

London Rewilding Taskforce: Meeting of 20 April 2022

Chair:	Shirley Rodrigues, GLA, Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy
Vice Chairs:	Nicky Gavron, London Recovery Board, Board Member – Environment; Ben Goldsmith, Defra, Non-Executive Board Member; Menhaden Capital Management LLP, CEO
Members:	Pamela Abbott, Citizen Zoo, Non-Executive Director Cllr. Ian Barnes, London Borough of Enfield, Deputy Leader of Enfield Council Liz Bonnin, The Wildlife Trusts, President; Natural History & Environmental Broadcaster Nick Bruce-White, RSPB, Operations Director – South England Alastair Driver, Rewilding Britain, Director Mathew Frith, London Wildlife Trust, Director of Research and Policy Ruth Holmes, London Legacy Development Corporation, Head of Landscape Stefania Horne, City of London Corporation, Superintendent for Hampstead Heath and North London Kabir Kaul, Young Conservationist Isabella Tree, Knepp Castle Estate, Conservationist and Author John Tweddle, Natural History Museum, Head of Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity
Attendees & Observers:	Peter Massini, Director, Future Nature Consulting Sachin Bhoite, Director of Climate Resilience, C40 Ben Smith, Director, Arup (working with C40)
GLA Officers	Andrew Jones, Head of Green Infrastructure, Environment Team Sam Davenport, Principal Policy Officer, Environment Team Kristiina Yang, Senior Policy and Programme Officer, Environment Team Asha Tomlin-Kent, Senior Policy and Programme Officer, Environment Team

Background

On 13th December 2021, The Mayor announced that he would establish a London Rewilding Taskforce as a short task and finish group to consider opportunities for ambitious, innovative projects to support nature recovery and biodiversity enhancement in London, while also bringing benefits to Londoners and tackling the climate and ecological emergency. This announcement was made in conjunction with the launch of a new £600,000 Rewild London Fund. Taskforce members were appointed in March 2022 and will work together to develop recommendations on opportunities for rewilding in London considered practical, sustainable, and aligned with broader nature conservation objectives. They will also help communicate what rewilding means in London to a broader public audience.

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Introduction and Terms of Reference: Members were welcomed by the Chair to the first meeting of the Taskforce and introduced themselves. Members and observers were asked to declare any interests, none of which were identified as posing any conflicts. The Chair reviewed the objectives and three main outputs of the Taskforce as set out in the Terms of Reference. No issues were raised by members.

Context-Setting Presentations and Discussion: Members were presented with the suggested principles of rewilding and applicability to the urban context by Alastair Driver of Rewilding Britain. He also covered information from recent research on rewilding projects around creation of jobs and volunteerism, species reintroductions, and UK funding and policy opportunities for

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rewilding. This was followed by a presentation on rewilding in the context of the Greater London Authority's nature recovery policy delivered by Peter Massini of Future Nature Consulting. He covered key points from a discussion paper that was issued to members ahead of the meeting, which provided context on London's historical and existing policies and programmes related to nature conservation and outlined several indicative locations in London for consideration of larger-scale rewilding projects.

Members then discussed their views on what rewilding means in the urban and London context, and what the focus areas of the Taskforce should be moving forward. Some of the key topics and issues raised by members, which are to be explored further, are summarised:

- Scale of rewilding in the urban context - Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land should be identified where it could provide core rewilding areas (large-scale) including areas outside the GLA boundary. These should be identified alongside stepping-stones (smaller-scale localised areas) and other 'micro-rewilding' interventions across London's urban and peri-urban fabric to form the framework for a London Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Rewilding as added value to current nature recovery approaches - Taking a rewilding approach must ensure that action is increased beyond existing levels of investment and activities to restore nature. This will require building on, and working with, the existing network of NGOs and parks/green spaces groups currently undertaking activities to enhance nature. It should amplify and complement existing efforts, rather than duplicate them.
- Rewilding management framework - A focus on rewilding creates an opportunity to develop a framework for individual, community, and collective action to support nature recovery, including through rewilding techniques and, where suitable, reintroducing species in an urban setting. The framework must consider risks associated with species reintroductions and rewilding management approaches. This can show public and private landowners that managing land for nature, including rewilding, can support broader societal objectives, such as social justice and improved health and wellbeing.
- Landownership as an underlying challenge - Adopting rewilding approaches must address the underlying challenge of effectively influencing and incentivising public and private landowners. For example, those who may be considering selling or developing their land. The scale of investment in nature recovery will require a pallet of existing and new approaches to funding for public bodies and private landowners.
- Communicating about Rewilding - In communicating about rewilding practices, there is a need to ensure rewilding is seen as an inherently long-term process rather than short-term action (i.e. 'rewilded' as the end point). Whilst rewilding can be a political driver for change, it can also a limiting factor, reflecting a cultural attachment to tidiness and protecting green spaces. Rewilding actions (such as allowing natural succession, tending areas less, felling trees and certain species reintroductions) can be viewed negatively if the intent and benefits are not well understood. There is also question around human activity and rewilding – with some viewing rewilding as making nature more accessible to communities and people, while others taking the view that human activity can hinder rewilding. A balance needs to be achieved over promoting and increasing access for people that doesn't detract from the principles of rewilding.
- Engaging Londoners in Rewilding - A rewilding engagement strategy must be strategic with defined outcomes while capturing Londoners' imagination. It must be inclusive and tailored to a range of demographic groups, including young people. It should clearly position rewilding in the context of broader climate and ecological challenges and urgent

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societal changes needed. It should be educational, relatable, and actionable, for example, indicating how those with a latent interest can rewild their gardens, pavements, window boxes. The power of the term 'rewilding' provides the opportunity for everyone to play a part. It must capitalise on the public recognition of the importance of natural and green spaces during the pandemic.

- **Bold leadership is required** - Rewilding projects will require strong leadership to convene and connect multiple bodies and stakeholders across boundaries to keep up momentum in the long term. Delivering rewilding will require working with surrounding counties, for example by contributing to the development of their Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Rewilding underlines the need to increase the level of ambition required to restore nature in the capital, and a move toward increasing connectivity and reducing fragmentation in existing land management and nature recovery approaches.

Call for Evidence: Members were presented information on (1) a written call for evidence with technical questions on rewilding to be completed by key partners and stakeholders; (2) a Talk London discussion group that will aim to capture public perceptions on rewilding in London, which will include a survey. These, along with other data and information provided by the GLA and by Taskforce members, will provide the evidence base to inform the Taskforce's discussions and recommendations. Submitted evidence will be compiled by GLA officers for the Taskforce ahead of their second and third meetings.

Work Programme: GLA officers noted follow up actions to this meeting and provided an overview of topics that would be covered in the second and third meetings of the Taskforce. During the second meeting, the Taskforce will discuss funding and policy relevant for rewilding in London to start shaping recommendations, and C40 may provide insight into examples of urban rewilding best practice. Members will also be given an update on responses to the written Call for Evidence and an interim update on public feedback from the Talk London discussion group. At the third meeting, the Taskforce will formulate their recommendations and consider how best to engage Londoners.

The actions from the meeting are as follows:

- GLA officers will circulate slides, minutes and a summary of the meeting. GLA officers will also share an updated work programme, the questions for the call for evidence, and the link to the Talk London site. A joint statement draft will be shared for comment before the second meeting.
- Taskforce members asked to highlight missing points from the Call for Evidence and share with GLA officers any key contacts/organisations who should be invited to input.
- GLA officers to bring together available data on public and private land ownership in the Green Belt.

Cleared by: Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy, GLA

GLA Officer: Kristiina Yang, Senior Policy and Programme Officer, Environment Team