



# **Jury Report 2020**

**June 2019**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Due to the interest from cities and building on the success of the European Green Capital Award the need to create a competition for cities of a smaller size was identified by the European Commission in 2014. This competition now exists as the European Green Leaf Award (EGLA).

Following a Europe wide competition, the title of European Green Leaf is awarded every year to recognise and promote the efforts of smaller cities and towns (20,000 up to 100,000 population) towards better environmental management and outcomes. The first cities were awarded the title in 2015.

Urban areas are the source of many of today's environmental challenges – not surprisingly, since two out of three Europeans live in towns and cities. It is important to reward cities which are making efforts to improve the urban environment and move towards healthier and sustainable living areas. Local governments and authorities can provide the commitment and innovation needed to tackle and resolve many of these problems. The European Green Leaf Award promotes and rewards these efforts, recognising cities that demonstrate a good environmental record and commitment to generating 'green' growth and new jobs to improve our urban living environment.

The Award is based on a two-tier evaluation process: firstly, applicant cities are technically assessed across six environmental topic areas by a panel of experts. The finalist cities from this stage are then invited to present to the Jury.

## 1.1 Role of the Jury

The Jury's role is to select the winner(s) of the European Green Leaf Award (EGLA). The European Green Leaf Award finalist cities are invited to present their achievements and future vision to the Jury. Following these hearings, the Jury deliberates on the winner(s) of the European Green Leaf Award.

## 1.2 Jury Members

The Jury for the EGL Award comprises representatives from key European and International organisations in the environmental field and is chaired by the European Commission. Jury members cover a wide range of expertise and have in-depth knowledge of the issues involved. The Jury for the European Green Leaf Award 2020 includes the following organisations and their representatives:

- European Commission: Joanna Drake, Deputy Director-General for Environment (Chair)
- Committee of the Regions: Linda Robinson, Member of Wychavon Council
- Covenant of Mayors Office: Frédéric Boyer, Head of Office
- European Environment Bureau: Bernhard Zlanabitnig, Vice President
- ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability: Stefan Kuhn, Deputy Regional Director for Europe

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## 1.3 European Green Leaf Award 2020 - Jury Assessment

The Jury was provided with a suite of supporting background documents on the finalist cities<sup>1</sup> including: the Technical Assessment Report, prepared by the Expert Panel in April 2019, the Application Forms, and the Background Research Report.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2019, the three finalist cities presented their vision, action plans and communication strategies to the Jury. The Jury assessed the finalist cities based on the following criteria:

- The city's overall commitment, strategy and enthusiasm, as conveyed by the presentation;
- The city's efforts to communicate to citizens and the citizens' engagement in environmental activities; and
- The city's potential to act as a 'green ambassador', promoting good practice and spreading the EGL concept further.

Each EGL finalist was allocated 30 minutes in total with the Jury which comprised a 20-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute Question and Answers session. Members of the media were permitted to attend the presentation for their own finalist city to the Jury. However, there was no media present for the 2020 EGLA Jury presentations.

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<sup>1</sup> Lappenranta (Finland), Limerick (Ireland), Mechelen (Belgium)

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## 2 JURY FINDINGS

The Jury considered that all three cities demonstrated a strong commitment to delivering environmental excellence in their towns and cities. Importantly, they also demonstrated the ability to empower similar cities across Europe and their potential to be worthy European Green Leaf Award winners. In this respect, the Jury found that the level of the finalists was very high. The Jury comments in relation to each of the finalist cities are summarised below.

### 2.1 Lappeenranta

The Jury commended Lappeenranta on how they based their presentation around the 'Green Reality' of the city and their belief that 'Green' is a way of life, not just a brand. This represents the change from the polluting industrial town of thirty years ago, to the green city that it has become today. Major investments in clean energy, including a biomass power plant, and more than 3,000 jobs related to clean tech and sustainability sector demonstrate this commitment.

Lappeenranta has invested in promoting the environment and their sustainable future with their UNIORI Junior University Concept. This programme runs classes for the younger generation addressing themes such as sustainable business, water, energy and circular economy to educate them and develop good habits, skills and practices they can use and share. The Jury view this as an easy yet impactful way to create behavioural change, easily replicable by other cities in Europe.

The Jury was impressed with projects, such as the restoration of the Pien-Saimaa lake region, helping to repopulate the Saimaa Ringed Seals, the transition to 100% renewable electricity, and their efforts in the Circular Economy, such as the reuse of industrial waste for concrete.

### 2.2 Limerick

The Jury noted that Limerick has a history of involvement in influential demonstration projects, such as the Smarter Travel City, and becoming Irelands first Lighthouse 'energy positive' City. This demonstrates the commitment of the city to making long term change, and experience in acting as a role model for other cities around Europe.

In conjunction with the larger scale projects mentioned above, Limerick has a host of local and regional projects that impressed the jury with their multi-faceted approach to environmental awareness and wide-reaching citizen engagement. The invasive species app for plants is an excellent tool for both monitoring and reporting invasive species, as well as educating citizens and encouraging involvement through initiatives like the 'All Ireland Pollinator Plan'. Circular economy-related programmes like the Glad Rags challenge (a competition to find outfits in a charity shop to be worn on a 'date', contestants were given €95 to spend and 95 minutes to shop), the removal of plastic at major events, the [Repair and Reuse Directory](#) and the popular 'Refill' campaign for bottles are all of note.

The Jury commended Limericks 'Small City, Big Ambitions' attitude and their work to effect change and empower citizens demonstrating their ability to be a strong ambassador for the EGL competition.

### 2.3 Mechelen

Mechelen impressed the Jury with their clear efforts in the city, working together with citizens and businesses to create long-term change. The city also demonstrated a high level of involvement in existing projects with EU-wide partnerships working together towards the goal of sustainability. Both elements underpinned Mechelen's capacity to act as a Green Leaf ambassador for change.

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The city clearly demonstrated they are 'a city of actions, not plans' by their strong commitment to change. To do so, the city is using a practical, step-by-step approach. This includes projects such as the transformation of central parking lots into parks, their citizen volunteer air quality measuring part of the 'Ground Truth' project and the aim to have over 85,000 solar panels (or one solar panel per inhabitant). These were all considered good examples, replicable by other cities throughout Europe.

The Jury noted the high level of citizen engagement to create a 'Green City with Green Spaces for Green People'. They lauded this bottom up approach with citizens to become ambassadors to promote change, with projects like the Energy Co-Op, and Citizen Science both engaging and educating on environmental issues. The combination of this physical engagement with Mechelen's strong online communication tools provides a significant platform to influence people.

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### 3 JURY CONCLUSION

The Jury would like to commend all of the European Green Leaf Award 2020 finalist cities for their demonstrated excellence.

Concluding its deliberations, the Jury decided to award the titles of European Green Leaf for 2020 to Limerick (Ireland) and Mechelen (Belgium).

As in previous years, the Jury encouraged the finalists to continue their efforts in aiming to become a Green Leaf and to re-apply again in the future.

*Note: The cities are listed in alphabetical order.*