

Sian Berry, candidate for London mayor, speech to Autumn conference, Newport, 2019



6 October 2019

Good morning.

I am going to get straight to the point today.

I want to invite you all to London, to my home and my city. I want to invite you to join a team that's ready to win.

Campaigning in London is the best.

Londoners are so ready to vote Green they are delighted when we knock on their doors.

They all want a chat, they all have good ideas for how to change things, and they all like our ideas too.

And for those of you who enjoy leaflet delivery. All our garden gates are easy to open, all our lifts are working, all our dogs are friendly and all our letterboxes are above floor level!

First I want to say a few things about the London we could have had by now.

If a Green Mayor had taken over from Boris Johnson in 2016, and not Labour and Sadiq Khan.

We'd have cancelled the Garden Bridge straight away. We would not have supported, then reviewed and then dithered over Boris Johnson's waste of a vanity project like our current Mayor.

We would have saved tens of millions of pounds for London.

We'd have cancelled the £1 billion Silvertown road tunnel vanity project too, which our current Mayor still supports, saving tens of millions more in its costs so far.

These tens of millions could have been spent on many things, for example... avoiding bus cuts.

Bus cuts? In London? Now that wasn't in Sadiq Khan's manifesto, but they are happening and they would never be happening with a Green Mayor.

London's private renters. (That's me too, I rent, that's most Londoners these days.) We private renters would not have had to wait nearly three years for anything to be done on rent controls.

Meanwhile, with rents rising – above inflation again and again – we have been overpaying our landlords for years, and this adds up.

Oh it adds UP.

London Greens have sat down and worked this out. Today I can reveal that, in just six years, London's private renters have overpaid our landlords by £11 billion pounds.

That's not the total rent we've paid, that figure is over a hundred billion pounds.

£11 billion pounds is just how much EXTRA we have paid compared with if our rents had gone up with inflation since 2012. That is just the excess profits our landlords have collected. So no wonder we are struggling.

And no wonder I am so frustrated at our current Mayor for going so slow on this campaign for these vital powers to control our rents.

With a Green Mayor this work would have started on day one.

What else would we have had with a Green Mayor?

We'd have had a bigger, smarter Low Emission Zone already in place across all of London, not just to the north and south circular roads. A Green Mayor cleaning up the air for all Londoners now, not from 2021.

We would not have had the creeping, lawless, and secret rollout of facial scanning by police.

On our estates I would have given residents the power to vote down unwanted demolition plans straight away.

Unlike the current Mayor, I wouldn't have delayed. And unlike him I would NOT have let councils off, helping them slip under the wire of a new ballot policy, to deny residents on 36 estates the power to decide their future.

That's thousands more Londoners who would have been given power by a Green

Mayor to have a final, binding say over the demolition of their homes.

And do you know what else a Green Mayor would never have done?

A Green Mayor, unlike Sadiq Khan, wouldn't have dreamed of telling Extinction Rebellion to let London 'return to business as usual' like he did.

That statement says it all. 'Business as usual' is the problem, and it's climate protesters who are the solution, Mr Mayor!

And one more thing. Would we have waited for two years for funding from a Green Mayor to combat the cuts in youth services? No, I made a promise to young people in 2016 to help and I would have kept it without delay.

But even though I was sadly not elected Mayor back in 2016, our group of Green Assembly Members has made a huge difference to Londoners' lives since then.

We've shifted the agenda with our good ideas and the effective way we work.

Caroline and I work, as a team, on the principles and values of listening to Londoners and bringing the voices of people who are ignored and marginalised into City Hall. I'm really proud of that.

Together, we have held this Mayor to account.

On climate change, on crime, on human rights, on healthy streets, on support for young Londoners, on community-led housing we've shifted the Mayor – and the Assembly – to put real money in and be much more radical.

And on renting rights, we've used our political weight to shift the Mayor, kicking and screaming, a LONG way from where he started.

After I gave him the harshest grief before Christmas last year for going slow on rent controls, the Mayor has finally come out and promised to push the Government on this. Something he's literally been dismissing for years in our debates.

