

A Local Green New Deal for Brighton and Hove

Climate:Change event – 30 November 2023

Introductory remarks by Presenters

Tim Foxon

Good evening, everyone. We are going to talk for about half an hour, summarizing the research we have done for this report. And I should say this is a team effort. So myself, Donal and Christian Jaccarini from the New Economics Foundation are going to be speaking. But we have our other colleagues here who are coauthors on the report. So thanks to everyone who contributed.

We are going to briefly introduce what we mean by a local Green New Deal and key areas for action. We will show the evidence that these measures are on the whole well supported by members of the public from the survey and focus group we did in the Greater Brighton area. And then Christian is going to talk about the policy recommendations that we are making in relation to what's happening at the moment in Brighton and Hove and the Greater Brighton area.

I'm sure most of you do not need to be reminded about the idea of a Green New Deal. We have one of the originators here, Caroline Lucas, one of the members of the Green New Deal Group, which authored the original report on a Green New Deal. The idea was to bring together environmental priorities and social justice in one package.

We identified five core features from different versions of the Green New Deal around: financial reforms; investment in green infrastructure; new financing mechanisms; new ownership structure, so more towards more community ownership; and crucially, done in a way which promotes economic, social and climate justice. We have a paper on the history of the Green New Deal.

But we want to really look forward today. We can by 2050 achieve a 50% reduction in UK energy demand in a way which is consistent with maintaining or enhancing people's quality of life. But most of the energy saving activity must be devised and delivered locally. And that needs radical policy reforms and often increased devolution, so more powers down to the local level.

Donal Brown

Hi, everyone. As one of the lead authors of the report, I am going to outline the areas we focused on in the report and some of the numbers that we used to help us articulate the scale of a local Green New Deal. These are not the whole picture. We missed some things out. For example, we are not talking about renewables. Clearly, renewables are hugely important. There are other areas that that we would obviously want to focus on, but we focused on the following partly because of the local implementation potential, and also the fact that they are about reducing demand. So: cheaper, warmer, zero carbon homes, particularly focusing on our existing housing stock; affordable, sustainable public transport; car free city centres and active travel by walking and cycling; and also expanding green spaces and nature restoration.

Cheaper, warmer, zero carbon homes

The first plank of this is based on some work that we did as part of a CREDS-funded project on Cheaper Bills Warmer Homes, which developed a national retrofit strategy for the housing stock to really move to an accelerated adoption of home energy efficiency and heat pumps, also solar PV by the middle of the next decade to 2035. The high level goal that we had there was almost all homes being EPC energy performance C by 2035 and about a third of households having heat pumps, and then rapidly pursuing the adoption of heat pumps thereafter. That scenario at a national level produced about a 53% reduction in CO₂ emissions from homes, with heat pumps doing much of the rest, as we rolled them out.

We did some fairly simple but representative downscaling work for Greater Brighton. That would mean about 316,000 homes retrofitted, a lot more than we've been doing to date. About 46,000 households in the region would be lifted out fuel poverty by this programme. That would create about 5,000 new jobs in retrofit-related supply chains and bill savings by 2040-45, the lifetime of many of these measures, is almost 5 billion pounds. That's actually quite a lot more than the money we need to spend on the programme. So you can just see how huge the impact could be if we got this right.

We did a little bit of work on the financing. Brighton is a relatively affluent place actually, compared to some of the other places we've looked at. So you see here the distribution of people in income deciles. So basically what we said was people at the bottom end get everything for free. And gradually as you move up the income distribution, you get some grant. But some of this will need to be paid for by private investment unless the state can pay for everything, which we didn't model, but it's still about a £60 billion investment in the housing stock through the scenarios we developed. So in Greater Brighton, actually it's about £286 million would need to come from the public sector in our model. And actually most of the chunk of the £2.5 billion comes from private investment. We can chew the fat over whether we agree with that. But, for example, the other scenario we looked at in North Tyne, the vast majority of people are in those lower income deciles. And so the state is doing more of the work in that scenario.

Affordable, sustainable public transport

On public transport, a huge area which Christian will talk quite a lot about in the policy space, but broadly our scenarios see about a 66% increase in bus journeys, 44% increase in use of trams, trains and metro and in metro services. And over time we get an expansion in capacity that requires also a lot of investment, particularly the electrification and expansion of the bus fleet, although obviously some of that will be replacing the buses that we already have with electric buses. We also, slightly for fun, looked at the option of reintroducing a tram system in Brighton and Hove. We managed to find this map of the old trolley bus, the tram system from the 1910s. Maybe this could be a really, really good thing. Similar cities in the UK like Sheffield and Nottingham spend between £2 million and £400 million on the reintroduction of tram system. It's not beyond the pale if we think big, I think.

Active travel

On active travel, a big part of this is about getting people out of their cars. So we model a 225% increase in walking and cycling. There are lots of ways we can achieve that. We model a 21% reduction in car journeys. That doesn't sound that much, but almost every projection for the UK into the future shows car journeys increasing massively, with more people driving. So we're actually pushing against that.

