

Westminster Labour Group: Climate Green Paper

The scientific consensus is absolutely clear - we have eleven years to cut global carbon emissions by half to prevent potentially catastrophic environmental damage.

Local authorities must provide leadership in tackling climate change. This paper sets out a plan about how Westminster Council can build a green future for everyone who lives, works or visits the City. In six steps, it provides a blueprint for how the Council can begin to hardwire climate action into everything it does.

The urgency of the challenge means that immediate decisive action must be taken straight away. There is no time for delay. Action must begin now.

Cllr Pancho Lewis, Shadow Cabinet Member for Environment

The climate crisis

The climate crisis is an existential threat. It is arguably the single biggest challenge facing humans today.

According to scientists, if we continue on our current trajectory, the world will be more than 3 degrees Celsius warmer by the end of the century compared to pre-industrial levels¹. This is well above the upper limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius that temperatures must remain within to ensure future generations can live a life of basic stability and security. Temperatures are already 1.1 degrees Celsius warmer compared to pre-industrial levels. As such, the window of opportunity to take action is radically diminishing in size - but there is still time to avert potential catastrophe, just about.

If we fail to respond to the climate crisis people in poor countries will be the most badly affected, but citizens in prosperous countries like the UK won't be insulated from its effects - far from it. Failing to take action would probably mean the following for UK residents, including people living in Westminster:

- systemic food insecurity caused by droughts and unpredictable weather patterns
- large-scale flooding (Parliament and significant chunks of the City of Westminster might be flooded, as well as other parts of London)
- hotter summers would put increased pressure on the local community, transport systems and health services. The elderly and young in particular would be particularly vulnerable to increased temperature extremes

¹ [The Uninhabitable Earth, IPCC report](#)

- dealing with a climate refugee crisis. The UN expects 200m refugees by 2050 due to mass migration away from parts of the world that have become uninhabitable.² By way of comparison, the Syria crisis produced 5m refugees.

Responding to the climate crisis

According to the UN, we need to halve global emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030³. Tackling this crisis will require efforts of monumental proportions by governments at an international and national level. But local authorities have an important role to play too. Indeed many local authorities across the country are already taking bold steps to help reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

This paper sets out the steps that Westminster Council must take to live up to its own role and responsibility in tackling the climate crisis, recognising that the Global North need to take the lead and reduce our emissions faster than the Global South as our historical greenhouse gas emissions are much higher. The Labour Group acknowledges the steps the Council is already taking but believes there is much more that needs to be done to meet the challenge that we face.

Step #1: Declare a climate emergency and establish an end goal

The Council must declare a state of climate emergency. It should set ambitious goals to become carbon neutral and zero carbon so that the Council itself must become carbon neutral by 2030 and zero carbon by 2050. By 'carbon neutral' we mean a system which allows for carbon offsets, and by 'zero carbon' we mean a system excluding offsets.

We note that more than a hundred local authorities have already declared a state of climate emergency and that these goals are in line with the goals established by other councils like Wandsworth and Redbridge⁴.

We believe the council must use its position of leadership, the policy tools currently available to it, by working with London and National Government and by lobbying them for greater powers to set and meet ambitious goals for the City of Westminster as a whole. We support the goal of reaching carbon neutrality for our city by 2040 but if the UK is to properly meeting the challenge of climate change we believe national government must take radical action and give our council the power to make real change locally so that we could seek to achieve zero carbon for the City of Westminster by 2050 with the right backing.

Step #2: Establish an inclusive and robust process to keep on track

² [UN report](#)

³ IPCC Report, *Guardian* source [here](#)

⁴ Richmond and Southwark have committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. See source: <https://www.climateemergency.uk/blog/list-of-councils/>

The Council should establish a robust, accountable process to ensure it keeps on track and delivers on its ambition.

It should work with other local authorities to set up the equivalent of the Government's Committee on Climate Change (CCC) at a local authority level. This could be called the Climate Action Network (CAN). CAN's principal role would be to hold the local authority to account on delivering its goals. They would write annual reports and establish a carbon budget for Westminster Council and other councils, like the CCC does for the Government. The London Climate Change Partnership run by Local Councils may provide a forum to build a body of this nature, working collaboratively with other networks such as UK100.⁵

The Council should make the Climate Emergency a defined responsibility and priority of a Cabinet Member, at present climate is not listed as one of the 74 defined responsibilities for the cabinet members. It should establish a Cabinet working group on the climate emergency and a similar Policy and Scrutiny task group or subcommittee.

The Council must hard-wire climate action into everything it does (planning, licensing, transport infrastructure, energy, etc.) - climate action can't be siloed. The Council should establish a check-list in every department to ensure that when decisions are made its climate impacts are evaluated and taken into account in the decision-making process. Cabinet document templates should include a question like 'How does this proposal contribute towards carbon neutrality in Westminster Council?'

The Council should make certain climate asks a priority in its lobbying efforts with national government. As a first step it should ask for more resources for a mass retrofitting scheme (more info on mass retrofitting below).

Citizens should be involved in the conversation and debate about how to make the City of Westminster carbon neutral and eventually zero carbon. The Council should consider emulating Camden Council and establish a Climate Assembly. (Another similar example is Wandsworth Council's 'The Big Chat'.) The purpose of the assembly should be to involve citizens in the process of coming up with solutions and helping people understand the trade-offs involved in living in a borough that is committed to climate action. In other words, it's about achieving buy-in.

