



Briefing on Climate Emergency and Response to Anthesis Carbon Emission Reduction Study

September 2020

Introduction

Context: The Climate Emergency Declaration made by Birmingham City Council (BCC) in June 2019 set the target of the city becoming carbon neutral by 2030. This ambitious target was co-proposed by all political parties represented on the Council and unanimously supported. Given that the Anthesis report summary with recommendations on achieving this has recently been published, and the council will soon be voting on an action plan to deliver on their commitment, Birmingham Friends of the Earth (BFOE) wishes to re-emphasize the urgency and ambition that are necessary in delivering these reductions in carbon emissions.

We are disappointed that the trajectory outlined in the Anthesis report does not give a route for meeting the democratically decided 2030 target, and that the proposed motion does not commit to a target date. Becoming carbon neutral is a goal the city can and must achieve as early as possible - significant action towards this must begin immediately.

The council's action plan must seek to implement positive and transformative change, recognising the opportunities presented by this ambition and the benefits that can be realised for the people of Birmingham through a just and imaginative transition to net zero. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that it is the most vulnerable residents of our city that suffer most in times of crisis and the council must act urgently to protect Birmingham citizens from the impact of future crises brought on by climate change. We would also remind the council of the obligation to those in our city and across the world who have seen their livelihoods, homes and lives damaged by or lost to the worsening impacts of climate change for too many years already. Delaying any longer cannot be an option. Over a year has passed since the climate emergency was declared and it is imperative that comprehensive and sincere action now begins.

Overview: This report contains a brief summary of BFOE's key priorities across the sectors identified in the Anthesis report, outlining the necessary and most pressing considerations, which we would expect to see reflected as core elements of the council's plan in order for the 2030 target to be achieved in a just and effective manner.

Objective: The report aims to concisely communicate BFOE's vision for delivering a zero carbon Birmingham, in order to clarify our perspectives and to inform councillors and others involved in the decision on and implementation of the action plan what key actions are needed for this to be achieved. We hope that it will be a starting point for engagement and understanding of some of the major changes which Birmingham will be working towards over the coming years, and we are happy to discuss any section or element in further detail.

Inputs: The report has been informed by over 40 years of campaigning around these issues, including research, consultation and lobbying around the council's strategy and activities and most recently around the climate emergency process. Following the Climate Emergency Declaration we ran two public consultation workshops, the first aiming to raise awareness around the declaration and what it meant, and the second to develop a vision for our city. The workshops were attended by

residents and this report is based largely on the ideas and feedback gathered. The report also makes use of contextualised recommendations from Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Cross-cutting issues and recommendations

Urgency: we reiterate the importance of ambitious and committed action which should start immediately.

Transparency: going forward, clear reporting and communication on the decisions, rationale, processes and progress around carbon reduction is crucial. This should include setting clear and time-bound targets and indicators for progress, involving the community in decision-making, proactively trying to reach people with key messages and involve citizens in the delivery of the carbon zero target.

Inclusivity: solutions, activities and implementation must put people first, work with communities, listen to their input and feedback, empower them and give them ownership of the process. The voices of the most vulnerable communities and individuals should be central. Education, outreach, and support for existing community initiatives are all key parts of delivering on this ambition and should not be overlooked. Measures must be inclusive, fair and promote equality and co-benefits while avoiding disadvantaging vulnerable groups (both in Birmingham and beyond). Offsetting outside of the area should not be made use of or relied on to reach zero carbon targets - we were glad to see this view is supported by Anthesis.

Comprehensiveness: it is important that climate impact is mainstreamed across every decision, every department and for every member of staff, partner, contractor and others. All council staff should be supported to incorporate carbon reduction into their day-to-day work and decision-making. Councillors should be identifying the impact of every decision on the climate action plan and current activities should be reviewed in line with this. Finally, the contribution to achieving zero carbon should be a central factor in every budgetary decision.

