

Build Back Cleaner Air summary note: The strengthened case for action on air pollution as part of the COVID-19 recovery

We have an unprecedented opportunity to build back cleaner air as part of our 'new normal' as we recover from this COVID-19 crisis. Action on air pollution has never been more important, for in addition to the annual burden of disease and 36,000 deaths caused by air pollution, it also looks to be making us more vulnerable to COVID-19. The public mandate to act on air pollution has also never been stronger with the majority of people wanting governments and businesses to act more urgently on air pollution because of the coronavirus pandemic.

- 1 Negative health outcomes: There is a detrimental link between the health outcomes of COVID-19 and air pollution.** Air pollution may play a role in making us more vulnerable to catching COVID-19. It makes those with health conditions that are caused or worsened by air pollution – such as asthma, heart disease and COPD – more vulnerable to complications, even death, if they contract COVID-19. And high air pollution is causing irreversible damage to children's health, reducing their lung function and creating a generation who may be more susceptible to future pandemics.
- 2 Increased salience: People have realised that clean air is possible and want it to stay.** During the COVID-19 lockdown, levels of NO₂ air pollution dropped by 20-30% across the UK, and by up to half in parts of London, primarily from a reduction in private car use. People noticed and appreciated the cleaner air and safer streets. The vast majority of people (72%) believe that clean air is even more important now because coronavirus can affect people's lungs, and want government and businesses to tackle air pollution more urgently than before the outbreak of the virus.
- 3 Willingness to change: Behaviour has shifted offering a profound moment of change.** During lockdown millions of people changed their routines in a way that reduced air pollution, by working from home and walking and cycling more, and many are willing to continue to do so: 87% want to keep working from home to some extent, half want to walk more and a third would like to cycle more. It is easier to maintain a habit than foster a new one, so let's build on this unique moment to create lasting change.