

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

**FOR THE NEXT MAYOR OF
WEST OF ENGLAND**

**10 priorities to protect people and planet
and help the COVID-19 recovery**

We're facing a climate and ecological emergency – the biggest threat we've ever seen to humanity's existence. What's more, we need to recover from the damage COVID-19 has done to businesses, jobs, and livelihoods. This is the challenge that awaits the next Mayor of The West of England

Whoever is elected as the next mayor can't single-handedly solve the crisis, but must use the powers they have to make as big a difference as possible. The mayor has a central role to play in providing a vision for the area, and will need to work with councils, businesses, local communities, and the national government.

Tackling the climate, nature and COVID-19 crises must be done in a way which benefits everyone, no matter their income, race, age, or background. It's essential to address the sheer scale of inequalities that exist.

People who are most marginalised – both here in the UK and across the world – have done the least to cause climate breakdown and are the least able to rebound from its impacts.

People on lower incomes, and particularly black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, suffer most from the lack of nature and green space in our towns and cities. This is also true of air pollution, despite a smaller proportion of lower-income and BAME people owning cars than others.

Young people's futures are most at risk from climate breakdown and the decline of nature, and they're also disproportionately impacted by the economic impact of COVID-19.

The next mayor must also shift how the success of a COVID-19 recovery plan is measured. Rather than focusing on economic growth, metrics should identify whether the plan reduces poverty, decreases inequalities, increases wellbeing, and meets carbon reduction and nature restoration goals.

This Climate Action Plan will help the next mayor address the climate and ecological emergencies at the same time as responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

10 priorities the next Mayor of The West of England should commit to:

- 1** Ensuring all infrastructure plans, programmes, and investment decisions – including plans to “build back better” from COVID-19 – are in line with what's needed to address the climate and ecological emergency and put the West of England on course to meet its ambitious goal of net zero carbon by 2030.
- 2** Ensuring those most impacted by climate breakdown and nature loss are heard and centre-stage in decision-making.
- 3** Protecting workers and communities through a just transition from a fossil fuel-dependent economy to a low-carbon, nature-rich, circular economy, including delivering the 14,875 jobs that a Local Government Association analysis says could be created in the region by 2030.
- 4** Introducing policies and measures that ensure new development is net zero carbon and existing homes are brought up to high energy standards, thereby relegating fuel poverty to the history books.
- 5** At least doubling public transport use, cycling, and walking within the next 10 years, to cut climate emissions and ensure everyone can breathe clean air.
- 6** Powering the region with clean, renewable energy and reaping the economic and job opportunities this will bring, while ensuring fossil fuels are kept in the ground.
- 7** Greening the city-region by increasing tree cover, protecting nature, and eliminating green-space deprivation.
- 8** Becoming a zero-waste city-region by 2030 without reliance on landfill or incineration, to reduce pressures on nature from resource extraction and pollution.
- 9** Calling on the local government pension scheme to divest from fossil fuels, to stop profiting from environmental harm.
- 10** Initiating a massive green-retrofit skills-training programme to create the workforce that will make all our homes net zero carbon.

What this looks like:

1 Ensuring all infrastructure plans, programmes, and investment decisions - including plans to “build back better” from COVID-19 - are in line with what’s needed to address the climate and ecological emergency and put the West of England on course to meet its ambitious goal of net zero carbon by 2030.

Too many councils and combined authorities across the country are simultaneously declaring climate emergencies while promoting more high-carbon infrastructure like new roads. They also continue to invest in fossil fuels and promote high-carbon activities such as aviation. The adage, that “when you’re in a hole, stop digging”, is apt. All decisions need to be in line with what’s needed to address the climate and ecological emergency.

The West of England’s Carbon Budget, in alignment with the Paris agreement, would allow 25.4 million tonnes of CO2 to be emitted by 2100. It’s estimated that this budget will be completely used up in 7 years if emissions levels are not cut. The West of England’s Climate Emergency Action Plan acknowledges that to meet the carbon zero goal by 2030, emissions must fall by 18% every year.

High-carbon developments throughout the area include incinerators, and major road building and expansion. Much new housing development is proposed to be in places far removed from major employment centres, with dependency on car travel baked in. These are completely incompatible with getting on the right path to zero carbon.

Practical action:

The mayor should work with partners across the region to develop an ambitious infrastructure development plan that complies with scientifically robust carbon budgets and supports nature recovery. This will involve working with local councils, the business sector, public services, trade unions, universities, and civil society. Infrastructure needed to tackle the climate and ecological emergency includes large-scale programmes for building segregated cycleways and trams, new renewable energy capacity, new green spaces in areas suffering from green space deprivation, and retrofitting houses with energy efficiency and eco-heating on an area-by-area basis. These programmes would create much needed jobs and help COVID-19 recovery.