There are some specific statistics about what that would mean in Greater Brighton and also the investment in things like cycling infrastructure that £600 million also including things like e-bikes.

Just briefly about the modal shifts. So this is the split of train transport journeys today in 2023. When we look to 2040, we do see an increase, but you see that massive increase in walking and cycling as a key component of that change. And we do see more travel, but it's healthy, active travel and a reduction in car usage.

If you're interested in some of these numbers, please get in touch with us.

Green spaces and nature restoration

The last piece is around green spaces and nature restoration. This is an afforestation/rewilding agenda. You see some stats over the whole of the UK and large support to move up to about 800 hectares being brought back in this case into sort of native woodland or other forms of kind of rewilding space. And we looked at some of the costs of doing that through carbon credits, about 11 million pounds, which isn't a huge amount of money actually for the benefit that this would create. Christian will talk more about some of the mechanisms for doing that, but you can see some of the spaces here where there is obviously more opportunity for expansion, things like native woodland, whereas city centres, less so. Those spaces are really valued where they are created in city centres.

Simon Maxwell

Have you added up how much in total all these measures for Brighton and Hove might cost?

Donal Brown

I don't have it in my head right now, but yes.

The last slide is just our primary research with members of the community. We did a survey with about 350 Brighton residents. We asked them about the popularity and approval of different measures. And you can see almost all of the measures were extremely popular with citizens. I think the only ones that were slightly more controversial were plant-based diets and things like car sharing, but still actually a fairly high share of people thinking positively about those. We also did focus groups, more detailed work with citizens, using multiple criteria mapping as the methodology, including asking for more qualitative answers. And we asked people to rank their preferences for different measures. You can see again, people were pretty positive about these solutions, once they learned more about them and understood the constraints and policy approaches.

Christian Jaccarini

Thank you so much. It's great to be here. And it's really exciting to talk about this because I think Greater Brighton is a really interesting case study to look at.

I'm really interested in the Net Zero agenda, but also specifically in how through the net zero agenda we can generate community wealth and deepen devolution, because I think really that's crucial.

Cheaper, warmer, zero carbon homes

On our first pillar, Greater Brighton set up a task force in 2021, a retrofit taskforce to make all council owned housing stock zero carbon by 2030. But it is my understanding that they have come up against the financial constraints and supply side constraints, so that's looking unlikely at the moment. In addition, there are community organizations doing great work already, for example BHESco, many of you I'm sure will know about. Within the wider region, Eastbourne and Lewes are working with AECOM and Robertson Projects. My understanding is that they're doing research into programme delivery and bulk purchasing, in view of trialing an approach. The project is called Clear Futures.

That is quite important to think about because it is worth remembering that AECOM is multi-national organization, listed on the New York Stock Exchange and headquartered in Dallas Texas. If we are to solely deliver many of these measures through big organizations like that, we will miss out on many of the upsides that come with the Net zero agenda.

One of our key recommendations is to put in place a ten year local retrofit delivery framework, and this would support regional authorities to deliver on one stop shops and put in place local retrofit taskforce forces that are well resourced across the country. Central government should be supporting this with expertise in how to best deliver on retrofit. It's also really key that we put in place a nationwide system and engagement campaign so that everyone understands that retrofit is a well-funded national priority. And in addition, we will need new training courses and apprenticeships that should again be run and delivered locally but funded centrally. It is also important to think about the role of community organizations in this. And government should be enabling local government to support social enterprises and co-ops to, for example, join BHESco, so they are actually able to deliver on the retrofit agenda.

In addition to that, I'm interested in direct labor organizations as a potentially fruitful way of delivering on some of this. Brighton has one, as I understand it, but it is not delivering on retrofit.

The case study of Glasgow City building is quite illustrative in this instance. They employ people on direct contracts and have developed an expertise in sustainable building, with a much more diverse workforce as a result of this than the general construction sector. And through this, they are able to retain a lot of the wealth within the local area and go out to the open market as well, bidding for new developments as well as just maintaining the existing building stock.

Affordable, sustainable public transport

For affordable sustainable transport, as things are at the moment, major funding is determined by the Department for Transport in relation to the local transport plans, and the local transport plans are put in place by the transport authorities. And in Greater Brighton, you've got three transport authorities, West Sussex, East Sussex and then Brighton and Hove Unitary. What that means is that you do not have a transport plan that considers the whole functional geography of the area.

Also, when we look at buses and how they operate, we know that buses are run by private operators on a for profit basis. I think there was a municipally owned bus operator in Brighton called Brighton Transport, but that was purchased by the Go Ahead group, which is one of the

big five bus companies. And again, I think it's owned by 51% by an Australian company and 49% by a Spanish infrastructure company. So we're not exactly keeping it local on that front.

It's worth remembering that the commercial basis of these for-profit operators means that they can't be seen to be colluding on anything or acting in an anti-competitive way. And so that means that they can't be planning routes or coordinating routes, which means that the transport network isn't as joined up as it could be.