Effectiveness: the council should work with neighbouring councils and others across the UK and internationally to determine and implement the best practices for addressing the climate emergency. There is a great deal of existing best practice and research which should be made good use of. Listening to experts is key, as is listening to those involved in the delivery of any measures, and those impacted by them. The council also has a vital role to play in working with and putting pressure on other key stakeholders. The action plan should take into account the impact that climate change will have in Birmingham and support measures that increase the city's resilience.

Omissions

As we mention above, taking effective action to respond to the climate emergency in practice goes beyond the sectors identified in the report and should feed into all aspects of the council's work. However, we note two substantial areas which have been omitted from Anthesis's recommendations.

Food systems: Agriculture, food production and food systems should be considered and relevant policies and actions developed. Crucially, the council should be looking to incentivise local food systems, to support, promote and protect home and shared gardens, allotments and communal spaces and resources used for growing food. Consideration of how space is used and innovation and efficiency in planning, designing and operating such spaces should also be part of this, for example roof gardens and fruit trees for the public. Incentives for low carbon restaurants and food suppliers

should be considered, and the council should be supporting, developing and promoting connections between local farmers and growers, and consumers, restaurants and shops.

Indirect emissions: indirect emissions and emissions from supply chains for the city (including the council, businesses and individual consumption), should be measured, accounted for and actions planned to address them.

Industry

The council should be more ambitious about the actions it will take to decarbonise industry and focus on incentivising the creation of good quality green jobs for the citizens of Birmingham.

The Local Government Association has estimated that there could be 194,000 jobs working in low carbon sectors across the Midlands, with Birmingham well placed to host many of these, particularly within the car industry. As well as supporting the creation of these jobs, BCC should take action to ensure that Birmingham residents interested in working in these sectors can access the skills and knowledge they need, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, prior income or any other characteristic. BCC should also recognise that existing jobs in many fields, such as health, social care and education, are already low carbon and support these roles in the transition.

BCC should provide particular support to SMEs to access funds and expertise, so they can recover from the COVID-19 pandemic contributing to carbon pollution reduction, nature restoration and the growth of the green economy. BCC should support SMEs contributing to the growth of Birmingham's circular economy.

Council powers

BFOE does not believe that relying on forums and companies' CSR will bring about the necessary pace of change. BCC has significant power as a commissioner and should make the strongest possible use of social value clauses in public procurement.

BCC should use its memberships of Local Enterprise Partnerships and of the West Midlands Combined Authority to ensure all their decisions are in line with the rapid growth of the green economy, climate reduction pathways and nature restoration plans.

Learning from existing models

There are many positive examples of 'green' SMEs in Birmingham. BFOE runs The Warehouse building in Digbeth, our 'little green community in the big city'. The Warehouse exists to promote, educate, and inspire sustainability and positive environmental change. We do this by providing meeting, office, retail and public display space to the local community and organisations that believe in what we do. We aim to continue to develop the building and create a carbon neutral and zero waste building that is accessible to everybody in Birmingham. We are committed to working with BCC and others in the city towards achieving net zero and look forward to sharing our knowledge and experience.

Waste

The waste system needs a complete transformation over the next 10 years, moving away from the incineration of waste.

Currently, 75% of council waste is burned at the Tyseley plant. In 2019, 342,000 tonnes of rubbish was burned, producing 308,485 tonnes of carbon dioxide, reported to the Environment Agency, the largest source of CO₂ in the city. The decommissioning of the plant should be part of the council's

action plan. The plant emits nitrogen oxide and particulates which are greenhouse gases that contribute to air pollution, a major public health risk.

Composition analysis shows that most of what is burned is material that should be composted or recycled. It should not be regarded as a fuel. The consequence is a very low recycling rate for Birmingham, compared to other local authorities, because incineration and recycling are in direct competition. Rubbish burning is a very inefficient and polluting way to produce electricity. For decarbonisation to be achieved, there must be a rapid increase in recycling. The goals of the Waste Strategy 2017 are not currently being met.

A national Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers will be in place by 2023, diverting them from council waste. There will be a legal requirement from 2023 to collect food waste separately. The expensive weekly collection of mixed refuse from every household is not going to be necessary after 2024 and BCC's plans should reflect that.

