

ROUTE TO ZERO

Grow Communities For Good



A report from Birmingham's First Citizens' Assembly

May 2019

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We face a climate emergency – and the West Midlands has a moral obligation to lead.

We led the country from the steam age to the jet age. We sparked the Carbon Revolution – now we should lead the Zero Carbon Revolution.

- Yet today, the West Midlands produces just 0.3% of Britain's renewable energy.
- Just 1% of our cars are electric and only 6% of journeys are made by public transport.
- 300,000 families are mired in fuel poverty.

Almost 100 councils around the country have declared a climate emergency. Our councils – and our West Midlands Combined Authority should join them. And back it with a plan for change that the citizens of our region help design.

To accelerate that work, we asked more than a hundred people from all over the region: **"What needs to change?"**

Their answer: **"Priorities."** With a clear consensus, that the changeover has to be fair, put the responsibility with the polluters and not leave vulnerable communities behind. If we navigate it well, the Route to Zero-carbon should be a means to tackle poverty, inequality and the cost of living – not another unjust burden for the poor to shoulder.

Where do we want to get to?

A Zero Carbon Region

1. Emission reduction in line with the 1.5-degree goal – “Don’t follow the Growth Paradigm without thought”
2. Destroying the planet shouldn’t be incentivised

Economic system change

- Rethink extractive capitalism – what do we mean by growth and how do we make it sustainable?
- Think beyond GDP growth and look at opportunities for redistribution of wealth from existing resources

Culture shift

- Modify how we define success or measure wellbeing (e.g. by owning material possessions or being able to drive a car rather than rely on public transport)
- Eliminate the idea that cheaper is better (e.g. moving away from disposable fashion and towards home repairs)

Specific targets

- Ban petrol/diesel by a prescribed date



What does a just transition look like?

3. Puts combatting poverty at the heart – *"Actions shouldn't penalise the poorest"*

Policies that tackle the climate emergency should centre on the poorest:

- Areas of deprivation within our region and our country must be prioritised, and we must invest in communities that can't afford "greener options"
- The dispossessed globally (developing nations) must also be at the centre

Such policies should target:

Energy costs/fuel poverty

- Retrofit homes in the private rented sector to help the planet *and* the poor
- Rather than rely on the private sector, create a localised co-operative energy company, using the council's power/income

Transport costs

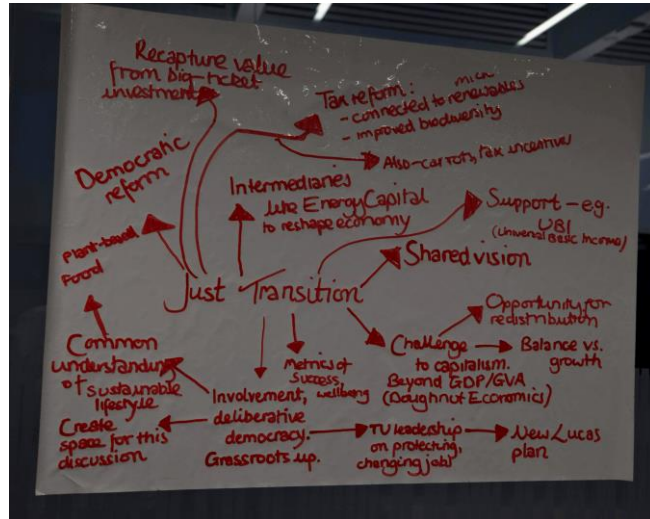
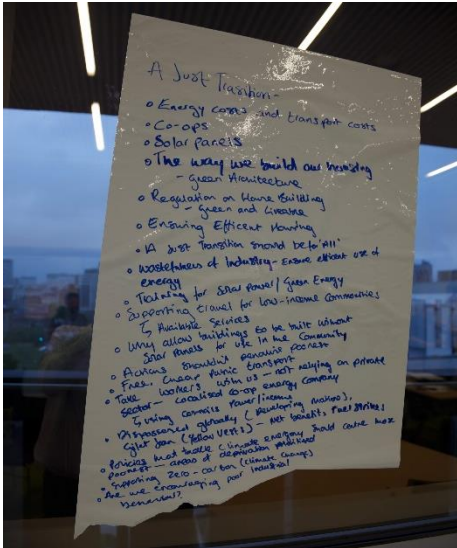
- Make public transport good enough that it is a genuine alternative to car travel and ensure there are routes in low-income communities
- Free/cheap public transport, with more joined up ticketing networks and zonal fares
- Improve cycling infrastructure, including the means to take bikes on buses, trams and trains – but make sure to take injury hotspots into account during consultation and design
- Increase number of electric car charging points
- Encourage car pooling
- Make use of the canal network

Health and wellbeing

- Improve community spaces with more green areas in tandem with reducing pollution
- Build infrastructure to encourage cycling and walking and foster community groups to get more people active
- Maximise the potential positive environmental impact people's gardens
- Lower the cost of fresh produce to bring down peoples' grocery bill and encourage more shoppers to cut down their intake of meat and dairy

Community regeneration

- Improve green spaces, pedestrianise areas
- Reduce the need to travel by improving facilities locally, particularly in deprived communities – including physical infrastructure like retail spaces and public services, but also community groups and cultural hubs



