

# CORE CITIES AND THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER



# CORE CITIES AND THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY: LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

## Why this report...and why now?

It is one year since many of the UK's local authorities declared a climate emergency. In the summer of 2019 - with its record temperatures - council leaders stood on the steps of their venerable town halls and made a series of promises. This continued into the autumn, and around 280 local authorities have now declared an emergency.

But what have they done since? A lot should happen in a year, in an emergency. This report is a **first pass** at assessing the progress of seven of the UK's core cities - major and broadly comparable urban areas. The '[Core Cities](#)' is also a self-selected and self-financed advocacy group consisting of eleven UK cities outside Greater London. The ways in which this group shares and applies best practice around climate change is not always clear. Some but not all of the local authorities have produced new climate action plans. Even the emergency declarations vary greatly in scope, approach and targets.

This report appears as city councils start to produce their Covid-19 recovery plans. There has been much talk of 'green recovery' but the risk of a brown bounce back is high. This report and its successors will scrutinise recovery plans for deeds not words. Will a few high-profile measures mask a broader return to business as usual?

### Key findings

- 1. Missing £ signs** - few climate emergency responses are costed, or include a plan for funding. Such detail will be needed for bids for national funding.
- 2. 'Green recovery' more slogan than reality** - increased active travel infrastructure is welcome, but limited. Retrofit is hailed by leaders, but the next steps are not clear.
- 3. Engagement is rarely ongoing or city-wide** - local authorities have either carried out small-scale or one-off consultations, or established stakeholder groups of 'usual suspects'.

## How we produced this report

This first version of the report draws on publicly available information, crowd-sourced by local groups around the country. The reflections of one researcher on what climate justice means at the city / region level conclude the document. The data was compiled by [Climate Emergency Manchester](#): a non-partisan group connecting citizens and holding Manchester City Council to account.

### Future reports - can you help?

Is there an issue in your city that we have missed? Does your city need a more socially and environmentally just vision of life post-lockdown? We need your on the ground views. Future reports will encompass all eleven of the core cities, with more data. So if you live in Belfast, Glasgow or Leeds, we'd be particularly keen to hear from you. [contact@climateemergencymanchester.net](mailto:contact@climateemergencymanchester.net)

## Structure

For each of the major areas on which action is needed we ask:

- Why does this matter?
- What has been promised?
- What has been done?
- What is the impact of Covid-19?

We give each city a provisional score, 0-2.

0 = N/A or no progress
1 = Some progress made
2 = Good progress made

These scores are combined to make the league table at the end of the report. Like all league tables, there is room for new challengers... and former frontrunners to slip.

The scores are a subjective judgement and we are aware that in some cases a score is low because we do not yet have the data to evidence action. If you are aware of an initiative that we have overlooked, we'd love to hear from you.

For each area, we also ask **what if...?** to capture the bolder suggestions or alternative ways of looking at the problems ahead. While many of these circulated in the early days of lockdown, early recovery plans suggest they are already being squeezed out.

## Thanks

To all those who contributed to the report. We look forward to working together in the future

Particular thanks to **LJBstudio** for the cover design.  
[www.LJBstudio.co.uk](http://www.LJBstudio.co.uk) @LJB\_Studio

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# 1 - Targets

## Why this matters

Targets are needed to identify a pathway for action (how do you get to...). But target setting needs to be informed by an understanding of current emissions. Many local authorities are still working out their emissions, or do not communicate the analysis that underpinned their targets. The targets for net zero vary from city to city; many combined authorities have different targets from their constituent councils.

Regular and transparent monitoring and reporting is just as important. **Look out for accounting tricks!** Local authorities might make grand claims of reductions stretching back to the mid 2000s, without mentioning that some of these came through the decarbonisation of the grid, or the decade of austerity that forced councils to cut thousands of staff and sell off buildings.