A new collection system should re-allocate household and business bins and collection vehicles to allow for separation of waste into food and organic waste to compost or digest and recyclable dry items for mechanical sorting, so that they will no longer contaminate each other. Any residual waste can be greatly reduced, stabilised and landfilled, locking more carbon out of the atmosphere.

Once these changes are made, the incinerator will lack combustible material and should close post-2024 at the latest. The amount of waste collected will be the same, or less, so this approach does not have to cost more. We are happy to discuss details.

Community Engagement

People do not understand the current system, what is expected of them, nor what happens to their waste, as reported by the Independent Review of the Waste Collection 2019. Waste is a big source of complaint and dissatisfaction. BCC should adopt an engagement and education programme, drawing on examples such as South Tyne and Wear Waste Management Partnership's Visitor and Education Centre in Gateshead.

The public views climate change as an urgent problem and a change to the purpose and the practice of the waste system is also an opportunity to develop a clear message and public support.

Serious consideration should be given to an incentive/reward for those who generate little residual waste, such as Pay as You Throw. If waste is treated as having a value, and going to the right place, then people are less likely to dump and litter it in the wrong place.

Large items can mostly be re-used and helping a charity is an incentive for many. BCC should establish a Re-use Forum (i.e. a group of organisations that are involved in the collection and distribution of secondhand goods) and a Reuse Strategy.

Business Waste

Existing legislation requires businesses to respect the waste hierarchy and take up recycling services, but this should be better enforced. BCC should lobby the government for a law requiring businesses to sort wastes. Meanwhile, BCC should publicise businesses that are demonstrating best practice.

Some commercial waste companies are advertising 'zero waste' or 'zero carbon services'. The council's commercial waste service needs to stay competitive, by moving rapidly in the same direction.

Transport

Over one-third of carbon emissions come from transport, much of this from car mileage. To cut carbon emissions from transport sufficiently, the goal must be to reduce car journeys.

Governance

Given the cross-border nature of transport and that WMCA is responsible for much of the decision making and funding for transport, BCC will need to continue to work with and lobby WMCA in order to achieve the required cuts in carbon emissions from transport. Re-regulation of bus services is essential for enabling the large modal shift to public transport necessary to cut emissions. The unregulated system as it stands will be unable to deliver on this, no matter how good the individual bus operators are. The City Council should work with WMCA and neighbouring authorities to ensure that bus services are re-regulated within the next mayoral term.

Revenue and funding

Major capital investment and revenue funding in sustainable transport will be required to cut car mileage and emissions. New local revenue raising measures must be introduced to raise the necessary funding. Such measures could include a Workplace Parking Levy, but other options are also available such as road user charging and a business property tax. There are some measures BCC could introduce on its own, but others will need to be conurbation wide.

Birmingham Transport Plan 2020

We welcome the approach taken by the Birmingham Transport Plan 2020 and are pleased to see that some of the proposed measures have been expedited as part of the Birmingham Emergency Transport Plan in response to the pandemic. We would urge BCC to build on the Birmingham Emergency Transport Plan and use it as an opportunity to accelerate change towards low and zero carbon transport.

Road space reallocation

We welcome the firm commitment in the Birmingham Transport Plan on road space reallocation away from private cars to active travel and public transport. Unfortunately, there are still some legacy highway schemes planned which aim to increase capacity for motor traffic. These will induce more traffic and completely undermine any attempt to cut emissions. Such schemes must be cancelled immediately or radically redesigned so that they do not increase capacity for motor traffic.

Car use

A huge modal shift away from car journeys is vital to achieve the necessary reduction in carbon emissions. Incremental changes in travel patterns will not be enough. Furthermore, technical measures will not be sufficient and need to be accompanied by behavioural change. Extensive and strengthened engagement and inclusion will be essential to bring about the necessary behavioural change. The need to own and use a car should be reduced by planning new developments to facilitate modal shift towards active travel and public transport and ambitious targets need to be set. Compliance with targets should be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis and a target should be set for reducing the number of vehicle miles by a given percentage of say 40% by 2030.

