

I am speaking today as a member of the Conservation Action Committee of Nature London. I thank Mayor Matt Brown and the 9 Councillors who have already met with us, and I renew our invitation to all of you to join us for a tour of one of London's Environmentally Significant Areas. I come before you to urge a greater commitment in the budget to protecting and enhancing London's natural heritage, the flora and fauna with which we share our city. In common with many other Londoners I hold the belief that protecting our non-human neighbours constitutes an ethical imperative. I have lived and worked in the greater London area for the last 46 years, but I chose to come to London and stay here. Many non-human organisms, especially plants, have no alternatives in the matter of where they live. A tuliptree and a sycamore cannot live much farther north than London; a snowy owl and a redpoll will only rarely be found much farther south. Tuliptrees and sycamores, snowy owls and redpolls lived here before we came. But whether they will survive the presence of their human neighbours remains an open question, and your budget deliberations hold part of the answer.

In addition to the ethical basis for conservation of our natural heritage, there are of course practical reasons. It takes no more than seeing a real-estate agent's advertisement of a "ravine lot" to understand that part of what draws people to, and keeps people in, our city is the opportunity to be close to nature, and this seems to be especially true of the "millennial" generation whose importance to the city's future the London Plan underlines. But balance is necessary in taking steps to keep this opportunity available for both present and future generations, because we Londoners are quite capable of loving nature to death. We must maintain accessibility to nature, but access to a degraded nature is useless.

I urge you to provide funding or to increase it in four areas, in all of which the City has previously declared its commitment. Funding is necessary to make that commitment good.

1. Urban Forest. The draft London Plan advocates that we “strengthen our urban forest by monitoring its condition, planting more, protecting more, and better maintaining trees and woodlands” (p. 21). Council has adopted an Urban Forest Strategy, but no funding to implement it has been included in the draft budget. I join ReForest London in calling for funding for this worthy initiative. Let’s take some small steps at least.
2. Managing City-owned Environmentally Significant Areas. Currently eight ESA’s are managed by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority under contract with the City of London. This includes closing unofficial trails, removing invasive species, and dealing with bush parties, dogs off-leash and illegal tree-cutting (with chainsaws, no less). Three hard-working men are all Upper Thames can afford to commit to this; there used to be five. There should be more.
3. Encroachment. Encroachment occurs when a neighbor to an ESA appropriates public space for his or her own uses, whether to dump yard waste, to extend a garden, to make a trail, to build a stairway, or to create a picnic area (complete with table and campfire pit). Stopping encroachment is currently handled by the City’s By-law Enforcement office, but insufficient funding cripples its efforts.
4. Cutting Back Invasive Species. Invasive plant species such as buckthorn, dog-strangling vine, and giant hogweed are pushing out native species in our ESAs. On a tour of Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA, Councillor Zaifman asked our committee chair, Sandy Levin, an insightful question: how much would it cost to remove all invasive species from London’s ESAs? We don’t know the answer, so please ask the Parks Planning Department. Buckthorn is estimated to have already

taken over 50 percent of the Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA. More funding is needed to stop the spread of these aggressive intruders.

Thank you.