobilising communities as tree champions, and targeting where we plant to maximise the impact for vulnerable communities.

Because successful urban forestry isn't measured by how many trees we plant, but by how many survive and thrive to benefit communities for decades to come.

This is why we are calling for greater investment in urban forestry and, crucially, tree establishment and maintenance. We need long-term commitment to creating greener, more equitable towns and cities so everybody can enjoy nature close to home.

The decisions made today by policymakers, local authorities, businesses and communities will shape how well we adapt to the climate and public health challenges of the coming decades.

Trees are not a silver bullet, but they are one of the smartest investments we can make. That's why we're proud to be working alongside the Greater London Authority, RBG Kew, Camden Council and other partners through a new Tree Equity & Urban Resilience Project, bringing trees to the heart of Camden.

■ ***More information at www.treesforcities.org***



buildings, sympathetic management and maximum working temperatures."

London is more exposed to the risk of heat than anywhere else in the UK. This year the capital experienced a new all-time May record temperature of 35.1C.

The infamous summer of 1976 is now only the seventh hottest – six hotter summers have all happened since 2003, the most recent two were the hottest ones yet.

Temperatures broke 40C for the first time in UK history in 2022, when the Met Office issued its first ever Red Extreme Heat Warning. City Hall's "Heat Ready London" report earlier this year found that one million London homes may be at high risk of overheating, with 60 hospitals and 351 care homes located in high heat-risk areas.

The report called for "protection of those at highest risk of extreme heat, retrofitting of buildings, expanded access to cooling spaces and improved infrastructure resilience".

School heat hacks that really work



BY **DAISY CLAGUE**

A COALITION of parents, teachers and council staff in north London are taking heat adaptation into their own hands before soaring temperatures cut school days short again next summer.

Five consecutive heatwaves between May and August brought temperatures of more than 40C in some classrooms, and hundreds of schools sent pupils home.

At one academy in Islington, National Education Union representatives investigated claims that a pregnant teacher was among those made to participate in a playground "line-up" in 32C heat, while anecdotes from other schools include pupils forced to keep thick blazers on all day and overheating rooftop water tanks turning tap water warm.

With no legally defined maximum classroom temperature, individual schools must decide how to meet the challenge – and now parents are joining the race against time to adapt school environments over the winter.

Last week, nearly 30 schools and nurseries in Islington joined council staff and parents for an inaugural workshop into practical ways to build heat-resilient learning environments.

Significant

"Heatwave risks are here to stay – we will have to deal with this issue for the rest of our lives," said Julien Etienne, a volunteer at Islington Clean Air Parents, which organised the workshop with Islington Council and the Islington Climate Centre.

Experts from Shade the UK, ARUP, the Greater London Authority and the Climate Change Committee also took part.

"We're not ruling out air conditioning, but it is expensive to run and to install. There are many other things you can do at lower cost that make a significant difference, some of which are technical, while others are more about organisation," said Mr Etienne.

Awnings and sails over playgrounds, tree-planting, shutters, night-time ventilation, light-reflecting paint, green roofs, ceiling fans, school days that start and finish earlier – these are all low-cost solutions.

The point of the workshop is to kickstart a localised "community of practice" between schools, parents and the council.

"You need people to speak to each other. The point is to really open the perspective of the council and the schools to the variety of things that can be done," Mr Etienne added.

And while this particular heat-adaptation network is in Islington, the organisers are not in the business of gatekeeping.

Director of Islington Climate Centre Anna Hyde, told Babelfish: "If you are a school leader or a parent in another borough, contact us and you can use our materials. You can take what we've started and adapt it for your borough or your school. We can connect people and we can share resources. We have to be wiser, and we've got to pull together."

BY **GARY JONES**

Air pollution killed her legacy is saving

LIKE any mother, Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah wants the very best for her children.

For her three daughters to change things for the better, to make their mark in the world.

You can see in Rosamund's beautiful wide smile, her sheer delight when she speaks of her eldest child Ella and how she has achieved global recognition.

Only Ella died 13 years ago.

The first person in the world to have air pollution listed as a cause of death – Ella is today the campaigning champion for the basic, human necessity of clean air.

Pride written large all over Rosamund's face, she says: "Ella is contributing today to society. She didn't die in vain. She's ended up saving millions of lives around the globe because her story has gone so far and wide.