The mayor should use their influence within the region and at national level to ensure an infrastructure programme for climate and nature is fully resourced.

The West of England Climate Emergency Action Plan includes a welcome commitment to review all the Joint Local Transport Plan’s proposed major transport schemes against the jointly stated ambition of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. This will require rigour and a willingness to rethink the priorities that have underpinned transport and spatial planning for decades.

The new Spatial Development Strategy now being developed is an opportunity to set the West of England on a new path – one which aligns development plans with the climate and ecological crises. An ambitious but realistic response to the climate emergency and the goal of net zero carbon by 2030 demands that all new development should be net zero carbon. In light of the climate and ecological emergencies, past assumptions about where new housing and other forms of development should be built should be reviewed and discarded where no longer fit for purpose.

3 Ensuring those most impacted by climate breakdown and nature loss are heard and centre-stage in decision-making.

In The West of England 174 neighbourhoods have been identified by researchers as being particularly vulnerable to surface flooding due to their location and demographics (for example, age or income). Flooding and extreme heat will both be exacerbated by climate breakdown.

In addition, 23 neighbourhoods have been identified as among those most deprived of green space in England. Green space is essential for physical and mental health and the lack of it in some areas has

become very apparent during COVID-19 lockdowns. It must also be recognised that those who have done least to contribute to climate breakdown are often the most vulnerable to its effects.

Practical action:

The mayor must commit to involving all citizens, but especially young people and the most vulnerable communities, in decision-making and action planning. The mayor must also recognise the impact of decisions made today on the wellbeing of future generations and commit to having youth representation on the governance structures within the region.

Deliberative democracy approaches like citizen juries, citizen assemblies, and participatory mapping and budgeting should be used, especially for complicated or contentious choices.

Spending on climate change adaptation and nature restoration should focus on the most vulnerable communities.

3 Protecting workers and communities through a just transition from a fossil fuel-dependent economy to a low-carbon, nature-rich, circular economy, including deliver 14,875 new jobs in the region by 2030.

Green jobs and training will both be necessary to achieve a credible sustainable plan for the region and to help the region's economy recover from the pandemic. The green economy is already the fastest growing part of the UK economy and action in this area will benefit the region.

The Local Government Association (LGA) says nearly 0.7 million direct jobs could be created in England's low-carbon and renewable-energy economy by 2030, rising to more than 1.18 million by 2050. Developing green industry, jobs and training programmes are essential to the future of The West of England.

The LGA analysis suggests the West of England could benefit from almost 15,000 jobs over the next decade, in these sectors: low-carbon electricity (5,500+), low-carbon heat (2,600+), alternative fuels (600), energy efficiency (2,400), low-carbon services (2,000+) and low-emission vehicles and related infrastructure (1,600+).

Practical action:

The mayor should invest in green jobs, apprenticeships, and sustainable enterprise, leaving no communities behind. The job losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic mean that plans, investments and decisions to build the green economy in sectors such as renewable energy, housing retrofit, sustainable transport, nature restoration and the circular economy must be fast-tracked and prioritised. The mayor must push for the UK government to give councils the resources and powers to accelerate skills development. The mayor must also work with businesses, unions and others to develop locally relevant transition plans and for local investment to develop new employment within these sectors.

4 Introducing policies and measures that ensure new development is net zero carbon and existing homes are brought up to high energy standards, thereby relegating fuel poverty to the history books.

Any new homes and developments need to be built as net zero carbon. But most of the buildings that will be in use over the next 50 years have already been built. Only 39% of homes are currently well insulated in The West of England. This represents a shocking waste of energy, high greenhouse gas emissions and unnecessarily high energy bills.

9% of households in the area are in fuel poverty, which means they can't afford to heat their homes properly. Poor insulation contributes to this problem. With more people at home because of unemployment resulting from COVID-19 or increased home, this problem will get worse without urgent action.

Practical action:

All homes must be brought up to high energy-efficiency standards by rolling out an area-by-area retrofit and heat pump-installation programme, ending the misery of cold, expensive-to-heat homes. 25,493 homes need to be insulated every year within the West of England to ensure all homes are properly insulated by 2030.

In addition, the transition away from gas-fired boilers in our homes to eco-heating systems needs to be well underway. At least 15,172 heat pumps need to be fitted every year in the West of England to meet even a target of net carbon zero by 2042. To meet this target by 2030 would require an even faster rate of installation.

All new development must be net zero carbon, including all housing as standard, starting immediately.

5 At least doubling public transport use, cycling, and walking within the next 10 years, to cut climate emissions and ensure everyone can breathe clean air.

