



Commissioner Vella's conclusions

Green Cities do better – they offer better quality of life to their citizens and new opportunities to business. That was the take-home message for [EU Green Week 2018](#), which was all about greening our cities.

Building a city that is genuinely sustainable and 'fit for the future' takes vision, a long-term perspective, and investment. It requires the buy-in of the city's politicians, citizens, and businesses for sustainable urban strategies to work. EU Green Week 2018 explored ways in which the EU is helping cities to become better places to live and work, and showcased policy developments on air quality, noise, nature and biodiversity, water and waste management.

We saw an amazing number of inspiring examples of how to equip our cities for a sustainable and green future. Urban farms, reclaimed industrial sites, restored waterways, smart energy grids, sustainable low energy social housing, smart transport networks, repair cafes, streets reclaimed for pedestrians, and biodiversity-rich green spaces. But these great local examples need to become the standard practice across Europe.

The week also saw several new policy milestones. EU Ministers officially approved new waste targets. The new rules, if fully and correctly applied, will make the European Union a global leader in waste recycling. They will support cities on their way towards a circular economy, giving them the certainty they need to plan for the future. Under the new rules Member States will have to reduce landfilling of waste to 10% by 2035. In addition to an overall municipal waste recycling target of 65% by 2035, there will be a specific recycling target for plastic packaging: by 2030 at least 55% will have to be recycled. Given that 10 Member States still landfilled more than 60% of their waste in 2013 this will be a considerable challenge. The Commission will do all it can to support Member States and make the new legislation deliver on the ground.

The Commission announced it will go one step further on single-use plastics, one of the most pressing environmental and economic challenges of our time. Plastic litter, from bottles to coffee cups, from food containers to straws, is polluting our oceans, our cities and our public spaces. The new legislative proposal to be presented on 28 May will help stop this plastic waste from becoming litter in the first place and will also benefit our urban areas.

As well as supporting cities through continuous policy development and enforcement in areas that are essential to citizens' quality of life and the environmental performance of urban areas, the EU is helping to build the capacity and knowledge needed to make cities more sustainable.

Over the last ten years the European Union has built a network of [European Green Capitals](#) and [Green Leaves](#) (cities with a population of between 20 000 and 100 000 inhabitants). From Stockholm and Hamburg to Nijmegen this year and Oslo in 2019, the number of sustainable role models is growing. Award-winning cities lead the way in setting higher standards in sustainable urban development, listening to what their citizens want and pioneering innovative solutions to environmental challenges. On 21 June the 2020 award holders will be announced from among the three shortlisted cities of Ghent (Belgium), Lahti (Finland) and Lisbon (Portugal).

EU Green Week 2018 saw the launch of a [new Green City Tool](#), which allows cities to assess their green performance in 12 areas and see how their approach compares to that of others, to get advice and recommendations on how to improve.

The EU Urban Agenda established through the Pact of Amsterdam in 2016 is helping to deliver "sustainable cities and communities" (SDG11). Local administrations and associations, Member States, NGOs and the Commission are working in partnership in the areas of air quality, urban mobility, circular economy, and nature and biodiversity. To address air pollutant emissions from traffic, the Commission will further strengthen its work with national, regional and local authorities on a common integrated approach for urban vehicle access regulations, under the EU Urban Agenda.

Peer-to-peer instruments are important for sharing of knowledge and good practice in environmental policies. This is particularly true at city level. Through the TAIEX-EIR peer-to-peer tools the Commission is supporting expert missions, study visits and workshops in areas such as air pollution, public procurement and waste management.

The European Commission's proposal for the next long-term EU budget clearly supports the EU sustainability agenda organised around climate action and environmental protection. The environment-specific funding programme, LIFE, has been substantially increased to €5.450 billion, and will continue to support many urban projects. There is a strong environmental focus in the funds that are most useful for the urban environment – the Cohesion Fund and the Regional Development Fund.

EU Green Week 2018 has engaged millions of actors from all over Europe in events and on [social media](#), in [blogs](#), and brought many insights and inputs for our further work. I hope you will join our efforts to ensure that these findings will now be taken up and turned into action for greener cities for a greener future.

Next year EU Green Week starting on 13 May will be about putting our European green laws and policies into practice. Green law is living, changing, and evolving. It exists in the water we drink and the air we breathe. With the 2nd Environmental Implementation Review Reports out in spring next year, Green Week will be an opportunity to take stock of how green laws work in practice, and how we - policy makers and administrations, business and citizens - can apply them better. I am much looking forward to next year's Green Week, and I hope to see you there.