"Her death was preventable. If Ulez (Ultra Low Emission Zone) had been brought in earlier her asthma might not have been so severe and she would have lived."

The only time of the year when Rosamund, a former teacher and head of sixth form, steps back from her campaigning mission on behalf of Ella is at Christmas and in the run-up to her birthday. She would have turned 23 on 24 January next year.

"There is always an empty seat for her at the table on Christmas Day," said Rosamund, who also has twin daughters now aged 19. "I have had to learn to live with it.

"Talking about her makes it better. Through her death she is achieving so much. Cleaner air and changes in asthma care. I have had someone in India thanking me for all my campaigning work. It is unbelievable."

Ella was first admitted to hospital in 2010 after a coughing fit and had to be placed in a medically induced coma for three days to stabilise her condition.

Horrifying

Just two years later she was classified as disabled and her mother often had to carry her on her own back to get around.

"It was a horrifying situation," said Rosamund. "When Ella was rushed into hospital, a lot of the time she was barely breathing. It was an emergency, cardiac arrest."

In her short life, Ella, who lived 25 metres from the heavily congested South Circular Road in Lewisham, south-east London, was admitted to hospital 27 times in the three years leading up to her death. She died aged nine, in the early hours of 15 February 2013 following a severe asthma attack.

The first inquest the following year made no mention of air pollution, with the coroner ruling that Ella had died of acute respiratory failure caused by severe asthma. The verdict was quashed in 2019 and a new inquest ordered after lawyers for the family presented evidence to the Attorney General from Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, one of the UK's leading experts on air pollution.

After a two-week hearing, Coroner Philip Barlow ruled that illegal levels of traffic pollution had made a material contribution to Ella's fatal asthma attack.

He said the levels of nitrogen oxide near her home had exceeded World Health Organisation and European Union guidelines.

Rosamund said: "I wanted justice for Ella, and for her to have on her death certificate the true cause of why she died."

For most, a hard-won legal battle to gain recognition for how a loved one really died would be enough. But not for Rosamund. She says: "When we left court I was told that 'you can walk away now, you've set out what you wanted to achieve. You don't have to continue.' But I am not going to stop – I want to hold the government of the day accountable.





MISSION: Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, above and, right, taking her battle to court

"I very much want a public health campaign to be launched which the coroner at Ella's inquest insisted on. Six years on we haven't had it. There needs to be a better understanding of our exposure to emissions.

"Air pollution was so bad that the London Mayor Sadiq Khan recently issued an alarming warning. That shows how precarious things are. Air pollution is invisible but it is a killer.

"Things have improved but it is still impacting health.

"We now know more than we ever did and between 2019 and 2024 there have been 54 deaths of children due to asthma linked to air pollution. We never talk about these children. It is absolutely terrible."

There are government estimates that the number of people killed by long-term exposure to air pollution in the UK could be as high as 30,000 a year.

"Next year it is going to be a degree hotter which will make the situation even worse," said Rosamund, who highlights the one million children suffering from asthma in Britain.

"Air pollution in the UK costs the economy and the NHS over £27billion a year and, accounting for the dementia [identified by Alzheimer's Society as increasing long-term risk], and economic impact you are talking about £56bn. It is costing us dearly. People now understand the link between air pollution and respiratory conditions – and that pollution impacts every organ in the body.

"People need to know it causes heart disease, puts pregnant mothers at risk, lowers sperm count, causes premature births as well as some cancers, with 30% of lung cancer down to air pollution. Air pollution affects us from the cradle to the grave.

"I have struggled to get this on the agenda. There's a disconnect, but I won't stop until all the dots have been joined. The issues are staring us right in the face.

"There are more than a 100,000 diesel vans in London. The opportunity to electrify a greater number of these vehicles must be seized. There needs to be more incentives to move to electrification."

Rosamund's passion and commitment to helping others avoid the same fate as Ella received official recognition when she was awarded a CBE three years ago by King Charles. Rosamund also serves as a World Health Organisation BreatheLife Ambassador.

Memories of Ella are her incredible driving force and energy. Rosamund fondly remembers Ella's dream of joining the RAF to become a pilot. Rosamund set up in memory of Ella a foundation in her name, and has now set "Ella's Law" firmly in her sights – legislation that would establish clean air as a human right.

"The government needs to take this issue more seriously," said Rosamund.

"Clean air is a human right. Legislation is the key. I feel so strongly about this campaign. I fight for all the children.