Park and ride should not have a significant role in any strategy aimed at reducing car use and carbon emissions. It perpetuates car dependence and just displaces traffic to other parts of the highway network.

Active travel

The main barrier to the uptake of active travel is the concern over safety owing to an intimidating road environment. Infrastructure needs to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists and improve safety. Segregated cycle lanes should continue to be progressed along busier roads. On less busy roads and residential roads, a safer environment needs to be created by a combination of lower speeds and low traffic neighbourhoods. Default 20mph speed limits on residential roads needs to be rolled out to the large areas of the city that have not yet been treated as soon as possible and enforcement stepped up.

Ambitious targets need to be set for increasing the uptake of active travel, and progress monitored and reviewed on an annual basis. A target also needs to be set to eliminate serious injuries and deaths for all road users by a given date such as the 2040 target adopted by Transport for London. The improved safety will encourage more to switch to active travel.

The council's own fleet

A rapid transition of the council's fleet to electric vehicles is necessary. It is worth noting that National Express has already committed to purchase no more new diesel buses for its British fleet and aims to be zero emission by 2030. It should be possible for the city council to implement this measure for its own vehicle fleet.

Aviation

Prior to the pandemic, aviation was the fastest growing source of carbon emissions. Although Birmingham Airport is not within the city boundary, the city council should not promote or support any further expansion of this. The aim should be to reduce total carbon emissions from air travel associated with residents and businesses. An information campaign and incentives should be considered to reduce air mileage of businesses and residents in the city.

Further details on some of the suggestions made on transport can be found in the following research commissioned by Friends of the Earth: <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/radical-transport-response-climate-emergency>

Natural Capital

The council should have a comprehensive and ambitious plan for maintaining and expanding natural capital assets.

The total net value (benefits minus costs) of Council-managed natural capital assets is in the order of £11 billion over 25 years, or £594 million annually. This means that each £1 the Council spends on parks and green spaces returns more than £24 to society. The value of natural capital in Birmingham also includes:

- **Health** - Council-managed woodlands capture more than 350 tonnes of pollutants each year, avoiding approximately 133 hospital admissions, 28 deaths, and adding 489 life years; the mental and physical health benefits of parks and green spaces are well documented.
- **Carbon Capture** - The parks and greenspaces managed by Birmingham City Council store more than 573,000 tonnes of carbon, equivalent to 2.1 million tonnes of CO₂ with a value of £221 million.

- **Food waste and alleviating poverty** - Nearly 7,300 Council-managed allotments are estimated to produce 2.9 tonnes of food each year with a value of approximately £4.3 million.

Trees

The council should double tree cover on council-owned land, update local planning strategies to double tree cover across the Local Authority area, and ensure existing trees are properly protected in order to store carbon, support nature, improve soil and water quality, and aid flood protection and urban design.

The Birmingham Tree Policy should be used as a starting point rather than developing an “Emergency Tree Plan”. The existing policy covers topics including community engagement, council, planning, funding, canopy and valuation.

The Council’s plan to ensure existing trees are properly protected and their commitment to canopy cover in areas where there is a risk of flooding is welcome.

Green Spaces

The council should protect existing local green spaces, green belt and locally designated nature sites. They should also develop new quality green spaces in areas where they do not exist, particularly in neighbourhoods where people are particularly vulnerable to heatwaves and/or are deprived of nature. The council should support voluntary and grassroots organisers to contribute to our green spaces and parks.

Urban Design

There should be a clear and comprehensive plan for sustainable urban building and green infrastructure. The Green Living Spaces Plan could be used as a starting point. Policies should ‘require’ rather than ‘encourage’ developers to prioritise green infrastructure.

Council-owned land and road verges should be managed to increase biodiversity and draw down carbon pollution, including through reduced pesticide use and increased planting of wildflowers.

Planning and monitoring

The council should produce a nature and ecosystem restoration plan to restore habitats and species and ecosystem quality and function.

