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Mr Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

14 November 2012

Dear Mr Johnson,

This is an open letter which will also be sent to the press. Ash dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) has now been found throughout the UK. It has not yet been confirmed in London, but it is just a matter of time before hundreds of thousands of London's trees are under threat.

This is just one of a number of threats that the trees of this city face. Due to global trade and a changing climate, in the last ten years more pest and diseases have arrived than in the past century, or even millennium. Oak Processionary Moth, Massaria (affecting London Planes), Sudden Oak Death, Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner, Pine Processionary Moth and Bleeding Canker are all real threats to our urban forest which have all arrived in the last decade, and more are on the way. Asian Long Horn Beetle - which can kill a wide range of trees - made a visit to Kent last year; we hope that this has been eradicated but are not yet sure. Across the channel in France, canker stain of London plane has killed 50,000 plane trees and currently threatens 42,000 planes lining the Canal du Midi alone. This is similar to Dutch Elm Disease, and we fear that it is only a matter of time until it arrives in the home of the London Plane.

These threats are in addition to the significant pressures our trees already face from a number of other sources including pollution, development, subsidence, vandalism, extreme weather and dog damage.

The life of a London tree is a hard one, and it is getting harder.

London is a green city; we very fortunate that thanks to the vision in the past we have inherited a tree population that all other major cities are envious of.

But for how much longer? As the current custodians, what are we leaving for future generations of Londoners?

A London with no Horse Chestnut trees, and no conkers for our children because these trees are in decline and no longer being planted due to the proliferation of disease?

A London with parks and woodlands containing Oak trees that the public cannot enter because of the toxic hairs of the caterpillar that we have been unable to eradicate due to an underfunded response?

A London where the iconic Plane tree so widely planted by the Victorians, which dominate and adorn our streets and squares, is consigned to history because we failed to heed the warning signs? A tree that has the potential to grow for hundreds of years could be lost in our generation, along with the Elms and Ash.



The absence of these trees will make London a hotter, more polluted, more uncomfortable place for us and our children to live and work. Research has shown that a 10% increase in the capital's canopy would reduce surface temperatures by 3-4° Celsius.

We don't need to tell you that trees reduce pollution, sequester CO₂, provide habitat for wildlife, produce oxygen, reduce crime, help build communities and make people happier. Some of these may sound far-fetched, but there is research that supports all of these claims.

This matter affects the quality of life for everyone; rich and poor, the old and the young.

We applaud your work planting 10,000 trees in your first term and your commitment to plant 10,000 more in your second. Your target to increase the canopy cover of London by 5% by 2025 is vital to offset some of the effects of the change in weather and climate. However, unless we do more to protect what we already have, we shall fall very short of your targets. Some are predicting that even if your planting programme was to continue for the next twenty years, there would still be an overall reduction in canopy cover.

Local Authority Tree Officers work very hard to protect and maintain this city's trees, but with the current cutbacks this is becoming increasingly hard. We appreciate that this will not be a priority for all at this difficult time, and that difficult decisions need to be made. But, the Ash, the Oak and the Plane are all trees that can grow to majestic proportions and make up a significant part of our canopy cover; a lack of investment in our trees whilst facing these unprecedented pressures could cause such damage that would take decades to repair, if it can be repaired at all.

London's urban forest is looked after by the members of the London Tree Officers Association; the thirty-three London boroughs, Transport for London, the Corporation of London and Royal Parks, who together manage the majority of our public trees. All of these organisations work hard to look after the trees in their care and are well placed to understand individual local pressures. We perform a difficult job with passion and care. However, we are being asked to do so much more with so much less. Without the correct amount of funding, both trees and Londoners will suffer.

Protecting and improving our tree-scape will cost money but perhaps inspiration can be taken from New York, where Mayor Michael Bloomberg aims to increase canopy cover by 20% by planting one million trees. He has realised that this investment provides long term value for money that will be realised from reduced energy and pollution as well as health costs to his city.

We call on you, the custodian of this city and of its urban forest, to champion this cause. We call on you to ensure that future generations look back and thank you, not condemn us all for what we failed to do for the trees of London.

Yours sincerely

Becky Porter
Executive Officer of the LTOA
Sent on behalf of the LTOA Executive Committee



Further information about the LTOA

The London Tree Officers Association provides an information network for the exchange of views, experiences and ideas on trees and the management of London's Urban Forest. The Association dates back to 1982 and aims to enhance the management of the capital's trees and woodlands. It involves local authority Tree Officers in all 33 London Boroughs, an associate membership of a wide range of tree professionals and those who manage and care for trees. The LTOA is funded by London Boroughs and associate member subscriptions and hosted by the London Borough of Camden. For more information, documents, advice and guidelines on tree care take a look at the LTOA website at www.ltoa.org.uk.