



## Project Freesheet - because free papers cost the earth

16<sup>th</sup> April 2008

Dear Mayoral candidate,

Among the issues the next major of London will have to tackle is the increasing environmental impact – and substantial clean-up cost – of free newspapers which continue to proliferate in our capital.

Currently, some 1.5 million free newspapers are distributed in London each weekday. No doubt you will have witnessed for yourself that many end up littered on London's streets and transport network – adding an extra 150 tonnes to London's rubbish each weekday.

What you may not be aware of is quite how little of this waste is actually recycled. Transport for London can only cope with recycling around 25% and no London borough yet recycles waste left in municipal bins. As a consequence, the vast majority of this waste ends up in landfill – a situation which will need to change as the EU Landfill Directive caps the proportion of biodegradable waste which can be diverted to landfill at 50% from July 2009, then 35% from July 2016.

At a time of increasing concern about climate change, when there is a pressing need to reduce our energy consumption and make better use of finite natural resources, freesheets, from production to distribution, are a step in the wrong direction. Consider these simple facts:

- **Deforestation:** London's consumption of free newspapers amounts to more than 100,000 trees per year
- **Energy usage:** Vast quantities of energy are used in production, distribution and disposal
- **Cleanup cost:** the huge cost and resource drain on authorities is inevitably borne by taxpayers and commuters
- **Unsustainable behaviour:** London seeks to inspire and lead other world cities in persuading its citizens and businesses to adopt more environmentally-sustainable behaviour, yet the wilful and gross wastage involved in the production and distribution of freesheets significantly undermines this message.

Decisive leadership on this issue is essential. We are not calling for a ban on free literature – we recognise the demand and businesses' right to trade. However, both publisher and consumer must display adequate standards of environmental responsibility. Project Freesheet believes that relatively simple measures would go a long way to remedy the problems outlined:

- **More recycling bins:** if we are aiming to recycle even 50% of free paper waste an extra 4000 bins are needed across the capital
- **Spot fines penalising those who litter or fail to use recycling bins when provided:** this would keep London's streets and transport network cleaner, while communicating environmental imperatives
- **Ban distributors:** publishers must be made more responsible for their own environmental impact. Forcing them to switch from manual distributors to stands where the public can help themselves would ultimately reducing supply to match demand
- **More obligations on publishers to collect and recycle their own waste:** this would reduce the financial burden on City Hall, borough councils and the taxpayer
- **Penalties for continual print overruns:** the current circulation war sees many papers jettisoned each day when they cannot be handed out, creating unacceptable and unnecessary waste.

As a mayoral candidate, we are interested in how you would address these issues if elected. We very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Don, Justin Canning, Tom Fewins and Tom Wright on behalf of Project Freesheet