

By Ken Livingstone

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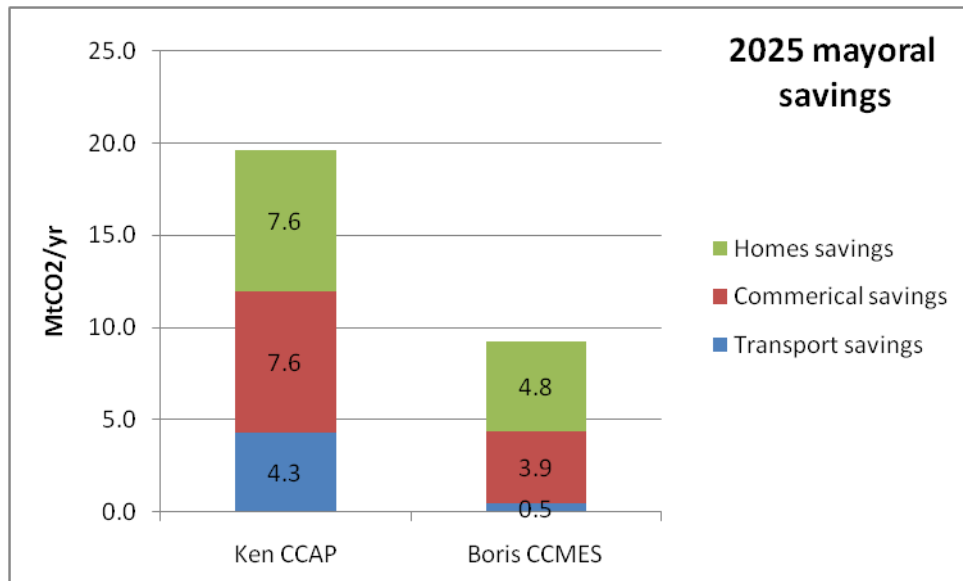
As a long-time SERA member, I have no hesitation in saying that environmental policies will be at the top of the agenda if I am selected as Labour's candidate for London Mayor, and I will make it a personal priority to ensure we deliver on our green promises if elected.

This will build on our legacy of success in London between 2000 and 2008. From the congestion charge to our ground-breaking climate change policies and the Low Emission Zone, London went from being an environmental laggard to winning praise around the world for its green policies.

Some have argued that we focused too much on the environment, but I am proud of what we did and concerned that Boris Johnson, despite his warm words, has squandered so much of the environmental legacy Labour left him.

As in so many other areas, Boris Johnson has been happy to pay lip-service to environmental policies and quick to adopt targets he didn't understand and probably didn't agree with – such as my commitment to cut London's carbon emissions 60% by 2025.

But in office he has quietly slashed Mayoral targets for cutting carbon emissions. The graph below shows the difference between the projected impact of the policies to which I had committed, and those set out in the Mayor's draft climate change mitigation and energy strategy.



The biggest change is in transport where Boris has slashed the target from cutting 4.3m tonnes of carbon to just 0.5¹. This demonstrates the inability of Boris's administration to innovate, as well as the true impact of policies such as cutting the Western Extension of the Congestion Charge Zone, cutting pedestrian crossing times so that cars can drive faster, and putting up bus fares.

We need to campaign relentlessly to expose Boris Johnson's fakery on climate change, both because it is such an important issue for the future, but also because Londoners need a Mayor who takes seriously the need to tackle the linked problems of rising fuel bills and cutting emissions. I have set out below a few of the ideas that I want to work on with SERA members if I am selected as Labour's candidate for Mayor:

Tackling fuel poverty

Ofgem, the energy regulator, projects scenarios in which if serious efforts are not made to introduce renewable energy and energy efficiency measures annual home energy bills could rise by as much as 50% over the next 15 years, as fossil fuel prices rise due to increased scarcity.²

On top of the vicious public spending cuts and fares rises already being imposed on Londoners by the Tories this would create serious problems for many families.

But this isn't inevitable. We can greatly reduce the impact of electricity and gas price rises by making homes more energy efficient. The Labour

¹ Mayor of London Draft Climate Change Mitigation and Energy Strategy, February 2010

²Ofgem Project Discovery,

http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/markets/whlmkts/discovery/documents1/discovery_scenarios_condoc_final.pdf

government's Feed In Tariff, which pays a premium price for energy to households and others who invest in renewable energy supply such as solar panels, has created a fantastic opportunity for local and regional government to support the 250,000 Londoners assessed to be in 'fuel poverty'.³

It's nauseating to see right wing think-tanks like the Policy Exchange attacking the Feed in Tariff as a middle class perk. They just don't want to do anything to tackle climate change and, anyway, their argument is nonsense. A bold and progressive Mayor could use the returns from the Feed In Tariff to raise funds to pay for renewable energy on the homes of the least well off across the city. Households would benefit from free electricity and hot water, while the GLA would enjoy a reliable income stream from the Feed In Tariff which would repay its original investment.

There is still little financial incentives for landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties at the moment. I support Friends of the Earth's campaign that from 2016 (giving landlords 6 years to sort out their properties) it should be illegal for to let properties rated F and G on energy efficiency (the lowest ratings and the energy efficiency and the carbon equivalent of being a health and safety risk).

Clearly funding for low carbon investments is a major issue. But with billions of pounds sitting on deposit in state owned banks such as RBS, this really shouldn't be an issue. The innovative local authority in Kirklees has found that for every pound they spend on installing insulation in homes, four pounds is returned to the local economy, through money saved and jobs created. We need to get taxpayer-owned banks to start lending to finance low carbon programmes on a London-scale.