	Score
<b>Birmingham</b> has promised a <a href="#">"just transition" to net-zero carbon by 2030</a> . But the targets are not based on a published analysis of the Birmingham economy in relation to climate issues and solutions. The West Midlands Combined Authority has <a href="#">separately declared</a> a climate emergency and developed a carbon reduction strategy to 2041.	<b>0</b>
<b>Bristol</b> was the first local authority in the UK to declare a climate emergency in November 2018. The headline target is to become carbon neutral, but also climate resilient by 2030. The <a href="#">One City Climate Strategy</a> , published 15 months after the declaration, in February 2020, refers to monitoring and public reporting (p.68), but with no indication on frequency. Reports on adaptation and mitigation needs will be 'biennial' - i.e. once every two years.	<b>0</b>
<b>Cardiff</b> aligns its targets to the Welsh Government's <a href="#">Low Carbon Delivery Plan</a> , with the ambition for the public sector in Wales to be carbon neutral by 2030.	<b>0</b>
<b>Liverpool</b> has declared a target of 2030 for net zero carbon, although the Liverpool City Region target is 2040.	<b>0</b>

<p><b>Manchester</b> has a target to be zero carbon by 2038, which was informed by work completed by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Research. The City Council has committed to ‘play its full part’ in reducing its emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. Rather than a single plan, the Manchester Climate Change Agency (an arms-length organisation funded mainly by the Council) has recommended a ‘suite’ of action plans across partner organisations for the 2020-2025 period to focus on urgent actions. This expects at least 50% reductions in GHGs by 2025.</p>	<p>0</p>
<p><b>Nottingham</b> aims to become the UK’s first carbon neutral city by 2028. ‘<a href="#">CN2028</a>’ pervades documents. Yet, there is a lack of urgency for such an imminent date. The CN2028 target was declared in January 2019. But public consultation on this was not launched until January 2020.</p> <p>The draft <a href="#">Climate Action Plan</a> (p.11, ‘Monitoring’) promises annual milestones and quarterly reporting on carbon neutral pathway targets, as part of the Council’s corporate reporting. Annual targets need to be set quickly, to allow for this quarterly reporting.</p>	<p>0</p>
<p><b>Sheffield</b> has brought forward its carbon neutral target to 2030. Sheffield Council also commissioned the Tyndall Centre for Climate Research to provide the analysis for the city’s carbon budgets. The report appeared six months after the emergency declaration, and is <a href="#">accessible on the Council website</a>.</p>	<p>0</p>

What if...

Each council had a dashboard on its website, updated monthly, which showed progress against targets.

## 2 - Governance and engagement

### Why this matters

Honesty, transparency and regular communication is crucial to build trust for difficult decisions. Local authorities don't have all the answers. But how can they bring in other ideas from across their city if the communication is not two-way?

	Score
<p><b>Birmingham</b> set up a multi-stakeholder Route To Zero (R20) <a href="#">Task Force</a> and sub-groups with Terms of Reference. But the Task Force is unnecessarily selective. There is only one union representative and no community representation apart from 'faith communities'. The views of the vast majority of 'stakeholders' - i.e. the citizens of Birmingham - have only been elicited through an online survey. The only citizen participation has been through meetings organised by campaigners - generally a self-selecting audience.</p> <p>The governance of the climate emergency implementation programme is currently under discussion. But the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees are not involved, except the Sustainability and Transport O&amp;S Committee (meeting every two months). Some infrastructure developments going ahead which should have been reviewed / halted, indicating that the climate emergency declaration has not affected behaviours in key council departments.</p> <p>Since Covid-19, Council meetings including those with the remit for climate, have moved online to video conference after a short delay, but they are no longer webcast. i.e. members of the public can no longer watch live.</p>	1
<p><b>Bristol</b> A new <a href="#">Bristol Climate Change Advisory Committee</a> - modelled on the national Committee on Climate Change - has been created to provide technical advice on climate change to all of the One City boards</p>	1