The West of England must achieve a dramatic change to transport infrastructure and travel habits so that using public transport (when it's safe to do so) or cycling and walking become the default. Enabling people to get around with minimum impact on the environment will also bring about big improvements in air quality. Everybody should be able to live decently and get about without needing a car. Across the UK, almost 50% of the lowest income families (people in the bottom 20% income bracket) don't have access to a car. The proportion of women that don't have access to one is twice that of men. Access to alternatives to car ownership is a social justice and social cohesion issue, as well as an environmental issue.

Air pollution is a real problem and limits are breached for the toxic gas nitrogen dioxide across the area. Fine particulate matter air pollution is the most damaging to health, and even World Health Organisation standards aren't considered "safe".

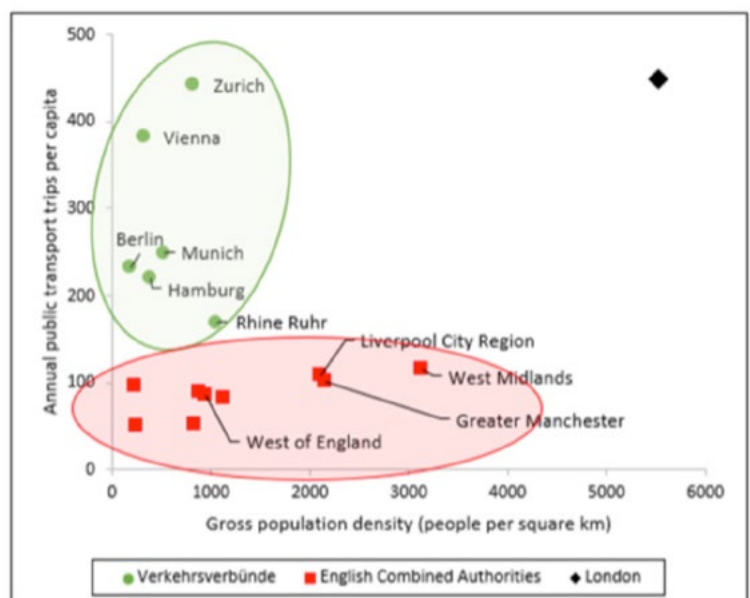
The mayor must protect the health of local people and commit to taking action to ensure air quality standards are met across the whole region.

Practical action:

On mainland Europe many places provide much better public transport. As a result, levels of public transport use are 3 to 4 times higher than they are in the UK's combined authority areas (see graph: Verkehrsverbünde are integrated regional public transport services).

To double public transport use, cycling and walking, the barriers to a good transport system need to be removed. The mayor should call for additional powers to re-regulate buses, develop a franchise system or commit to implementing these powers where they are already in place. In mainland Europe some regions also control suburban trains as well as buses.

The West of England can also do much better at providing safe cycling routes. Research shows that 27% of commuter journeys in the region could be by bike if there was good cycling infrastructure, such as segregated cycleways and the uptake of e-bikes. A comprehensive network of safe segregated cycle routes like those planned in Copenhagen, Denmark should be the goal.



Annual per capita public transport trips in six continental Verkehrsverbünde (Transport Authorities), the English Combined Authorities, and London

Pop-up cycle lanes and other active travel measures introduced as part of the emergency response to COVID-19 should be kept in place wherever possible, and new routes should be connected across the region. It's really important to build community support for these changes and consult in advance about new routes and measures.

Currently only around 33% of commuter journeys in the West of England are by walking, cycling and public transport. As a bare minimum, the mayor should work to increase this to 64% by 2030. Money to achieve this transformation can be raised through schemes like the Workplace Parking Levy successfully pioneered by Nottingham City Council.

6 Powering the region with clean, renewable energy and reaping the economic and job opportunities it will bring, while ensuring fossil fuels are kept in the ground.

A rapid growth in renewable energy is needed to wean the UK off electricity produced by fossil fuels and to provide the extra electricity needed to heat homes and power transport. Some of this renewable energy can be provided in the West of England.

Practical action:

Sustainable energy infrastructure and renewable energy production must be delivered across the region in partnership with local authorities, communities, and energy utilities. In particular, community ownership of renewable energy should be encouraged and supported.

Currently 306,781 GWh of renewable energy is generated in the West of England. This is equal to only 5% of household energy use. If every council area within the region matched the best similar areas, then 969,103 GWh could be produced.

In addition, all public purchasing of energy should be from 100% renewable power.