The Anthesis report contains good suggestions and enablers for monitoring natural capital on private land. The implementation of plans should be monitored more closely, including the impact of building work carried out close to existing trees.

Energy

An energy policy for the decarbonisation and efficient use of energy for the city must be developed as a matter of urgency, encompassing energy, buildings, transport and waste.

The most recent data for the Birmingham area (2017) shows 37% of emissions come from housing, 29% from transport and 34% are industrial and commercial emissions (footnote i). As discussed, the notion of incinerating waste to produce heat is regressive and contradictory.

Energy Suppliers

All council buildings should use renewable energy suppliers. The council should support, promote and encourage businesses and households to do the same.

Reducing energy use

The council should conduct an energy audit within the existing council stock to see how energy usage can be reduced and to increase energy efficiency across their operations. This has the added benefit of saving BCC money.

Lighting

Lighting systems, including buildings and street lighting, should be upgraded to use LED.

Investment

The council should enforce implementation of their decision to divest the pension fund from fossil fuels.

Buildings

Greater efficiency is more cost-effective than the addition of green technology and should be the core focus of action around buildings.

Energy efficiency

The council should retrofit council-owned properties with high levels of insulation and with heat pumps where possible, starting with homes most at risk of fuel poverty. The council should be rapidly enforcing minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector and encouraging landlords to insulate homes to a higher EPC level. However, upgrades to the minimum legal standard will not be enough to address the need for zero carbon, and they will require upgrading a second time, so the aim should be to do it once and do it right, towards EnerPHit or AECB standards.

The council should be helping owner-occupied homes be more energy efficient, for example by supporting fuel-poor or vulnerable households to access home insulation grants. Reduced price deals could be offered, especially those in the same areas/blocks, due to economies of scale and ease of treating whole buildings and areas simultaneously.

There should not be an over-reliance on technology. Although renewable and low carbon technologies have their place, they should come second to saving energy through energy efficiency measures. Measures for carbon reduction should not rely on yet-to-be-proven technologies such as hydrogen/CHP and carbon capture and storage in industry.

Planning

Planning policy has a significant effect on the energy consumption of buildings. This should be recognised and policy aligned with a 2030 target.

The council should require excellent standards of efficiency (Passivhaus standards or similar) for privately built new homes, including requiring the installation of heat pumps for heating where possible. The current national minimum standards are inadequate.

The city should make best possible use of space, including roof space, and could develop a planning policy of 'no roofs unused', which would ensure that all roof space/surfaces are used productively: for energy generation through PV panels, and/or as green roofs to soak up carbon and air pollution, act as cooling to the city, and for water attenuation for the more intense rainfall we will see from climate change.

Construction

Building standards should be enforced during construction and renovation, including through thermal image testing.

Buildings built on council land should be required to be extremely energy efficient, meeting the Passivhaus standard or similar.

The council should consider modern methods of construction and the use of off-site fabrication for some buildings, such as the Nottingham Energiesprong method(iii).

The council needs to ensure proper procurement and regulation of contractors to carry out work effectively and to the correct standards.

Strategy, training and support

The council should develop a heating and energy efficiency strategy for the area, which includes necessary skills and training priorities, to increase local employment as well as aid recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The council should act as a trusted source of advice for deep retrofit and low carbon technologies through exemplar projects, supporting investment from homeowners. This could involve setting up of an Energy Advice Hub for tenants, owners, and landlords to act as a first point of call which is independent and can advise on energy efficiency measures and routes to funding which are appropriate to the building and person.

- (i) The government publishes data on local authority emissions. It excludes motorways, aviation, and large industrial processes because the local authority has no influence on these.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-carbon-dioxide-emissions-national-statistics-2005-to-2017>
- (ii) Utrecht 'no roofs unused': <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/27/utrecht-rooftops-greened-plants-mosses-vertical-forest>
- (iii) Nottingham Energiesprong: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jan/07/dutch-eco-homes-idea-arrives-in-uk-and-cuts-energy-bills-in-half-nottingham-energiesprong>