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# Final Ministerial Reply



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**Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs**

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**The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP**  
From the Secretary of State

Thank you for your letter of 25 September highlighting your approach to London's environmental challenges. Your kind words on my new role are much appreciated. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

I am very much looking forward to tackling the vast range of issues for which Defra is responsible and to working with you to achieve our aims. I shall say a little here about each of the matters you raise and would be happy to meet you to discuss them in more detail in the near future. Your office should contact my diary secretary, Emma Southard, at: [emma.southard@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:emma.southard@defra.gsi.gov.uk) or by telephone on 020 7238 5343 to make the necessary arrangements.

**Air quality**

Like Caroline Spelman I welcome your efforts to tackle air pollution in the capital and agree that a 'joined-up' approach is essential. The Department for Transport (DfT) is a key player in this and I am pleased that you have been able to work with it to improve London buses. Accelerating improvements in the remaining stock is important and we should work with DfT to explore what can be done in the short term.

I agree that in allocating funds we should take account of the significant challenges London Boroughs face; in recent years the total share of air quality grant allocated to London Boroughs has increased. This year, you will be pleased to hear that we intend to award £100,000 to support CityAir business engagement projects in London and £188,000 on projects to take action on awareness and reducing exposure around schools. Other London-based projects are in line for funding as well. The input by your officials has been very helpful in moving this work forward. I note your comments on boiler scrappage schemes; it is important that we tailor energy efficiency programmes where we can to support both climate and air quality goals. Similarly, where energy proposals have the potential to worsen local air quality, as for some scenarios for combined heat and power or biomass, we should take note of these risks and seek to minimise the impacts.



**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**

We are working closely with DfT on a number of low emission strategies, including retrofitting programmes and assessing the relative balance between the use of petrol and diesel vehicles, although of course the Treasury has the lead interest in fiscal incentives. To date, the perceived wisdom has been that diesel is better for carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions than petrol, with petrol having lower air quality impacts than diesel, but there is increasing evidence that for new vehicles there is reasonable parity between the two on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It is, therefore, important that we get the balance right between the two. You rightly mention the significant progress made by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2012. We need to build on this, coordinating our efforts and agreeing to common solutions that can provide maximum benefit to the environment, public health and wellbeing. Like you I look forward to working on these issues together and ensuring that London continues to be an innovative and dynamic capital city.

### **Sewage discharges into the Thames**

On the Thames Tideway Tunnel, I am of course aware that there are concerns about the potential impacts of its construction, particularly in the communities where the main drive shafts are proposed to be located. As you know, Thames Water has conducted two public consultations on the proposed route and locations of construction sites. It has recognised the importance of reducing the impacts and minimising disruption on local communities as far as practicable and modified its proposals accordingly wherever possible. I welcome your commitment to work with Thames Water to ensure that the concerns of local communities are addressed. The tunnel will contribute to London's growth with the creation of several thousand jobs, both directly on the project and more widely in the supply chain and local economy. I remain conscious of the need to keep a tight rein on the project costs. We are working with Thames Water and Ofwat to ensure value for money and that the interests of Thames Water's customers and the UK taxpayer are protected.

As regards possible alternative solutions to tackling the problem of sewage pollution in the Thames, there has been detailed study of several proposals over the last decade or so. This has concluded that they would either not meet the established environmental objectives for the river or cost too much over a much longer timeframe, leaving the tunnel as the most cost-effective, timely and comprehensive solution. I agree that green infrastructure measures, such as sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), should become an integral part of London's approach to drainage in the future. However, they can only complement the tunnel as they will not address the lack of capacity in the sewers for dry weather flows and cannot be achieved without excessive cost and disruption (much worse than that caused by the Tunnel) other than on a very long timescale. As a solution to the immediate problem, the Tunnel remains the most cost-effective option.

### **Aviation**

Like you, we believe that maintaining the UK's status as a leading global aviation hub is fundamental to our long-term international competitiveness, which is why DfT has appointed Sir Howard Davies to chair an independent commission to identify and recommend options for achieving this.

As you know, the Government is also developing a long-term strategy for sustainable aviation. We want to provide a framework that supports economic growth and addresses aviation's environmental impacts, including noise and air quality. DfT intends to adopt the final framework by next spring. Officials and I will continue to work closely with that department on these important issues.



