



10 Minutes For The Planet

London: A Radically Green Character©

by *Pierre Vercueil*

Hi there and welcome back to our weekly environmental series here on EnglishWaves, Ten Minutes for the Planet. Today we conclude our theme on the greenest cities in the world by taking a look at number 5 on the list, the dynamic British capital London. When thinking about London, you might be more likely to picture its congested roads or its history as one of the earliest sites of the Industrial Revolution. Yet despite London being one of the most important financial centers in the world, its eyes are set on radically greening its character.

London boasts an impressive collection of green spaces, literally making the city one of the greenest of them all. According to the most recent estimates the capital of Britain has over 35,000 acres of open spaces and parks, woodlands and public gardens. This is an astonishing number as it ultimately means over 40% of the territory of the metropolis is covered by publically accessible open green spaces. Compare this to Berlin's 14.4%, a city well-known by many for its visible greenery!

On top of the city's green endowment, a coordinated effort to make London one of the greenest cities in the world, started as a response to the announcement that the city would host the 2012 Olympic Games. To do this, London's mayor committed the city to reducing CO2 emissions by 60% by 2025 through slashing carbon output by reducing demand and wastage across the whole spectrum: individuals, households, businesses and local governments. The key measure was addressing the problems relating to domestic and commercial buildings, which accounted for a staggering 70% of CO2 emissions in the city. London's 7.5 million people were not only urged to turn off televisions and lights and switch to low energy light bulbs, but households were offered a significant subsidy to insulate their homes, which continues to account for 40% of annual carbon emissions.

Despite targeting reducing carbon emissions from buildings, the city has adopted a strategy primarily aimed at modernizing transport, in part to better London's air quality. A drive to replace 8,300 old diesel buses was put in place leading to the birth of a new low-carbon fleet for public transport. There were also 32,000 taxis running on diesel fuel which are progressively being replaced by electric vehicles. However, most famously the city has taken a Paris style *Vélib* system, dubbed 'Boris bikes' after the city's eccentric

mayor, and took the concept one step further with the construction of cycle superhighways. Overall London has also been very successful in getting people out of their cars and onto public transport, with Transport for London recording a seven percent increase in passengers year on year. This trend bodes well for the city in its effort to move towards number 1 on the list.

That concludes our look at the world's Top 5 Greenest Cities. Join us again next time when we'll start a brand new theme. Stay tuned to Ten Minutes for the Planet on EnglishWaves.