<p>The new Environmental Sustainability board brings in partners from across the city. An open <a href="#">expressions of interest process</a> led to the appointment of the Board’s first <a href="#">18 members</a>. Two further places have been reserved to improve the Board’s diversity, notably of people with disabilities and young people.</p> <p>Like many of LA partnership arrangements, the Environmental Sustainability Board has no powers to make decisions directly about the allocation of public funds. Each member takes views back to their own organisations and their decision-making structures. The Board is co-chaired by Bristol’s mayor, Marvin Rees, who has also written a number of blogs on the climate emergency.</p> <p>Bristol City Council plans to engage with the national citizen’s climate assembly, rather than set up one of its own. Bristol proudly proclaims that it has that it has engaged over 300 people in the production of its climate action plan. As a percentage of the total population of Bristol (which is 463,000) this is miniscule.</p>	
<p><b>Cardiff</b> Many strong suggestions come from outside the Council through the <a href="#">Future Generations Commissioner</a>. The Future Generations Act gives Wales a framework for addressing the climate emergency in a bold way, but its recommendations are not legally binding.</p> <p>The Future Generations Commissioner’s <a href="#">10 Point Plan to fund the Climate Emergency</a> addresses head-on the problem that the Low Carbon Wales plan contains no detail on how the climate emergency will be funded.</p>	0
<p><b>Liverpool</b> shows little evidence of engagement and there is not a clear governance structure for responding to the climate emergency. Liverpool City Council has not yet produced an action plan. It should be noted that Liverpool faced some of the most severe austerity of the 2010s (approx 63% cut in annual budget 2010-20).</p> <p>Some engagement has taken place around transport infrastructure, with an information campaign on reduced speed limits in residential areas that involved community centres, tenants and resident associations, youth centres, friends of parks and church groups.</p>	0



<p><b>Manchester</b> There is a devolved, partnership-based approach to climate action covering residents, large organisations that make up 20% of the city’s emissions, including the City Council. However, this approach does not show who is clearly accountable or driving this work. There is a Manchester Climate Change Partnership and Manchester Climate Change Agency responsible for “championing, coordinating and facilitating the implementation of the Framework”. There are also Independent Advisory Groups - two out of four are set up - which are there to monitor progress, but do not have any remit to bind greater action. Ward-level meetings to engage residents were promised, but these only started in a few wards in January/February 2020 and have not yet happened on any scale.</p>	<p><b>0</b></p>
<p><b>Nottingham</b> The draft <a href="#">plan</a> for CN2028 sets out a number of promising initiatives around governance (p.9). However, it is not yet clear which, if any, of these have been implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a network of Climate Champions across the Council and City</li> <li>- Change the style and venue of meetings to be more engaging for partnerships and community/business to creatively address key challenges</li> <li>- Develop new forms of democratic involvement - including crowd-sourcing and crowd-funding initiatives</li> <li>- Develop a ‘carbon neutral by design’ ethos where everything that is proposed or implemented across the organisation considers how it can be carbon neutral or contribute to reducing carbon as a matter of course. This will include being considered from the outset in the City Council’s major projects assurance process to inform decision making</li> </ul> <p>The section of the Draft Plan headed ‘Governance, Funding &amp; Engagement’ was not included in the consultation survey that went out to citizens and organisations in March 2020.</p> <p>The Plan contains little information on costs and funding.</p>	<p><b>1</b></p>

<p>The CN2028 lead is Deputy Leader Sally Longford, who is also responsible for emergency planning. This means that, even more than most, her attention has been diverted elsewhere during the pandemic</p>	
<p><b>Sheffield</b> Council has promised a Citizen’s Assembly on climate change. At the start of March, this was scheduled to be underway by June 2020. Its status is currently uncertain.</p> <p>Sheffield council has invested in £100,000 in stakeholder engagement around the climate emergency. This translates as ~13p resident.</p>	<p>0</p>

What if...

Each Council had a permanent Committee dedicated to the climate emergency, of equal standing to its other committees.

### 3 - Transport

#### Why this matters

Transport is at a critical moment. Before coronavirus, the transport sector was responsible for the largest share of carbon emissions across the country. But Covid-19 has shown the potential to reimagine a transport system that works for people’s health, wellbeing, the economy and climate. It has also made clear that public transport is a social justice issue, meeting the needs of key workers.