We have made our mark, but we have so much more to do. We now have the chance to shift London politics really seismically next year.

And the growing climate chaos says we must.

The Conservatives want to frack our fields and hills against our wishes.

They want to build a new motorway across England, and won't invest in walking and cycling.

They want to build HS2 while refusing to bring our railways into public hands under local public control.

But Labour do not yet get it either. They fall short and water down so much of their progress when they face the real decisions.

Their national policies on aviation, especially Heathrow, HS2, the oil and gas industries, the niggling top-downness of their climate measures, the sponsorship of their conference events by oil companies.

Yes, the growing noise on climate change, from elected Greens across the country passing emergency motions, to the young people and campaigners putting their bodies in the way calling for urgent action, have forced Labour to change, but they still have a way to go to catch up with the Greens.

And at home in London the Mayor is also falling short on preventing climate chaos.

In 2016 he promised to be the Greenest Mayor Ever.

But would the Greenest Mayor Ever build a £1 billion four-lane road through two of our most polluted boroughs?

No, he cannot back the Silvertown road tunnel and hold his head up in Green company.

And would the Greenest Mayor Ever back expansion at Gatwick Airport and at City Airport?

Would he let Transport for London – our biggest electricity user by far – buy just one thousandth of its energy from renewable sources?

No, with these stains and holes, the Mayor's climate clothes are only fit for the recycling bin.

Ask yourselves, who can you trust to make London a carbon neutral city in time for the deadline that science gives us?

A go-slowly Mayor who builds roads and backs airports, or a realGreen Mayor?

Conference, we have talked this weekend about the big constitutional changes we need. About bringing power back to the people.

About how this is essential to fix the interlocking crises we face.

And in London, no Mayor can ignore the democratic hole, the destructive virus at the heart of our city.

I'm talking about the City of London, the financial centre of our capital, the impact it has on the world, and the undemocratic way it is governed.

The City of London Corporation needs reform. It's needed it for decades, and only a Green Mayor will stand up and talk about this.

Remaking the City of London is something the Mayor of London could and should be leading on, but every other party is silent on the corporate monsters lurking in the towers that loom over us from across the river.

I will get stuck in and make the strongest possible case for a revolt against London's ancient feudal state, where the businesses not the residents get to

vote, and a revolution in the climate chaos-enabling industries it houses.

It is long past time that the City of London Corporation was abolished.

It needs to be a borough like any other. With its higher functions, like policing, and its huge assets, brought into the Greater London Authority.

This would fix our constitutional anomaly, and give Londoners the ability and the mandate to set a new strategy to make the City and financial services work for us, not the other way round.

A strategy to focus more police resources and effort onto financial crime, illegal trading, and money laundering, and fraud across London.

To work with the most ethical and forward thinking experts in the City to plan the financial tools we need to finance a full scale Green New Deal.

To push forward the widespread divestment from fossil fuels that we need for our future security.

To set new goals for financial services to support climate action, and climate justice around the globe – to stop undermining it and exploiting the people of the global south and their resources.

To stop bailing out banks that are ‘too big to fail’ and get the City working with the City...

...to help us set up a public Bank for London that helps create the resilient local economy we need, backing small business and green industries to grow, while helping Londoners bank ethically and save for the future.

Because let me be clear. We cannot claim to care about climate change while our capital is still the epicentre of finance for fossil fuels, and we cannot have a fair economy that is based on the profits of megabanks or the balance sheets of oil firms and arms companies.

And we cannot rebalance the UK's economy, and spread wealth to every corner of these islands, if we don't deal with the engine room of climate chaos at the centre of our biggest city.

It will take a Green Mayor to take this task on.

And, conference, a Green Mayor would use the powers we currently have in the GLA to win more constitutional rights for London too.

Working with London's MPs and Councils, I would make a plan to introduce new legislation in Parliament to give London's representatives more rights over how we run our city.

At the simplest level, the right to bring in new road safety rules, default speed limits, road signs and crossings, not controlled by the Department for Transport's old fashioned ideas and without having to submit for new legislation each time.