"Losing a child is devastating, it cuts across everything, whether you are rich or poor and whatever the colour of your skin. We have a long way to go. Ella's Law is something to aim for. I am going to make it happen for Ella."



CONSTANT BATTLE TO CUT

EXCLUSIVE

BY **NICK SOMMERLAD**

NO LONDON neighbourhoods met the World Health Organisation's target for fine-particle pollution last year, an investigation by Babelfish has found.

But almost all parts of the capital do meet the UK's less stringent target for what is called "PM2.5" pollution – which is set at double the WHO level – except for some central neighbourhoods in Camden, Islington and Westminster.

Measures such as Ulez – the world's largest and most ambitious clean-air zone – have helped cut pollution by around a third in five years.

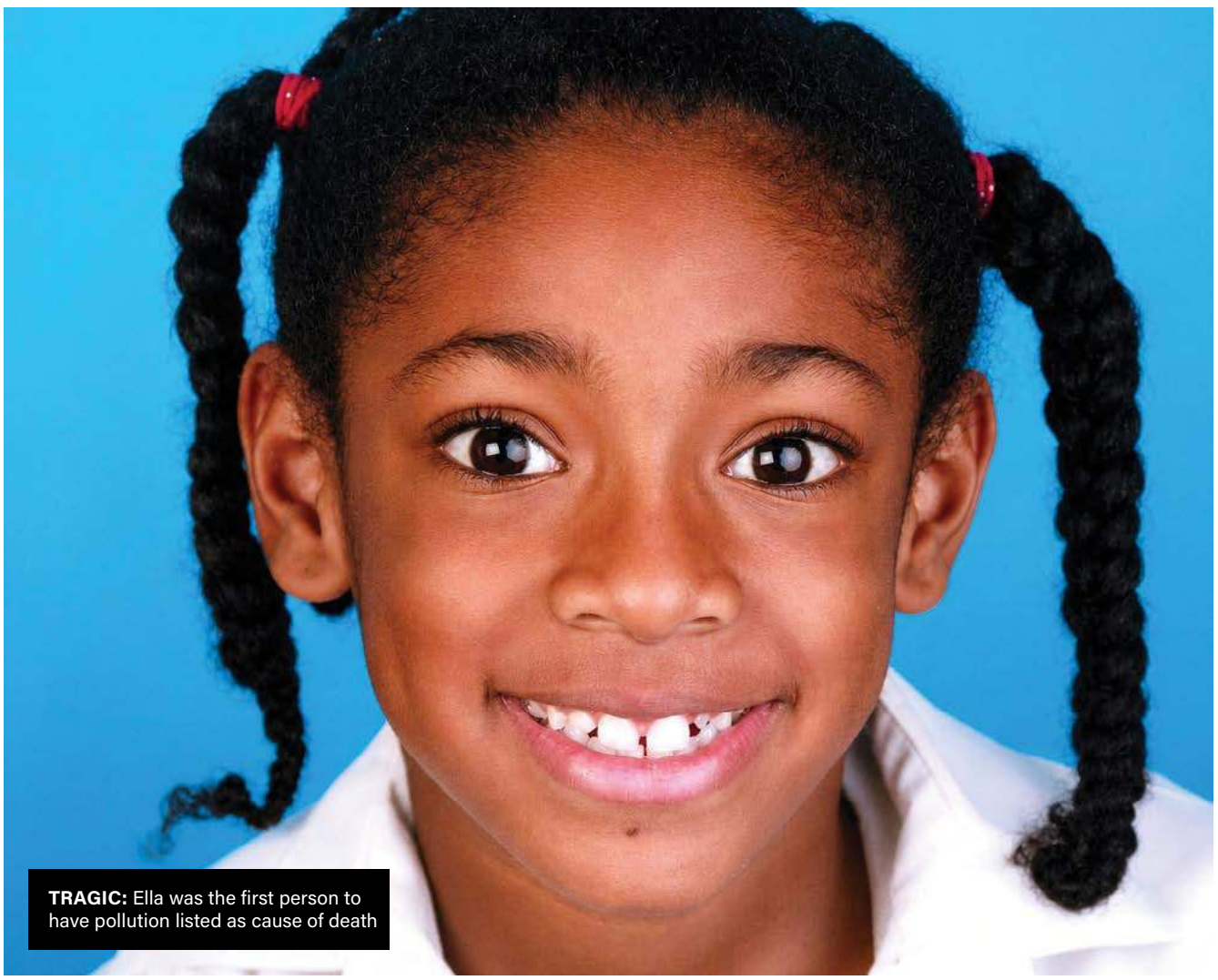
London's Ulez was first introduced in 2019 by Mayor Sadiq Khan in a bid to "clean up London's air".