4. Creates opportunity for workers – "Take workers with us"

Reskilling

- As jobs in old carbon-heavy industries disappear, identify who is at risk, including older workers
- Provide training for green industries such as installing solar panels and other green energy technologies, as well as forest management – a field that needs more workers
- High-skilled job creation in research and development, ensuring there are pathways for apprenticeship-style upskilling to a *better* job
- Rebuild communities that are currently centred on carbon-heavy industries – i.e. avoid the destruction felt in old mining communities

Workers' rights

- Work with the trade union movement
- Use transition as an opportunity to tackle precarious work, including scrapping Zero Hour Contracts and trialing Universal Basic Income

5. Places the burden on the polluters – "Those that are less well-off are greener by default"

- Punish wastefulness in industry to ensure the efficient use of energy
 - Use a "carbon tax" and money channelled from tools like the Low Emission Zone into investing in green technology and jobs
 - Make links with former colonies and recognise obligations to the international victims of climate change as we make a transition that is just for the whole world
- "The UK economy has had the benefit of our industrial revolution, but other countries won't get this. We need to ensure they can grow their economies with green energy."

6. Doesn't leave anyone out – *"A just transition should be for ALL"*

- Proactively engage groups often excluded from the climate debate, including BAME communities
- Engage those with reason to be sceptical, such as small business owners and those who work in carbon-reliant industries
- Encourage more women into jobs in new industries
- Ensure measures do not penalise those already struggling to get by
- Make sure climate policy is not solely focused on cities
- Promote intergenerational fairness, but also make sure older people are not left out – communicate in language that speaks directly to older people



How do we achieve a just transition?

We need a balance between personal responsibility and corporate regulation.

Individuals can and should do their bit – but we need government action.

7. Be brave – “Don’t leave the change to chance”

“Political will, at all levels and in all departments”

National Government

- National Government needs to think big and “make the changes it is scared of”
- Encourage small changes but also tell the truth and acknowledge that we will have to make some unpleasant decisions
- Set clear targets so Government can be held to account
- Make real financial commitments
- Commit to strategic planning as well as money, making sure the infrastructure we invest in is not obsolete by the time it is completed
- Work internationally – this is an international problem with an international solution, and international justice has to be taken into account
- Enforce corporate regulation (including in the supply chain) and explore public ownership
- Reform tax to ensure it is paid by polluting industries (and then invested into renewable energy production and improving biodiversity rather than used to subsidise petrol for cars)
- Introduce carrot and stick incentives to encourage individuals and businesses to make greener choices
- **Empower local government:** “National government has to put the framework in place to enable local government to make the changes we need, for example changing regulations so that councils can require developers to build low-carbon homes”
- **Empower individuals:** “Help individuals make better choices by requiring environmental education in schools (which will then filter to parents) and clear information on products and services about the carbon implications of our choices.”
- **Expose polluters:** “Stop using the passive voice when we talk about climate. Name the interests, forces, organisations. Identify who, what, where, why, how – so we can make change happen. Start talking about consumption. Start talking about growth/profit.”

City and regional government

- Promote becoming sustainable within a region and encourage localism
- Hold the institutions within the community to account (e.g. by setting emission targets)
- Procurement – “A Green Preston Model”: Stop allowing buildings to be built for use in the community without solar panels or proper insulation
- Green architecture: Enforce regulations requiring housing to be both green AND liveable
- Green use of public infrastructure – e.g. turning billboard lights off at night
- Local initiatives to encourage travelling to school by public transport, bike or foot

“Focus on the journey not the endpoint. We need people to want climate action but, naturally, their focus is elsewhere. We need to concentrate on the shared goals: warm homes, clean air, good jobs, clean water, good health.”

Individuals need to:

- Use less plastic
- Eat less meat
- Use more sustainable forms of transport
- Reduce waste
- Start conversations with the people in their community
- Inform themselves
- Put pressure on politicians and business
- Recognise our individual power to influence

Businesses need to:

- Reassess their priorities: “profit vs polar bears?!”
- Work with activists and the public for practical solutions to reduce waste
- Set achievable targets that they can be held accountable to

8. Build a movement

“We need a Brexit level of public engagement on climate and how life will be very different”

“Justice = fairness”

The transition requires us to act collectively and sacrifice some our selfish individual desires.

But we also need a narrative that helps people understand their place in the story – how their decisions affect the planet – and the impact that will then have on them as an individual.



Policy-making from the grassroots

- Use simple language in discussions around climate policy
- Bring the existing environmental movement and workers together
- Deliberative democracy, including existing groups like trade unions on relevant issues such as protecting or changing jobs
- Raise environmental issues within other social justice movements
- Build a common understanding of a sustainable lifestyle – including increased consumption of plant-based food. It takes a change of culture to normalise “green options” like reusables

9. Community ownership

“We need to build a shared vision for the future with an understanding that the transition is the opportunity for a better quality of life for all – not just a matter of giving things up.”

- (Re-)nationalisation of energy/utilities/transport networks
- Introduction of new local energy co-operatives
- Ensure community participation in decisions that will affect them

10. Move beyond party politics – “We’re on the same team”

- This is not a party issue – it does not belong to one side of the political spectrum
- We have to build a consensus

“Take it seriously, stop stalling, stop just talking about change. If we keep discussing it so much it will be too late.”