	Score
<p><b>Birmingham</b> On May 14 2020 Birmingham City Council launched an <a href="#">Emergency Transport Plan</a>, as part of the response to Covid-19. Both the prior transport plan and post-covid emergency transport plan are relatively radical. But City level action constrained by WMCA "ownership" of regional transport strategy and by privatised public transport. The government has imposed a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) on the whole city centre which poses some major operational and social justice issues. Unlike some of the city zones proposed in other cities, (e.g. Manchester) the CAZ includes private cars.</p>	1
<p><b>Bristol</b> In May 2020 Bristol City Council proposed bringing forward long-term transport schemes to enable people to move safely as Bristol emerges from lockdown. These include: pedestrianising the Old City area of Bristol, pavement widening, new bus priority routes, and active travel upgrades in central areas.</p> <p>The Council have launched a new <a href="#">interactive mapping tool</a> to capture the public’s views on possible changes for transport and travel in Bristol. The public can add their comments and ideas to the map online. For example, identifying difficult locations to maintain social distancing, which roads could be included in revised plans and ways to create better spaces for cycling and walking across the city.</p> <p>Bristol airport expansion <a href="#">appears to be halted</a>, but it was a long battle for Councillors and there have been subsequent challenges from the Airport</p>	1

<p>Chief Executive. The Environmental Sustainability Board has been asked to <a href="#">input into Bristol Airport’s Sustainability Plan</a>: how critical will the Board be? Citizens have previously used Freedom of Information Acts to request more information about the Mayor’s role in Bristol Airport’s plans for expansion.</p>	
<p><b>Cardiff</b> Although Cardiff Council claims it wants to get more people walking and cycling, it is <a href="#">opening a series of temporary cark parks</a> around the city as lockdown lifts.</p>	<p>0</p>
<p><b>Liverpool</b> Mayor of Liverpool has greenlit a £2 million package for up to 100km of pop-up cycle lanes (although the money is also intended to cover street furniture). Seven routes have been introduced so far.</p> <p><a href="#">Businesses and the public</a> are also being asked to come forward with ideas on how to improve access for cyclists and pedestrians around the city centre, including temporary lanes. These are a start but not a ‘network’. Again, this is an issue on which the <a href="#">greater initiative</a> is being taken by the City Region and the active travel commissioner role.</p> <p>Prior to lockdown, Liverpool had been undertaking a £45 million redesign of the city centre. This covered the widening of pavements on key routes such as Victoria Street, introducing 11km of new permanent cycle lanes and expanding its 20mph zones.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><b>Manchester</b> City Council has come under much criticism for <a href="#">refusing to install</a> pop-up cycle lanes in the city centre as lockdown lifts, <a href="#">leading to actions from campaigners</a>.</p> <p>Manchester City Council has a 35.6% share in Manchester Airport Group, from which it receives a large dividend. In May 2020 the <a href="#">Council bailed out the Airport to the tune of -£260m</a>.</p>	<p>0</p>
<p><b>Nottingham</b> Implemented the UK’s first Workplace Parking Levy and constructed two new tram lines. This has led to 9.7 million additional public transport journeys each year. Efforts to increase the uptake of Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles (ULEVs) are now beginning to show results but still account for less than 0.5% of all Nottingham’s vehicles.</p>	<p>1</p>

<p>Local groups would like more urgency in implementing a City Centre Clear Zone to keep out the most polluting vehicles; In the medium term, consideration of road user charging (1.5.1 in CN28 Plan) to help reallocate road space to the most sustainable forms of travel. Some of the suggested actions, including emissions-based parking tariffs, could be implemented more quickly and the shift to EVs / charging network will need cooperation of private sector</p> <p>Increased working from home was included in the Nottingham CN2028 draft plan even before Covid-19</p>	
<p><b>Sheffield</b> has installed pop-up temporary footpath widening measures in six locations.</p> <p>Sheffield City Region has also <a href="#">appointed paralympian Dame Sarah Storey</a> as its first Active Travel Commissioner. We hope this means that active travel measures will take those with disabilities into much greater account.</p> <p>Over the summer 2019, Sheffield expanded its ‘anti-idling zones’. Anti-idling zones are now in place outside all primary and secondary schools, as well as other notable buildings like hospitals.</p>	<p>1</p>

**What if...**

We moved towards a more ‘polycentric’ vision of our cities and regions, with not all economic activity concentrated in the centre.