And now we're moving towards what the government calls enhanced partnerships, where there's an enhanced partnership between the transport authorities and the bus operators in exchange for improved infrastructure offered by the travel authorities. The bus operators promise to sign up to some additional features, which could include multi operator ticketing and joined up timetables. But this funding again was cut nationally from £3bn to £1bn. I think in Greater Brighton each of the transport authorities has received funding, but only 31 of 79 Transport Authorities nationwide has. So there is a definite need that is not being met.

The other key recommendations are: to review the functional geography of the transport authorities, so that we are sure that it is representative of the functional geography; to make sure to integrate rail and regional transport planning, because currently responsible authorities have very little oversight of the rail network and are not able to integrate it properly. In addition, we would like to see control over buses given to transport authorities once the functional geography is sorted out. Local authorities are banned from owning bus companies, so we say that we should lift the ban and ultimately move towards a not for profit system, because much of the innovation in buses comes from the planning of the system, which in a municipally controlled system would be done by transport authorities.

And then yes, we were also thinking about trams, and it was really interesting reading about how the French system works and how they have achieved such wide coverage. I think there are trials in over 30 cities across France, and one way in which they've achieved this has been primarily through devolution of the powers required and the ability to fundraise for those systems. So that is what we are advocating, devolve power to local governments and allow local government to levy a tax on large employers in those cities. So I think we need to ultimately move towards that as well.

Active travel

Onto car free cities and active travel. Again, action is happening in Brighton, but like we said, it is still very top down. West Sussex and East Sussex have responsibility for highways, and then we've got the district councils responsible for planning and parking. And in Brighton Hove, it's all linked up under the unitary authority. But you can see there are already issues that arise in the system as a whole because of the split.

Now local government has the power to restrict vehicle traffic and create pedestrian and cycling friendly areas. This is through something called a Traffic Regulation Order, a TRO. This is being used to create low traffic neighborhoods such as the one in Hanover and Tarn, which I understand is contested, though I don't profess to know all the details on that one.

It's also really worth mentioning that the budget for active travel is being cut this year by two thirds by central government. A cut of £200 million. The decision is now in the courts, who are reviewing whether the government is failing in its statutory duties.

What we are calling for is that central government lays out a clear vision for LTNs and low traffic towns and city centres. Implementing pedestrian friendly and cycle friendly areas is very difficult on a small scale because even if they're just doing a street corner, they still have to go through a full consultation. So, what we're calling for is that some of that needs to change, but we also need to address the way in which communities are consulted with, so the planning happens before we get to full blown project, if you like.

We also want to require that national highways work with local government to tackle emissions, an area that is currently is very segmented. It means local government has very little oversight of the emissions that come from big arterial roads.

We also really need to reform the appraisal tools for large capital projects. What you see at the moment is that a lot of the government guidance is based on economic modeling that uses quite a simplistic methodology for assessing the benefits of the scheme. And it's not very well suited to a paradigm shift. For example, introducing a big cycle highway on a road where there is currently no cycling is very difficult. It is very difficult to make the benefit cost ratios in the modeling actually stack up because it is based on a percentage uplift. So, if you only had five cyclists on that road already because it was a very hostile environment, then applying a percentage to that isn't going to get you very far in terms of total benefits.

And then lastly, this one is a whole policy paper in itself, what you see with LTNs is the pain that comes with retrofitting places to be active travel friendly and not be car centric. What we need to make sure we're doing is that when we're developing new housing and new places is that we have a more proactive planning system. We see a role for local development corporations that have funding to assemble land and the capacity to develop a transport led housing and places.

Next to expanding green spaces and restoration.

Again, there is some action happening. Councillors have agreed to plant thousands of young trees in Brighton. I believe a total of 19,500 tree in woodlands, with a further 419 trees planted in parks, around housing and on highways. Unfortunately, most of these 19,500 trees were direct replacements for trees that have died as a result of ash dieback, which is a fungal infection in the trees, which has got worse because of climate change. There is also an ash dieback plan in place and there are some other initiatives taking place in the region, such as the Trees for the Cities programme.

Now, much of the government's approach to managing rural land is very incentive led, with subsidies provided. What we are saying is we want to keep that, but we also want to move beyond it. For example, one proposal is to amend property rights, so that a landowner must comply with agreed uses for agricultural and rural land. And these agreed leases would be democratically determined through a planning process. My understanding is that Labour is on board with that, but I think the detail is still up for grabs.

It is also really important to think about food systems and how they affect our natural environment. What we need to see is a shift of power away from the supermarkets, so that farmers are less squeezed and they are actually able to care for their environments and for people who work on their land.

And then lastly, we are also calling for making the land register free to access for all. Because currently, it costs 3 pounds a pop to find out who owns a piece of land and then another 3 pounds to find out the plot size and so on. That just gets in the way of a lot of planning,

because frankly, the only people who can afford to access it are developers who are able to pay for expensive annual subscriptions to amalgamation services.

Thank you very much.