One study found that deaths related to air pollution are down 40% over that time, while another found evidence of recovery in the lungs of London's children. There are separate guidelines for nitrogen dioxide (NO2) pollution.

Our analysis of the latest average annual pollution-monitoring data from Defra has found that all parts of London met the UK's target for NO2 – 40 micrograms per cubic metre – last year.

But we found that just 33 out of 1,002 London neighbourhoods monitored by Defra last year met the WHO guideline for

my beloved Ella, millions of lives



TRAGIC: Ella was the first person to have pollution listed as cause of death

TOXIC FUMES CHOKING OUR CITIES

NO2 – set at 10 micrograms. The WHO has lowered targets for air pollution to try to curb the millions of deaths it causes globally every year.

London's cleanest air was in the south east of the city, around Bromley and Croydon.

The three worst neighbourhoods for NO2 pollution in London were all in Camden, covering the area from Kings Cross to Holborn.

The next worst were in Westminster and Islington, with another hotspot around Heathrow.

Ten neighbourhoods, all in Camden, Islington and Westminster, failed to meet the UK's target on PM2.5 pollution – this measures tiny particulate matter 30 times smaller than the width of a human hair which can be inhaled deep into the lungs.

Dr Helen Wood, a research fellow at Queen Mary University London, said: "I think the WHO guidelines are important because it's been established that really there is no safe level for fine particulate matter."

She was part of the team behind a landmark study of more than 3,400 children in London and Luton, Bedfordshire – finding that "improvements in air quality helped restore lung growth previously stunted by exposure to air pollution".

Luton was chosen as a "control" site as it had similar traffic pollutants to the capital but no clean air zone. Initial measurements taken before Ulez was introduced showed that children in London had "significantly smaller lungs" compared with those in nearby Luton.

Over five annual tests, the proportion of children with clinically impaired lung function fell from 14% to 9% in London, compared with a fall from 9% to 7% in Luton.

Helen said: "Ulez is the largest clean-air zone geographically as well as in terms of population and it is the strictest."

She added: "London was in a very bad place in terms of pollution but Ulez is a step change."

Vulnerable 'at risk' as mouldy homes sold to rich investors

BUSINESSMEN are reaping rich rewards from selling rat-infested properties riddled with black mould to investors based hundreds of miles away.

The flats sold at a lucrative profit are marketed as a government-funded source of income for investors in which vulnerable tenants are cared for.

But housing charities and experts claim homes in London and across the UK have been transformed into a profit-generating machine at the expense of some tenants' safety, care and dignity.

Labour MP Abena Oppong-Asara, who chairs the Housing Select Committee, said it was "outrageous" that supported housing properties were being marketed as investments "where there's public investments involved".

She was responding to the exposé by the BBC of more than 40 companies involved in marketing properties to individuals in the UK and also abroad.

The web of companies providing housing for those in real and genuine need causes serious problems for tenants trying to resolve issues within properties.

One tenant called Mo, who has mental health issues, was housed in a studio flat in Cricklewood, north London, after he became homeless. The converted house containing his flat was bought by a company run by French nationals living in the Czech Republic, for over £1.8million last year.



OUTRAGEOUS: Black mould is common in housing marketed for mental health patients

He says his housing provider, Windrush Alliance, receives nearly £2,000 a month via Barnet Council for the flat. Mo receives £340 in universal credit for living expenses every month from which he is expected to pay Windrush a monthly £120 service charge.

Last year the ceiling of Mo's flat collapsed after a leak which was not repaired for over a year. He was temporarily housed in another flat in the same property. Windrush said it was aware of the problems and was "working with the owner to put them right".

Windrush has faced criticism in the past over its "failure to meet the standards" of the regulator, including to ensure "tenants are safe in their homes".

Another tenant called Phil lives in a flat in Runcorn, Cheshire, which was sold to a Czech investor last year for £163,150, more than double the £75,000 cost of similar apartments in Castleview House.