Step #3: Lead by example

Westminster Council must take steps to remove investments from fossil fuels companies and invest in green alternatives. In particular it should look at where

⁵ <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/environment/energy-and-climate-change/climate-change>

employees' pensions are currently invested. Pensions should be invested in green funds. We note that Lambeth Council and others have already taken steps in this direction.

It should conduct an audit of the GHG emissions of food served in council café's/restaurants and it should work to reduce the food miles involved, while providing improved meat-free options.

Step #4: Deliver green homes and jobs

We note that the Council has invested in improvements across the council's housing portfolio, including installing internal wall insulation on 120 homes. This is a start but we need to see much bolder action.

The Council should draw on resources available in both the Mayor of London's retrofitting programme and the Mayor's Energy Efficiency Fund (MEEF) ⁶. It should begin with targeting energy efficiency to those living in fuel poverty, particularly those living in the private-rented sector. Some of the income from a future landlord licensing scheme could be reinvested to support energy efficiency schemes as is currently being done in Newham. By 2030, all private rented sector properties should have a band C energy rating - this will require insulating tens of thousands of homes⁷. The process of retrofitting homes will have the benefit of creating hundreds of jobs, creating an opportunity for economic and environmental justice to go hand in hand. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Education & Skills will have to prioritise developing upskilling opportunities as there is currently a shortage of skills in this area of expertise. It should work with major landowners on their property portfolios to advance this.

The Council should work in partnership with health authorities to connect elderly people whose housing issues have led to poor health with the Council's housing team. Islington Council's SHINE programme, now available to all London councils via the GLA, uses this model and Westminster Council should emulate it.

New developments need to embrace green principles. New buildings should comply with the London Plan zero carbon policies⁸ and consider summer cooling needs. In its City Plan, the Council should follow the lead of other councils and ban car parking in new developments - the Council has moved in this direction but still not embraced a total ban. The City Plan should look to reduce planning restrictions on solar panels

⁶ Source [here](#) and [here](#). Page 11 of the Mayors Zero [carbon report](#) (page 6 of the .pdf) shows the scale of retrofits required across London in the next 15 years which is both a challenge and an opportunity in terms of job creation and upskilling

⁷ In line with the Government's Fuel poverty strategy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fuel-poverty-strategy-for-england>). Mayor of London sets goal of 70 per cent of London's buildings need to reach EPC C by 2030 in Zero Carbon London plan.

⁸ Source [here](#)

and energy saving work. From 2025, gas heating will be banned for all new housing developments⁹ and heat pumps combined with improvements in energy efficiency look likely to be the main alternative to gas boilers. While the deadline comes into effect for new houses from 2025, opportunities to deploy heat pumps and energy efficiency improvements should be tied in with current round of retrofit to reduce disruption and costs in order to avoid disruptive and expensive retrofit later. Heat pumps can be run in reverse to provide cooling in summer to adapt to a warming climate¹⁰. S106 and CIL funding from developments should be drawn on to deliver on green goals.

It is positive the Council is looking to pilot food waste collection schemes.¹¹ It should embrace the Government's current drive to make food waste available to everyone so food waste is used to produce energy via anaerobic digestion rather than being incinerated along with other waste. We note pilots are already planned in the City of Westminster this year. These should be delivered on track and in time with the aim of rolling out similar schemes to the rest of the borough.

Step #5: Deliver green energy

Westminster should join other councils in signing up to the [UK100 clean energy pledge](#), which commits to shifting towards 100% clean energy by 2050.

We note the Council has invested £1.3 million to install 124 solar power generating systems. This is positive but far more is needed. The Council must work with its own buildings, private landowners and local residents to dramatically increase the number of roof-top solar panels in the city. The Repowering London scheme is an opportunity to help fit in solar panels at a rapid pace¹².

We note that the Council is managing and delivering the Pimlico District Heating Undertaking (PDHU), supplying low carbon heat to over 3,500 local households. There are other schemes the Council should explore. It should seek to learn and emulate Islington Council's Bunhill Heat and Power Network scheme¹³, where surplus heat from the underground network is used to power homes.

Step #6: Build green communities

The Council's current goal of planting 3,000 new trees comes to an end next year (2020). This should be replaced with a new, more ambitious goal. Trees are important not only because they help mitigate climate but also because they provide shade, thereby providing shade as temperatures increase (a form of climate

⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47559920>

¹⁰ [Committee on Climate Change report](#)

¹¹ Globally, food waste accounts for 8% of greenhouse gas emissions.

¹² [Repowering London](#)

¹³ Source [here](#)

adaptation), and helping reduce the urban heat island effect. New 'blue' spaces also help with overheating in summer.¹⁴

We note the Council is installing 214 vehicle charging points to increase the uptake of electric vehicles in Westminster (AQ and carbon benefits). More electric vehicle charging points should be rolled out. Equally however, the focus should be on providing high quality transport infrastructure and public realm to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport instead of owning their own car - change behaviours to make people embrace green lifestyles is also an opportunity to encourage people to live healthier lifestyles and spend more time outdoors in their communities, rather than atomised individualistic lives. The 'Oxford Street District' programme is an opportunity to create better cycling infrastructure and encourage more pedestrian-friendly spaces. The Church Street and Ebury regeneration schemes are also opportunities that should be embraced in this respect.

¹⁴ Source [here](#)