## 4 - Energy

### Why this matters...

Municipalities can play an active role in clean energy. Many of the technical challenges, for example decarbonising heat, are inherently local. Local leaders can build support for clean energy in a way that national leaders cannot. But in the UK, only a minority of local authorities are pioneering clean energy programmes.

	Score
<p><b>Birmingham</b> is piloting a number of interesting initiatives.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Birmingham District Energy Scheme</a> is a 3 district energy networks (Broad Street - a tri-generation system, Aston University - a CHP system and Birmingham Children's Hospital - a CHP system) built and operated by ENGIE through the Birmingham District Energy Company</p> <p>Energy Innovation Zones (EIZs) are significant geographical areas where energy market regulations might be varied to encourage investment in infrastructure to meet specific local needs and become democratically accountable through Local Authorities and Regional Mayor, facilitated by the Local Enterprise Partnership</p> <p>Tyseley and <a href="#">Central Birmingham Energy Innovation Zone plan</a>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Phase 1: 10 MW waste wood biomass plant, provides the foundations for a decentralised controllable distributed energy system</li><li>- Phase 2: the UK's first low and zero carbon refuelling station = supplies public and commercial vehicles with a range of sustainable fuels that reduce emissions - supports the Clean Air Zone</li><li>- Phase 3: waste processing technologies to generate power - link this and the biomass plant to city-wide grid infrastructure</li></ul>	1
<p><b>Bristol</b> - Bristol City's energy company Bristol Energy, has been <a href="#">put up for sale</a> after repeatedly making a loss. Opposition councillors are <a href="#">demanding</a></p>	1

<p><a href="#">a full inquiry</a>. By October 2019, Bristol Community Energy fund had invested nearly half a million into <a href="#">various small scale renewable energy projects</a> across the city.</p> <p>In March 20202, Bristol <a href="#">received £10m of government</a> funding to expand the city’s low carbon heat network.</p>	
<p><b>Cardiff</b> <a href="#">Research from the IWA</a> suggests that "many of the powers needed for clean energy are in the hands of ministers in Cardiff. Westminster cannot be blamed if only 2% of the Welsh block grant went to the ‘Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs’ planning group.</p>	0
<p><b>Liverpool</b> has not yet produced an action plan following the declaration, and so the ‘latest’ promises are those from the Sustainable Energy Action Plan of 2012</p> <p>The Liverpool LECCY was launched in 2017 - a partnership with Robin Hood Energy. What we do not know but would like to ascertain for future reports is: how much of each type of renewable source are now operating in Liverpool? ; how many customers does it have and can we get a breakdown of the customers based in Liverpool, the city region and wider UK?; how much was invested to get this up and running and what surpluses or losses have been reported 2017-18, 2018-19 and does it look like this is a business/business model that we can build a larger city-region wide energy company on?</p>	0
<p><b>Manchester</b> The <a href="#">MCC Climate Change Action Plan</a> 2020-2025 has outlined the following:</p> <p>A Carbon Reduction Programme - first phase includes £2.6 million invested in energy conservation measures and around £4.3 million invested in energy generation technology at 13 buildings in the Council’s operational estate, includes Solar PVs on suitable buildings and sites, Batteries, EV Charging Infrastructure and Heat Pumps.</p> <p>A commitment to Civic Quarter Heat Network - a shared heat network for council-owned properties and some private properties around the Town Hall</p>	1

<p>However, research has suggested a <a href="#">double-counting of savings</a> from these initiatives</p>	
<p><b>Nottingham</b> Robin Hood, Nottingham City Council’s energy supplier has struggled financially recently., posting a loss of £23.1 million in its latest financial results for 2019 in March. In <a href="#">May 2020, advisers from Deloitte</a> were called in for a strategic review.</p> <p>Robin Hood Energy has long had its critics but was the UK’s first publicly-owned, not-for-profit energy company. As of July 2019, all of its energy comes from renewable sources. It serves around 115,000 customers.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><b>Sheffield</b> Sheffield Council now purchases electricity generated from 100% renewable sources. This is an increase of 81% since 2019.</p>	<p>1</p>

What if...