"This building is hell on earth," said Phil, whose flat was marketed for people with mental health issues who receive the "aftercare programme pursuant to Section 117 of the Mental Health Act", meaning they have been sectioned and discharged from hospital with a care plan. Phil says he has not been sectioned, but he does suffer from severe depression and anxiety.

Phil said: "Whoever marketed this property, the way they've worked is total dishonesty. If they're looking to make as much profit as they can, then they clearly have no plans to fix the issues in the building."

The owner of the property company behind the sale said his flats provide "good quality accommodation".

FAST FOOD TIMEBOMB

Concern over takeaways near schools fuelling child obesity



CAMDEN has the highest concentration of fast-food outlets in England – and the average school in the borough has 12 of them within 400m, Babelfish has found.

Half of English councils with the most takeaways by population are in London, where nearly a quarter of children leaving primary school are obese.

That Camden, a world famous tourist and shopping destination, has the most takeaways in London is perhaps not surprising.

But the Obesity Health Alliance said that our investigation revealing that every Camden school had a fast-food outlet within 400m was "deeply concerning".

Official data from the Department of Health's Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) last year found Camden had 417 takeaways per 100,000 people. That rate had doubled since it was last measured in 2017.

Westminster was next with 248 and there were three more London councils – Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Hackney – in the country's top ten.

Babelfish has repeated that research, which is based on certain types of businesses registered with the Food Standards Authority's hygiene rating scheme.

OHID defined fast food as "energy dense and available quickly, usually via a counter service, and for consumption on or off the premises". Their data "covers a range of outlets selling foods including, but not limited to: burgers, pizza, kebabs, chicken, Indian takeaway, Chinese takeaway, fish and chips".

Convenient

We found that Camden now has 978 fast-food outlets, according to OHID's definition, up from 922 in 2024, and mapped them in relation to nearby schools.

All Camden's 87 schools have them within 400m – which is the distance used by planners in efforts to limit new outlets. The average (median) distance from a takeaway to a Camden school is 204m – compared with 271m across London.

Katharine Jenner, Executive Director of the Obesity Health Alliance, said: "These findings are deeply concerning. When every school in Camden has a fast-food outlet within a short walk, we have to question whether we're doing enough to protect children's health.

"Children are growing up surrounded by unhealthy food that is cheap, convenient and readily available. While the National Planning Policy Framework encourages local authorities to restrict new hot-food takeaways near schools and in areas already saturated with them, it does little to address the hundreds of existing fast-food outlets."

The 2021 London Plan restricts new fast-food outlets within 400m of the entrances of primary and secondary schools, though Camden told us the rules can prove difficult to enforce in some circumstances. We found one Camden primary school with 192 of them within just 400m – likely to be a UK record but arguably an unusual case as it is extremely close to Camden Market and Camden High Street.

The four London schools at the top of our list were all in Camden, a mix of independent and state primary schools. Looking at state secondary schools, we found one in Southwark within 400m of 65 fast-food outlets.

Camden Council said its new Local Plan would strengthen efforts to resist hot-food takeaways near schools and prevent further increases in outlets. The council supports caterers offering healthier options.

A Camden Council spokesperson said: "Camden is a world-famous tourist destination, attracting visitors to our markets, music venues, theatres and nightlife, and we know that many of these visitors will buy food and drink while spending time in the borough.

"Our residents are actively supported to access healthy food options that offer a balanced diet.

"There are a wide range of community food projects and food-growing initiatives across Camden, and we work closely with our schools and partners to promote healthy eating and healthier lifestyles among our children and young people."

Cllr James Slater, Cabinet Member for Planning, said: "Rising cases of obesity remain a significant public health concern, and we are working hard to address this at a local level and to support our children and young people to live healthier lives.

"This includes using the planning system where we can to minimise the health impacts of new food outlets."

And he added: "Our planning policies include strict criteria for new fast-food outlets near schools and our new Local Plan will go further, strengthening these policies and giving more control over hot food takeaways – resisting them where they are close to schools and preventing an increase above the existing number of outlets."



EXCLUSIVE

BY **NICK SOMMERLAD**

SUCCESS ON



BY **DAN CARRIER**

ENCOURAGING a healthy diet is a cornerstone of secondary education at Acland Burghley school, the Tufnell Park comprehensive where, for a decade, they have been pro-active in tackling poor diets.