Waste

Nothing reflects on a city's environmental credentials so much as how it deals with waste. Unfortunately London lags way behind the best cities in the world, not least because responsibility for waste management is dissipated through too many organisations. The Mayor's pan-London waste council is an expensive joke. The Mayor needs to have control of strategic decisions about how waste is recycled and converted into energy, while the boroughs retain responsibility for waste collection.

One example of the current problem is reflected in the procurement currently being undertaken by the North London Waste Authority⁴. Rather than guaranteeing that the waste it processes is used to support local decentralised energy in the Lee Valley, there is the possibility it may end up sending its waste to north Europe for treatment. A modern, green London can't afford to treat waste as a problem to be disposed of somewhere else.

³ http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/statistics/fuelpov_stats/regional/regional.aspx

⁴ <http://www.nlwa.gov.uk/procurement>

We need to see waste as a resource which can be recycled or converted into renewable energy to power homes and offices.

Seventeen million tonnes of food, with a nominal value of £18bn, goes to landfill annually in the UK.⁵ Using modern technologies like anaerobic digestion, which using bacteria to convert food waste into gas, we could provide renewable power to 164,000 homes (ie all the houses in a borough the size of Barking and Dagenham) just by using 80% of the food that British households throw out each year.⁶

Parks and open spaces

Two thirds of London is occupied by green spaces or water, including a ‘green belt’ around the edge, and they are among our greatest resources.

London is unique in designating nearly ten per cent of its urban area as Metropolitan Open Land, protecting spaces such as Richmond Park and Hampstead Heath, and long may it remain so.

Suggestions early on in the Mayoral selection campaign that we should be flexible about building on the green belt are a mistake. There is a clear choice on this matter in the Labour selection. If we send signals like this we will intensify the demands of property developers to continually snip away at the edges of our great natural resources. I will give no such green light that the green belt is up for grabs.

Sustainable transport

Achieving a shift from private car usage to public transport, cycling and walking while most other cities in the world were going in the opposite directions is one of our most important achievements in London. My recently published ‘Protecting London’s Transport Services’ paper sets out what I would do to revive this policy after the disaster of Boris Johnson.

It includes keeping the Western Extension of the Congestion Charge, ramping up cycling facilities in outer London and extending the cycle hire scheme to all town centres that want it, investing in electric buses, and introducing a form of emissions-based charging on new cars entering the congestion charge zone meaning that new cars with the worst carbon emissions will pay more (whilst the least polluting cars pay less and older vehicles will pay no more than the basic congestion charge).

⁵ Arup Food Drivers of Change cards 7

⁶ Arup Food Drivers of Change cards

Air quality

Figures published recently by the Campaign for Clean Air in London show that at least 3,000, and possibly as many as 6,900 Londoners, have their lives cut short because of poor air quality each year.

The European Commission has recently ruled against London for not even meeting the minimum requirements of the European air quality Directive.

This should create a real sense of urgency for the Mayor to take strong measures to improve air quality. Yet not only has Boris Johnson failed to set out the positive measures through which air pollution will be reduced to levels that are not injurious to health, but he has actually cut or delayed measures that were already planned - Phase 3 of the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) which would have tackled heavy vans, and the Western Extension of the Congestion Charge.

Rather than lobbying for a get-out clause, the Mayor should urgently set out a programme to reduce air pollution in line with European health-based targets.

Getting smart about the environment

If we really want to cut out the wasteful use of energy and resources in London and create a more attractive, low-carbon environment, then we have to embrace technology.

For example, the always forward-looking city of San Francisco has come up with an innovative solution to tackle congestion. The Mayor's officials discovered that as many as twenty per cent of cars driving in the congested city centre had already arrived at their destination, but continued to circulate because they couldn't find a parking space.

It wasn't that there weren't enough parking spaces. At most times of the day the number of available parking spaces at least matched the number of cars. It was just that the drivers didn't know where they were and the car park operators had no way of telling them.

San Francisco's solution was to install sensors in car park spaces around the city and to create a Wi-Fi service which tells drivers, via their mobile phones, when they are near an available parking space. The system also allows drivers to extend their stay online without having to physically return to top up parking meters.

Early trials report significant cuts in congestion as a result, as well as happier drivers. The success of this initiative prompted the city to open up its transport data to the public at large, spawning a whole new industry in writing transport related phone apps and providing a welcome boost to a recession-hit

economy in the process. I want to see similar policies adopted in London and I will work with the boroughs and others to advance this smart-city agenda.

So-called ‘smart grids’, which allow energy providers to measure exactly where and when energy is demanded, and enable consumers to manage their energy consumption so as to reduce bills, are essential if a national grid based on renewable energy is to become a reality.

And we should be using information technology to engage with individuals and communities about their resource consumption, for example providing data on household’s energy use compared to the average for their street, because as most advertisers know people are far more likely to do something if they think it keeps them up with their neighbours.

My view is that the role that information technology could play in making London a better place to live is now so great that we need an ‘urban information architecture’⁷ strategy for London, just like we have plans for transport, housing and waste.

Working with SERA

We’ve got two years to plan the mayoral re-election campaign and to prepare what we would do in office if elected. I hope that many SERA members will use that opportunity to input into the policy making process and if I am selected as Labour’s candidate I very much look forward to working with you on this.

Thank you for this opportunity to tell you something about my ideas for London’s environment and energy future and have a good AGM!

⁷ A proposition first made by Volker Buscher of the London-based consultancy firm, Arup.