The uncertainty was taken away from piecemeal projects, combining them into programmes, with a long-term policy mandate.



## 5 - Homes and buildings

### Why this matters

Home energy use (mainly heating and hot water) accounts for around 20% of the UK’s overall emissions. The energy efficiency of homes must be radically improved, not just to meet targets but to eradicate fuel poverty. Retrofitting homes, with the potential this holds for jobs, appears in almost all statements about a ‘green recovery’. A national one-size-fit approach has failed over the past decade. But maybe now is the moment for local authorities to scale up recent pilots which work with community-organisations to offer a more people-powered approach.

	Score
<p><b>Birmingham</b> - The Action Plan currently in development will include retrofit and we are told will aim for all new-build to be zero carbon. This is important: every new home built which is not yet zero carbon will need to be retrofitted later down the line. Funding for retrofit has not been identified.</p>	<b>0</b>
<p><b>Bristol</b> - is plagued by the past <a href="#">failures of ‘top-down’ retrofit schemes</a> in the mid 2000’s (Warm Up Bristol). This may contribute to caginess about how many homes the council has actually insulated, <a href="#">leading citizens to submit Freedom of Information Act requests to find out</a>.</p> <p>The <a href="#">One Climate Strategy</a> recognises some of the challenges and opportunities in providing energy efficiency buildings (p.35), specificity about the partnerships that could deliver ‘exemplar’ projects or provide green jobs soon.</p> <p>There is a recognition of the need for new national planning processes and energy efficiency standards, but a lack of ambition to push at the standards being trialled (<a href="#">PAS2035</a>).</p>	<b>1</b>
<p><b>Cardiff</b> - Councils in Cardiff and the rest of Wales are still largely testing out and piloting interesting but small-scale initiatives. The plans for</p>	<b>0</b>

<p>larger rolling out of the necessary measures are not clear. The recent <a href="#">pilot schemes</a> in the Swansea Bay area are a case in point.</p>	
<p><b>Liverpool</b> Steve Rotheram has joined Andy Burnham in speaking of the need to roll out more retrofit as part of the Covid-19 recovery. What this will consist of is not yet clear. The City region has at least begun to identify where it needs to be: 42,774 homes need to be insulated every year within the Liverpool City Region to ensure all homes are properly insulated by 2030. At least 24,675 heat pumps need to be fitted every year in the city region. Campaigners must push for all new development to be zero carbon, starting immediately.</p> <p>Retrofit falls under Liverpool’s Energy Project Plus. However, as with many local authorities, we need more data about what has already been done and will in future ask: for data on what retrofit work has been carried out by the various councils? How much was spent on the various programmes? What was the outcome?</p>	<p><b>0</b></p>
<p><b>Manchester</b> The MCC Climate Action Plan promises “a comprehensive investment programme to deliver energy efficiency, retrofit and energy generation from solar panels and heat pumps across all Council owned properties or those managed by Northwards Housing”. However, since the declaration of the climate emergency there have been no new policies, schemes or grants made available to help Mancunians retrofit homes they own or rent.</p>	<p><b>0</b></p>
<p><b>Nottingham</b> Nottingham City Homes is the first housing association in the UK to pilot net zero retrofits using the Energiesprong approach. However, since the declaration of the climate emergency the Council has <a href="#">re-announced £5m of funding from the EU</a> on several occasions, even though this was awarded in 2014 and access to such funding in the future is not guaranteed.</p> <p>Retrofit is still small-scale. The Energiesprong pilot retrofitted 27 homes. Nottingham has 135,000 homes, 27,000 of which are managed by Nottingham Council Homes. Over 58% of these are below the national energy efficiency target (EPC C).</p>	<p><b>1</b></p>

<p>The Council claims to have made over 40,000 energy efficiency measures in local homes, however it is unclear whether this brings the homes to the necessary standard.</p> <p>The time frames are also unclear: Nottingham City Homes have installed 14,221 boilers, 4140 loft installations and 12,588 cavity wall measures - but from when to when?</p>	
<p><b>Sheffield</b> - The claim that the Council is spending £5.7m replacing obsolete boilers has been <a href="#">wheeled out as evidence of what is being done since declaring an emergency</a>. However, this grant of £5.7m was awarded in 2017.</p>	<p><b>0</b></p>

What if...