At the transformative level, the right to have a Londonwide landlord register and rules, and set limits on rents in our uniquely out of control housing market.

And make our own Clean Air rules, covering all the sources of pollution not just the vehicles.

And at the strategic level, we need the right to choose our own unique planning rules, unfettered by the Government's terrible national planning policies.

To be exempt from Conservative measures created to please big developers, like eroding the Green Belt, those dodgy definitions of 'affordable', and permitted development rights, which have let developers convert our office blocks into the slums of the future, with homes as small as a car parking space that no family could live in healthily.

These constitutional rights for London might sound abstract. But the redistribution of power and decision-making must be at the heart of any genuinely forward thinking politics.

It matters. It means people having control over issues that affect them, it means communities working together, it means working with MPs and councils and grappling power away from the Cabinet and into Londoners' hands.

No London Mayor has yet made real use of section 77 in the GLA Act 1999, which gives us the ability to place our own bills before Parliament "for any purpose which is for the public benefit" of our citizens.

If laws need to change, if power needs to be shifted, all of us who work as campaigners know it's no good just asking nicely.

We need to use every tool we have to get things right for Londoners, and as a Green Mayor I would stand up for our city in every way I can, in Parliament too.

And conference I WISH I could express in words how ready London Greens are for this election.

I'm going to try.

I have been your Green Party candidate for Mayor twice before. in 2008 and 2016.

Each time there was a change of Mayor and a close battle. Each time a real threat to the Green vote and our Assembly Members.

But each time we've fought through this to get noticed,

fight a serious campaign, and got our message through with a clear mission and a great team.

And each time, our votes have gone up and our vote share too.

In 2008 we went from 7th to 4th, in 2012 Jenny Jones took us to third place, and in 2016 we added to our 3rd place lead over the Liberal Democrats.

BUT I have NEVER stood for Mayor as a sitting Assembly Member

AND I have NEVER had the chance to stand when there was NOT a two party squeeze.

This time we have a politics more fragmented than ever before. The Tories are weak, ridiculously divided, and losing all credibility in the disgrace and shambles of their government of the country. And putting up an Assembly Member who isn't up to the job.

Sorry Shaun Bailey, but Green Assembly Members have been the best opposition in City Hall for decades, I've been the Shadow Mayor these past three years, and you SHOULD be worried.

Apart from us, Londoners have some poor choices in 2020.

Between Bad with Bailey

Far from OK with Khan

Not 'Better (or any different) with Benita'.

And Random with Rory

It is clear that the change London needs is Green, and our record proves London is Best with Berry.

And conference I also want to say I've NEVER – been so excited about our London Assembly candidates.

They are amazing, hardworking, wonderful people.

Stand up

Peter Underwood

Scott Ainslie

Tim Kiely

Benali Hamdache

And of course my amazing existing colleague in the Assembly, Caroline Russell.

Also Hannah Graham, Andree Frieze, Pippa Maslin, Shahrar Ali, Zack Polanski, Jarelle Francis, Kirsten de Keyser and all the others too across London.

These people are the Londoners who will make a Green London, a fair London, a

London where every citizen is listened to, a reality.

We are all ready to welcome you all to our campaign. And together what a team we'll have!

Conference.

The climate emergency can't wait.

The problems that led to Brexit need to be fixed now.

London urgently needs a new champion.

Because without big thinking, and big, transformative changes to the way we do things, the young people out on our streets and living on our estates are right: our future is broken.

I will unbreak London's future with the urgency the task deserves.

Unfix the housing market

Unwreck our climate

Uncrush our communities

Reclaim our streets

Restore our homes and environment

Renew our rights, Revive our democracy, and

Recapture London's heart and spirit

Londoners can trust us to do all of this with more Green Assembly Members and a Green Mayor.

London Greens are ready to welcome you all to help us win.

We have no choice but to get to a different place by 2030...

But we can't get there unless we start now, in 2020, with a Green Mayor.

The Green Wave is ready to come to London!

Thank you.

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