The school lobbied Camden Council 10 years ago to limit the number of fast-food shops that could open near them. With a number of cafes including fried chicken and chips nearby, they called for changes in planning laws to limit how many takeaways could open near school gates.

Their work to encourage better eating is fundamental to how they manage a school day.

"We do not let the children out at lunch time," says head of school Martha Collins.

"We made that decision 10 years ago. We were not happy with what was being offered outside, and what was affordable was not going to be healthy.

"We wanted to create a culture of sitting down to eat together, a place students can talk to their peers. Teachers join them each day and we consider the social aspect of communal eating that you just do not get from grabbing a takeaway." Swapping chicken and



A PLATE FOR CITY PUPILS



HEALTHY MENUS: Head Martha Collins

chips cooked off premises for something similar in the canteen would not help develop healthy habits, Ms Collins reflects – so the school reviewed their menus.

"We looked at what we were offering – we did not want food to be 'grab and go'. This discouraged pupils to sit and eat together – and there was an environmental cost with the packaging it created."

The school's food providers come from a central contract with Camden Council, but the school has control over what is served. "We have worked hard with food provider Caterlink," she adds. "We make sure it is nutritious and balanced." This includes a free salad bar and giving children input into the menus.

"We are sent menus and we discuss the content and variety, we look at how often they offer red meat, vegetarian and vegan options and a mix of carbohydrates.

"We go through what is on offer with pupils and ask for changes if needed. It means the children have ownership of the menu."

Talking about food choices is a vital part of the day.

Cultural

"We do have a problem in the mornings with children going to sweet shops on their way in," she states.

"That does not set you up well, so we discuss that within assemblies."

The school has a cooking club and also a food growing project, and it re-introduced food technology to the curriculum three years ago.

It is a cross-curricular approach. For example, they include Spanish and French cooking classes, giving children a richer cultural experience alongside the opportunity to speak European languages in a different setting to the classroom.

"We teach knife skills – and we should not be afraid of doing hands-on lessons like this," she adds.

"You are more likely to cook at home if you have had these experiences."

Choose what we chew and make a difference

BY **DALE VINCE**
GREEN INDUSTRIALIST

SOMETHING to chew on: your diet, the things you choose to eat every day, is probably killing you. Will likely give you a shorter, less healthy life. Is driving the climate crisis and is the single biggest cause of the global wildlife crisis – the sixth great extinction on our planet. That's unless you're plant based – aka vegan.

While these issues are individually awful they are collectively catastrophic and the scary part is not the list of them here – it's the fact that this is true.

Britain's newest crisis, while not caused by our diets, is made worse by them.

We face historic low levels of water while the animal agriculture industry uses 25% of all the water we have. It takes an incredible 1,000 litres of water to make just one litre of



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Dale Vince urges people to ditch dairy and meat products

cow's milk. Or 50 litres of water for one litre of oat milk. The problem in our diets is animal products, meat and dairy – they are toxic to us, to the climate and to wildlife.

If we simply choose differently, we make all the difference in the world. Starting with just one meal a week, dropping meat and dairy makes a big difference.

If all Britons were plant-based we could give half our entire country back to nature, make a massive reduction in our climate emissions, live longer healthier lives, have cleaner rivers, land and air.

And solve our water crisis. All we have to do is choose what we chew – more wisely.

The link to global conflict is real and cannot be ignored



DESPERATE MEASURES: Due to the conflict and a fuel and food blockade by a Saudi-led coalition, a family is forced to leave Taizz in Yemen with belongings – and children – on the car roof

THE climate movement suffered a major setback at this month's COP summit – a total lack of agreement that threatens a future of rising seas and impossible temperatures.



By **ANDREW GILMOUR**
FORMER UN REPRESENTATIVE

Coupled with that is another risk: the increase of climate-related conflict that is often under-reported and under-played.

Ranked the "worst ever" COP, this year's summit in Turkey has left many disheartened.

Before it even began it had been labelled the "overshoot summit", because it was the first COP since the UN's assessment that the world is heading beyond the Paris Agreement's limit of 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

I was in Paris at that 2015 summit and I remember the excitement. Even though many feared that a limit of 1.5C didn't go far enough, at least there was agreement on the way forward. We now know the rise will be considerably higher, and with no agreement.

Eleven years on, it's hard to believe the United States is in the second term of a Hoaxer-in-Chief who ridicules climate science and boycotts climate summits, and that Saudi Arabia and Russia would succeed in blocking any reference at all to the need for a transition away from fossil fuels.