7 Greening the West of England by increasing tree cover, protecting nature, and eliminating green-space deprivation.

Access to good quality green space is essential for people's physical and mental health. Green space, trees and other "green infrastructure" are also essential for nature. Friends of the Earth has used data on green space, gardens, and open-access land to rate access to green space for neighbourhoods in the region ([a map is available here](#)). Results unsurprisingly show that low-income and BAME communities are worst off when it comes to access to green space.

As with most of the country, the West of England has suffered major declines and losses of wildlife. Areas still rich in nature are smaller and more fragmented, facing continual and rising challenges from development, pollution and climate breakdown. These trends need to be reversed as a matter of urgency. The intention to do so led to the City of Bristol declaring an ecological emergency in 2019 and the adoption of an ecological emergency strategy in 2020. The West of England should do likewise.

Practical action:

In The West of England there are 23 neighbourhoods rated E (the most green-space deprived), where in total over 150,000 people live. These are by no means confined to older inner-city areas, and include places where new housing has been built on a massive scale in recent decades, such as parts of Yate, Patchway and Bradley Stoke. The mayor should aim to eliminate green-space deprivation by ensuring everybody has access to enough good quality green space. In some areas this might mean opening-up school grounds outside of school hours or converting some streets or car parks into public green space. It also means increasing tree cover with more street trees and growing more trees and woods on council-owned land. Friends of the Earth has [produced a map](#) identifying where new woodlands could be planted outside urban areas.

To tackle the ecological emergency, all infrastructure plans, programmes, and investment decisions need to be reviewed, as we propose for the climate emergency in point (1). The starting point is to do

no further harm, ensuring that new development does not further deplete or fragment the nature that remains. Restoring, creating and joining up wildlife-rich areas must be an integral part of Building Back Better.

8 **Becoming zero-waste by 2030 without reliance on landfill or incineration, to reduce pressures on nature from resource extraction and pollution.**

Only 53% of household waste in the West of England is reused, recycled, or composted. The best local authorities in Wales are achieving more than 70%. The current waste strategy has no targets to reduce waste (only to plan to cater for an increase) and waste is not covered in the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Incineration, or so called energy from waste, is not a sustainable alternative. It's even more carbon polluting than gas-fired power stations and it contributes to local air pollution.

Practical action:

The West of England should aim for 70% of household waste to be reused, recycled, or composted by 2025, and to achieve zero waste by 2030.

The mayor should also bring in doorstep food waste recycling across the region and make it easier for people and businesses to stop sending waste to landfill or incineration.

9 **Calling on the Avon Pension Fund to divest from fossil fuels, to stop profiting from environmental harm.**

Local government pension schemes are contributing to the climate crisis by investing in climate-wrecking gas, oil, and coal companies. This investment is leading to the loss of lives and livelihoods, and the displacement of people from their homes due to extreme weather.

Practical action:

The mayor should publicly call for the local government pension scheme to divest from fossil fuels and engage directly with the local authorities that control these funds, encouraging them to make immediate commitments to divest from all fossil fuels.

10 **Initiating a massive green-retrofit skills training programme to create the workforce to make all our homes net zero carbon.**

There is a compelling need and opportunity to create green jobs, particularly for younger people, who have the highest level of unemployment yet suffer most from periods of joblessness. Being unemployed when younger leads to a higher likelihood of long-term problems in later life in terms of subsequent lower pay, higher unemployment, and reduced life chances.

Young people are also more significant losers from climate breakdown than other age groups, despite having contributed very little towards it. We need to create more green jobs to address the climate and ecological crisis, and to address COVID-19 unemployment.

Practical action:

The mayor has a key role in shaping skills training across the West of England. There are clear signs that the economic transformation needed to reach net zero carbon is already being held back and can't deliver its huge potential because of the lack of a workforce with the relevant training and skills.

The Office of National Statistics says there are currently 185,000 FTE workers in England's low-carbon and renewable energy economy. 70% of these workers are in energy efficiency.

According to a recent report for the Local Government Association, there could be more than 500,000 additional jobs by 2030 and a million by 2050, some of which could be delivered earlier through accelerated action on the climate emergency.

Focusing skills development across the West of England on the emerging green economy provides a golden opportunity to rise to the multiple challenges of the climate emergency, the COVID-19 economic downturn, and the economic exclusion of young people.

Notes and further information

Details of the methodology, data sources and targets used [are available](#).

A summary report on green space deprivation, together with links to a map and full report, [is available](#).

The graph in the transport section is taken from [A radical transport response to the climate emergency](#) by Transport for Quality of Life, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace.

The estimate of renewable energy capacity in the area outlined in point 6 excludes offshore wind. It also excludes biomass energy, because some biomass sources can have a large carbon footprint and harm biodiversity. And it excludes incineration, because of its very high carbon emissions.