## **Waste**

You mention the work of the London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB). I recognise the important work LWARB carries out in waste prevention and management across the capital and Defra has supported it for some time. As Caroline Spelman said in her reply to you of 5 July, funding for capital projects is very tight and the emphasis is on absolute 'must-haves'. We certainly cannot guarantee funding on the scale you suggest but we will bear in mind the value of LWARB's work as we look at the business case that it has submitted.

## **Improving the quality of life for Londoners and adapting to climate change**

Fiscally neutral charging for stormwater runoff could indeed bring benefits. The innovation showcased by the Olympic Delivery Authority demonstrated the effectiveness of sustainable and green water policies and infrastructure. Given the pressures on our infrastructure capacity and the risks from climate change, we want to encourage the use of SuDS wherever they will be effective. SuDS are a range of measures designed to mimic, as closely as possible, natural drainage and its advantages: providing habitat, filtering pollutants, recharging groundwater (particularly important in water stressed areas) and slowing water down thus reducing flood risk.

I appreciate your comments on green infrastructure and your commitment to promote it in your London Plan. Defra too believes in the many benefits that green infrastructure can provide, including those relating to jobs and growth. Following a commitment in the Natural Environment White Paper to support the development of green infrastructure in England, the Green Infrastructure Partnership (GIP) was launched last October. It brings together representatives from local communities, civic and environmental groups, local government, planners and developers, academia and central Government to establish a better dialogue to address how green infrastructure can be enhanced in England. Peter Massini, the GLA's Urban Greening and Biodiversity Team Leader, is already an active member.

One of the areas that the GIP is looking at is how to design and retrofit green infrastructure into the built environment. GIP, in conjunction with RESET Development, is organising a series of workshops across the UK on 'Green Infrastructure for Ecosystem Services in the Built Environment'. One of these workshops will take place in London on 5 December and your officers can find out more information about this at: [reset-development.org](http://reset-development.org).

## **Water and resilience to extreme weather**

Hot water efficiency measures can be included in the Green Deal, as reductions in the energy used for heating water should generate savings on energy bills. In addition, the Green Deal assessment will encourage customers to think about their whole property and what can be done to improve energy efficiency and wider sustainability, including measures that save cold water in homes. Water companies are looking to create partnerships with Green Deal Providers to do a range of work in properties at the same time.

Ofwat currently sets annual leakage targets for water companies based on a sustainable economic level of leakage (SELL) and a cost/benefit analysis. Defra, the Environment Agency and Ofwat have recently reviewed water company calculations of the SELL and its integration with water resource planning to ensure that the methodology used by companies in the next round of their Water Resource Management Plans is robust and consistently applied. Ofwat is also considering its approach to leakage targets post 2015. It is important that any new approach fully takes account of the short and longer term benefits and the



impact on customer bills. Water company consultation with its customer challenge panel will be key to guiding water company aspirations and customer expectations on leakage control.

We recognise the potential benefits of water reuse technologies but the merits of a proposed installation should be examined case by case, as this technology may not be appropriate, or deliver benefits, to all situations. Simple steps to reduce water use such as changing behaviour and installing water efficient fittings should always be taken before the reuse of water is considered.

### Plastic bags

We are monitoring the results of the charging scheme in Wales and the outcome of the Scottish consultation on a charge, together with Northern Ireland's plan to launch a charge from April 2013. However, we recognise the current pressures on household budgets; levying even a small charge at this point may not be the best option. We remain determined to tackle this blight.

### Food

I appreciate your support for Defra's work on food policy. As you will be aware, growth and competitiveness in the agri-food sector is at the heart of the department's business plan. This sits alongside strong environmental commitments we have made. The Green Food Project is the start of an evolving process that will shape our future policy work on food and farming. This is not a challenge for the Government alone; we will continue with the open policy-making approach and work in partnership with key organisations to further examine the challenges to the food system and how they can be addressed.

I am sure that David Heath, the new Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, would be pleased to meet your food adviser, Rosie Boycott, to discuss this in more detail.

  
THE RT HON OWEN PATERSON MP

*P.S. We should  
definitely meet to  
discuss all this  
further to you.*