City councils went into partnership with one or more of the energy companies to establish a domestic "heat and light" offer

## 6 - Nature and the circular economy

### Why this matters...

We know green space is important for emissions. But 2020 has reminded us of all the additional benefits of green space and clean air for physical and mental wellbeing. Planning is not just about stopping development; flood defences, for example, will be crucial to minimise the damage of extreme climate events.

	Score
<p><b>Birmingham</b> - In February 2020 Birmingham earned 'Tree City' status, despite <a href="#">felling a number of trees</a> in recent years.</p> <p>Birmingham is one of eight cities taking part in the National Lottery-funded Future Parks programme (awarded June 2019).</p> <p>The Council has requested a <a href="#">delay to the Birmingham Clean Air Zone</a>, due to coronavirus.</p> <p>Food and agriculture are not in scope in the draft climate action plan. This seems a major omission. Like many cities, Birmingham has seen a large increase in demand for food banks (run by charities) during Covid-19 and the council have set up local support networks for vulnerable households.</p> <p>The draft action plan includes waste reduction and some migration to "circular economy" principles. However, Council recycling centres closed during lockdown and there has been a marked increase in fly tipping.</p> <p>A piece of research in 2019 concluded that Birmingham had the lowest recycling rate of any UK city. <a href="#">Only 22% of Birmingham residents recycle</a> their waste</p>	<b>0</b>
<p><b>Bristol</b> has set the objective that by 2030 "Everyone lives and works within a 10 minute walk of a quality green space with sufficient tree</p>	<b>1</b>

<p>canopy cover to provide refuge for citizens during climate change induced extreme heat conditions”. There is also a recognition of the need to redress the balance of access to nature and green space, which is lower in some deprived communities who cannot always travel to access it.</p> <p>Bristol aims to plant 250,000 trees by 2030 (“one tree per employee”).</p> <p>In May 2020, Bristol withdrew from the West of England Joint Spatial Framework. The <a href="#">Mayor’s blog</a> linked this to climate change.</p>	
<p><b>Cardiff</b> produced a <a href="#">green infrastructure plan</a> in September 2019 .</p>	<b>0</b>
<p><b>Liverpool</b> Information on green infrastructure is dramatically out of date (plans on the Council website are from 2010).</p> <p>Many of the figures on recycling readily available relate to the 2010 action plan. Again, a decade ago.</p>	<b>0</b>
<p><b>Manchester</b> has approved a number of <a href="#">car parks</a> since declaring a climate emergency, including a <a href="#">large central space</a> that citizens wanted to become a park. <a href="#">Planning decisions have been taken in private</a> during lockdown.</p>	<b>0</b>
<p><b>Nottingham</b> City Council is committed to planting 50,000 new trees by the end of 2023. This started in winter 2019. Funding for this first stage has come from the Trees for Cities charity and Nottingham City Council. The CN2028 plan aims to create bee-friendly habitats in every ward. However, the Nottingham 2028 Action Plan might overstate the role of carbon offsetting?</p> <p>Here are the calculations of one local campaigner: the City Council has an existing policy (Urban Forest Strategy) to increase tree canopy cover from 14% to 20% by 2030. This increase of 6% will need to cover around 450 hectares (4.5 million square metres). This would require say 1 million trees each with a canopy of 4.5 square metres (i.e. 2.4 metres diameter) - i.e. mature or semi-mature trees, depending on species. Estimating absorption of carbon by trees requires a complex calculation depending on species and location, but one rough estimate is that one tree may absorb the equivalent of one tonne of CO2 over 40 years, an average of</p>	<b>1</b>