Yes, the denialists seem to be winning right now, and much of our press is pumping out disinformation. Climate denialism has shifted from baldly claiming that global heating is not happening, to saying there is little we can do, so why bother to try, given net zero's alleged economic disadvantages for Britain.

But it is essential that the climate movement, together with a wide coalition of environmental and human rights groups, does not lose heart and roll over in frustration.

Or, just as importantly, not become more "extreme" in our analysis, recommendations and tactics, and thereby both alienate the middle ground and benefit the far right. But we also need to recognise that the climate crisis is linked to other global developments: the rise in conflict and a worldwide push-back against human rights and international law.

One little-covered aspect of climate change is how connected it is to conflict. There are estimated to be more ongoing armed conflicts now than at any time since 1945. Some of the biggest (Russia's invasion of Ukraine; Israel in Gaza and Lebanon; the US-Israeli war on Iran) have causes unrelated to climate, but they all contribute to emissions and to a harsher diplomatic atmosphere within which climate measures, and so much else, fail.

But the contemporary conflict that has caused the most casualties – the one ravaging Sudan – is intimately connected to climate, as are those in Mali, Somalia and Yemen.

Drought and desertification have increased competition for ever-dwindling water supplies and fertile land. Nomadic pastoralists have come into conflict with farmers, as they feel forced to bring their herds of camels, cattle and goats on to tilled farmland.

Few now deny the increasing salience of climate stress as a factor in exacerbating and prolonging conflict.

In 2023, the head of the CIA declared that climate change is the quintessential 'threat multiplier' – fuelling energy, health, water and food insecurities, setting back progress on economic and human development, "turbocharging what is already the worst period of forced displacement and migration in history, and further exacerbating instability and geopolitical tensions and flash points".

Since taking over as Foreign Secretary, Ed Miliband has shone a light on some of these matters. So has Prime Minister Andy Burnham, who at COP31 described climate change as a security issue.

Appointing the world's first Special Representative for Climate Security, the UK is underlining that climate change is already disrupting food systems and undermining energy security, as set out in the leaked Joint Intelligence Committee assessment this year.

What is even more rarely talked about, though, is that it is not just climate change itself that is a growing driver of conflict. It is the actions we take to mitigate it. In the richer countries of the global north, the whole set of issues relating to "net zero wokeness" and the "climate hoax" is being used in culture wars to divide societies and electorates. Both the Conservatives and Reform are gearing up to make this a major issue at the next UK general election.

> **"As the world is weaned off oil, some countries will face curtailed revenues**
>
> **On the dangers to come**

So far, this has remained largely non-violent, although the gilets jaunes (yellow vests) protests in France in 2018 – whipped up by the belief that "metropolitan elites" were discriminating against rural voters by raising fuel taxes to reduce carbon emissions – shows how conflict can develop.

A far more serious threat to peace and stability is likely to come from countries that overwhelmingly depend on oil revenues for their budgets, security and social services.

Iraq, Libya and Nigeria are three examples. As the world is gradually weaned off oil and into renewable energy, countries such as these will find their once assured revenue is curtailed. There is a pressing need for oil-producing states to diversify their economies, otherwise extremist movements such as Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and Islamic State will profit from the resulting deprivation and lawlessness.

So climate change poses a triple threat to security. First, there's the direct threat to peace and development. Second, the actions we take to combat climate change are also serving to fuel conflict. Third – and probably hottest of all – there is climate migration.

It seems almost inevitable that tens of millions of people will feel compelled to leave their homes because their lands are uninhabitable as a result of floods, droughts, heat waves, and rising seas. These climate refugees are being forced to move not through any misdeeds of their own countries, but because of greenhouse gas emissions caused by far more developed countries that bring misery to them.

There are thus two major trends likely to intensify. On the one hand, we see within richer societies a militant growing reluctance to accept refugees and migrants. On the other, potentially vast numbers in poorer societies will be forced to leave their homelands for more temperate climes.

There are no easy solutions. The last thing progressives should want is to hand Europe's far-right movements the gift of "waves" (as they call it) of refugees to whip up hatred against. But the refusal by today's political leaders to even debate these issues, let alone to start preparing their societies for what's coming, will be viewed by future generations as a failure of unforgivable proportions.