

# Briefing note on Manchester Airport, Economy Scrutiny Committee March 2022

This briefing note is produced by Climate Emergency Manchester (CEM) and supporters, for the benefit of Councillors and citizens ahead of the [discussion of Manchester Airport](#) at Manchester City Council's Economy Scrutiny Committee, on Thursday 10 March 2022.

Disclaimer: This briefing paper is not intended to pre-empt or undermine the role of the Economy Scrutiny Committee or the independence of its members. The questions are by no means an exhaustive list.

## Of airports and carbon budgets 🕒 ☔ 🌀 ☀️ 🔥

Manchester City Council (MCC) set a science-based "carbon budget" in 2018 via support from the Tyndall Centre at University of Manchester. This gave the city a budget of **15 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> for the rest of the 21st century**.

The city is getting through this science-based carbon budget at an alarming rate - about **40% of the total has been used in the last 3 years** and 86% of the 2018-22 interim budget.

Manchester Airports Group (MAG) has committed to be net zero by 2038 as a member of the "Manchester Climate Change Partnership". Net zero is widely defined as essentially reducing to zero all direct emissions of fossil fuels from its own activities including electricity and neutralising a small amount of residual emissions that remains unfeasible to eliminate via permanently removing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>. However, the situation remains confusing for an airport owner and operator considering the operation of an airport will inevitably lead to aircraft continuing to burn fossil fuels well beyond 2038.

**Question:** How can such a large emitter in the city and enabler of even further emissions continue to grow as currently planned whilst also delivering on an ambitious target to be net zero by 2038?

## 👻 👻 👻 Ghost flights and fair flights ✈️ ✈️ ✈️

In December 2021 CEM published a [report](#) introducing the public and members of the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee to some of these conflicts in detail. Recently the media have [reported](#) that more than 1,500 "ghost flights" departed the airport during the pandemic that were empty or with less than 10 percent of passenger capacity - second only to Heathrow.

**Question:** How can the airport justify allowing the operation of ghost flights and think it can still claim to be leading on reducing their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or taking a fair contribution of cutting its emissions?

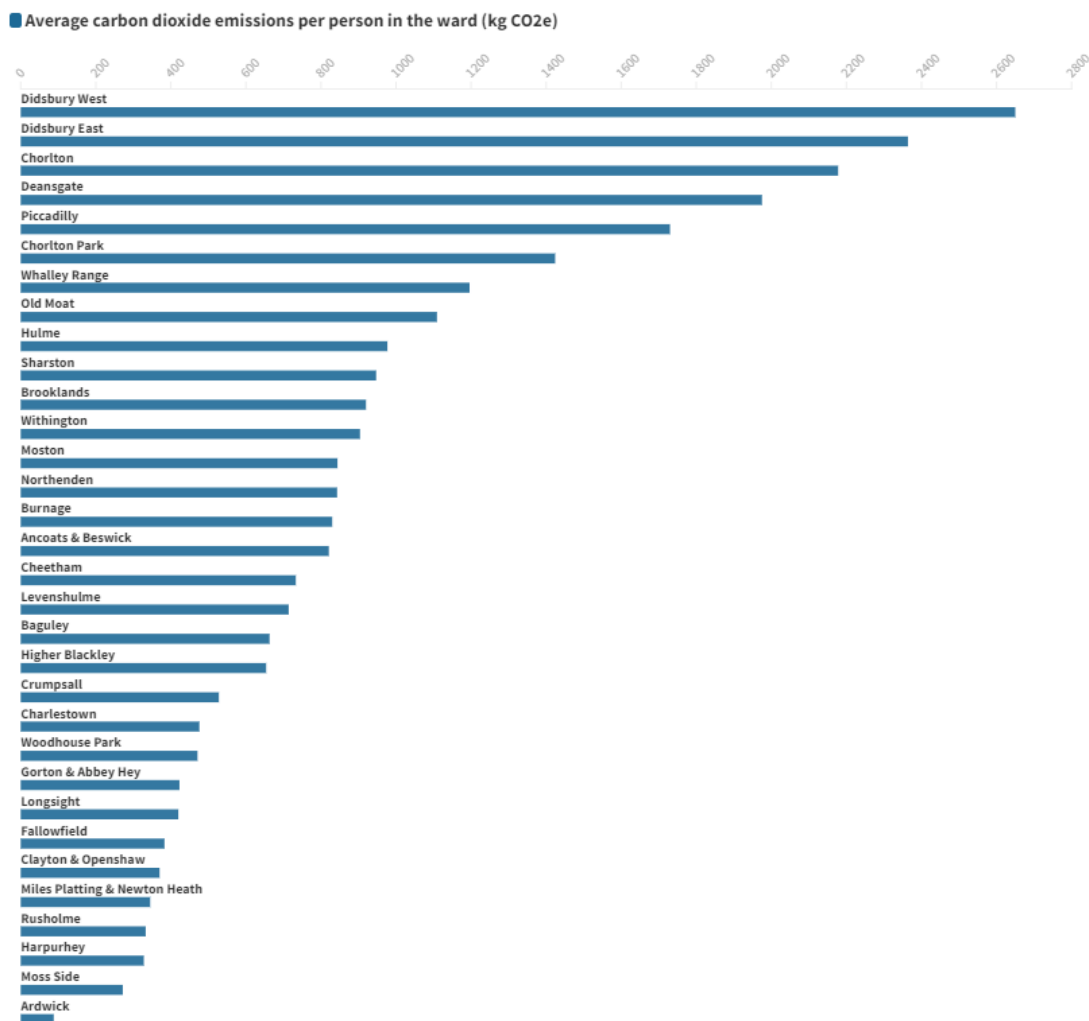
A common theme throughout MAG [publications](#) and public statements is the belief that expansion in passenger capacity can still be possible as long as it can be done within "environmentally acceptable limits". These limits are never concretely defined and, in

practice, are whatever continues to be acceptable for achieving planning consent. These limits are also linked to their “social licence to operate” i.e. what citizens and politicians are willing to accept along with their consequences.

When looking at fair contributions to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and consequent reductions, analysis by The Meteor shows this is not fairly distributed across the city - more affluent areas take a far larger share of emissions. **A resident of Didsbury West Ward has over 30 times higher emissions from flights compared to a resident of Ardwick.** Those who frequently use the airport are not from low income areas so the economic benefits of the airport are also not evenly distributed.

**Recommendation:** This inequality must be taken into account when looking at the future development plans of the airport - are the economic benefits for the few outweighing the environmental risks to the many?

#### Aviation emissions in Manchester



Source: [Place Based Carbon Calculator](#)

Since the pandemic, MAGs expansion plans are now extremely unrealistic, with [no pre-COVID recovery expected until “at least” 2024](#) according to the airport’s Managing Director Karen Smart.

**Recommendation:** MCC should use its powers within the Localism Act to commit to not permit further expansion of the airport passenger capacity beyond 2019 levels until 2030 and only then on contingent of their being viable new technologies that enable zero carbon air travel.