



**UK Health Alliance
on Climate Change**

The Right Honourable Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
Greater London Authority
City Hall, London SE1 2AA

6 November 2024

Dear Mayor of London,

Transforming London into a Plant-Based City for Health, Environmental, and Economic Benefits

I write to you as the Chair of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, an alliance of UK health organisations including Royal Colleges, journals, associations and societies representing more than one million health professionals, a significant proportion of the NHS workforce.

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change's recent [Plant-powered Planet: Building a Healthy & Sustainable Food System](#) report highlights the far-reaching benefits of a plant-based approach to health and the environment. As the capital's leader, you have a unique opportunity to spearhead a transformative initiative that positions London as a global model for sustainable, health-conscious urban environments. I urge you to consider bold leadership by transforming London into a predominantly plant-based city, thereby advancing critical goals in public health, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience. A plant-based city means implementing a "plant-based by default" approach which makes plant-based food the default option while giving consumers the choice to opt into meat/dairy if they want.

Your expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to outer London, despite initial challenges, is an inspiring testament to your commitment to cleaner air and improved health outcomes for all Londoners. This decisive move reflects the strength of your leadership in addressing the climate crisis and setting an example for urban centres worldwide. The expansion has reduced harmful emissions and encouraged more children to walk or cycle to school, increasing physical activity levels.

Your recent travels to New York where you explored innovative sustainability projects like cleaning the Hudson River using oysters further showcase London's dedication to bold environmental action. New York's recent initiative to introduce plant-based meals as the default in public hospitals is another pioneering step that aligns with your vision for London. Given London's role as a global leader in health and sustainability, could our city consider adopting a similar "plant-based by default" policy within public sector catering and promote the same for private businesses? This initiative would support public health, reduce

environmental impact, and send a powerful message about the importance of sustainable diets.

Benefits of a plant-based-by-default dietary approach in London:

- **Health** - There is an urgent need to reduce consumption of **processed red meat (a group I carcinogen) and red meat (a group II carcinogen)**. An increase in healthy plant-based diets has demonstrated efficacy in reducing rates of obesity-related illnesses, such as heart disease and diabetes, which would alleviate pressures on the NHS and contribute to better health for Londoners, especially in communities facing health disparities.
- **Environmental** - The food system contributes one-third of the global greenhouse gas emissions. On average, **plant-based proteins produce 70 times less greenhouse gases and use 150 times less land than a similar amount of beef**. A city-wide shift toward plant-based options, especially in public institutions, would reduce emissions, align with London's climate targets, and serve as a model for sustainable urban policies among C40 cities.
- **Economic** - This transition represents an economic opportunity, positioning London as a hub for sustainable food innovation. By encouraging plant-based initiatives, the city could attract investment, create jobs, and further its reputation as a leader in health-conscious, climate-smart economic development. **Savings of £74 million for the NHS due to health benefits have been projected if public catering in England follows a plant-based by default approach.**

Your ongoing efforts to enhance sustainability have made a lasting impact on London, setting a standard for cities around the world. By supporting policies that prioritise plant-based food options in public and private catering, and making them accessible and affordable across communities, you could elevate London's role as a global example of health and climate action.

Thank you for your continued dedication to a healthier, more sustainable London. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can support this transformation.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Smith CBE FMedSci
Chair, UK Health Alliance on Climate Change