<p>25kg per year though probably nearer 10kg in early years. So one million trees might absorb 10,000 tonnes CO2 per year initially, rising to 25,000 tonnes - around 1% to 2.5% of Nottingham’s current CO2 emissions.</p> <p>The Council makes much of the “Energy-from-Waste” provided by Eastcroft Incinerator is not low carbon. In 2019 the incinerator burnt 188,242 tonnes of waste. Assuming the composition was similar to when a waste audit was carried out in 2014, which found waste delivered to the incinerator to contain 23.66% carbon, we can calculate that around 160,000 tonnes CO2 will have been emitted in 2019. Taking account of the electricity and heat actually sold by Enviroenergy, carbon emissions are probably worse than for a coal-fired power station.</p>	
<p><b>Sheffield</b> Flood protection schemes, particularly those around the Lower Don Valley, are underway. The <a href="#">costs and phases have been set out.</a></p> <p>However, it is not clear if all funding has been secured.</p>	<p>0</p>

**What if...**

The Council designated and demarcated areas of of public land (such as verges) where people could plant trees.

## League table

This first pass at a league table draws on the information available at the time of writing. The position may reflect lack of data, as well as lack progress. As more data becomes available, city rankings may change. We'd love more evidence!

City	Overall score (/12)
Bristol	5
Nottingham	5
Birmingham	3
Manchester	2
Sheffield	2
Liverpool	1
Cardiff	0

## What next?

There are three things you can do in the coming months, as citizens.

- 1. Interrogate Covid-19 recovery plans** - Councils are in the process of drafting their Covid-19 recovery plans. Based on [early statements and reports](#), we anticipate that many of these will talk of a 'green recovery', but lack concrete detail on how this will be achieved. Questions to ask include:
  - Are the partnerships needed to create green jobs in place?
  - Are retrofit plans supported by data?
  - Do active travel measures stretch beyond a couple of streets?
- 2. Scrutinise local climate action plans** - both those launched in early 2020, and those that are due to appear in the coming months. Watch out for:
  - Re-announcements of funding
  - Actions that are not prioritised
- 3. Send Freedom of Information Act Requests** - If local authorities provided more information, a fuller assessment could be made. If they released comparable data, cities could more readily learn from each other. Until this happens, citizens can use Freedom of Interest Act requests.

Hints and a worked example on how to submit FOIAs are available [here](#), with more resources coming soon.

## Reflections: climate justice at the city / region level?

Whatever you think a zero-carbon city / region would look like, or how that goal will be achieved, there's no escaping the fact that the changes involved will affect all citizens, communities and organisations in profound ways.

Change is always difficult, even if the goal sounds highly attractive. Workers in “sunset” industries will lose their jobs. Currently in our society that means immediate, tangible losses - of income, security, status, etc. How can this be compared with the intangible future benefit of sustainable ecosystems for future generations? What level of compensation for short term losses would convince people that “it will all be worth it in the end”? Will investment in retraining and “green jobs” fill the gaps? Do we need Universal Basic Income to create basic security for everyone?

And who will decide the balance of pain and gain? Can our fragile democratic systems stand the strain of the what will be the biggest peace-time transformation ever?

How do we balance “winners and losers” across society? How do we protect the most vulnerable people and communities from adverse changes? Do we value equally the lives and well-being of people elsewhere on our planet who are already suffering from the impacts of climate chaos?

All these questions and many more are lumped together in the clumsy phrase “Just Transition to net-zero carbon by 2030” (or whatever date has been chosen as “feasible” locally).

One thing is certain - climate action campaigners should be facing up to these questions and demanding full, ongoing citizen participation in finding solutions with wide popular support



We at **Climate Emergency Manchester** will continue to work on Manchester projects. We have a [petition](#) for a seventh scrutiny committee to examine climate policy - anyone who lives, works or studies within the City Council's boundaries can sign it. If you don't, but you know people who do, please alert them.

We are also creating an **Active Citizenship Toolkit**, to raise our own skills and knowledge, and help others do the same.

We are keen to work with individuals and groups within Manchester, but also beyond.

We will revisit this question of the Core Cities and their progress: right now we are thinking our next report on this will be in early November.

If you want to contact us, please email us on [contact@climateemergencymanchester.net](mailto:contact@climateemergencymanchester.net)

or Tweet us at [@climateemergmcr](https://twitter.com/climateemergmcr)