

# CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

**FOR THE NEXT MAYOR OF  
WEST YORKSHIRE**

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**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 Mayor of West Yorkshire**

Whoever is elected as the 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 but 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 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 mayor address the climate and ecological emergencies at the same time as responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **10 priorities the next Mayor of West Yorkshire 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 the city region's emerging carbon reduction pathway. The mayor should show leadership in developing and championing a clear action plan to meet that pathway.
- 2** Committing to 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 42,060 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** Power 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.
- 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** Opposing the unsustainable growth plans for Leeds Bradford Airport and joining with Metro mayors across the country to ensure regional airports keep within carbon budgets.

## 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 the city region’s emerging carbon reduction pathway. The mayor should show leadership in developing and championing a clear action plan to meet that pathway.**

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 commitment made by West Yorkshire Combined Authority in July 2019 to achieve net zero by 2038 is to be congratulated. Subsequent work to develop a carbon-reduction pathway for the city region is also welcome, as is the commitment to screen and assess all infrastructure investments against these targets and pathways. But it’s important that the mayor commits to a moratorium on potentially high-carbon investment decisions until that carbon assessment is developed and implemented.

High-carbon developments throughout the region include the road building and widening planned under the West Yorkshire Plus Transport Fund and the proposed expansion of Leeds Bradford Airport. 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. All existing major schemes should be reviewed to ensure they are compliant.

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**2**

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

In West Yorkshire 464 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, 39 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.

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**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 42,060 new jobs in the region by 2030.**

Green jobs and training will both be necessary to achieve a credible and 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 West Yorkshire.

The LGA analysis suggests the region could benefit from 42,060 jobs over the next decade. That includes a potential 6,136 jobs in low-carbon electricity, 6,595 in low-carbon heat, 17,291 in alternative fuels, 6,034 in energy efficiency, 3,675 in low-carbon services, and 2,329 in low-emissions vehicles and related infrastructure.

#### **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.

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**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 32% of homes are currently well insulated in West Yorkshire. This represents a shocking waste of energy, high greenhouse gas emissions and unnecessarily high energy bills.

11% 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 working, 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. 70,927 homes need to be insulated every year within West Yorkshire 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 37,645 heat pumps need to be fitted every year in West Yorkshire.

All new development must be net zero carbon, including all housing as standard, starting immediately. Examples of best practice within the city region range from the near-Passivhaus Baildon Methodist Church to the Climate Innovation District in Leeds.

The mayor should also ensure that the Northern Gas Networks-led H21 project to produce heat from hydrogen excludes the use of hydrogen made from natural gas. Unlike hydrogen production from renewable energy, the process of hydrogen production from natural gas is dirty as all the carbon pollution can't be captured, and fugitive emissions from gas extraction and transportation remain. It also won't be practically possible for at least ten years because there are no existing carbon storage facilities.

Hydrogen use for heating should only play a supporting role to electric heating using heat pumps, because of hydrogen's high carbon footprint and the need for sustainably produced hydrogen to be prioritised for use in industry and heavy goods vehicles where alternative low-carbon options don't readily exist.

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.**

West Yorkshire 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".

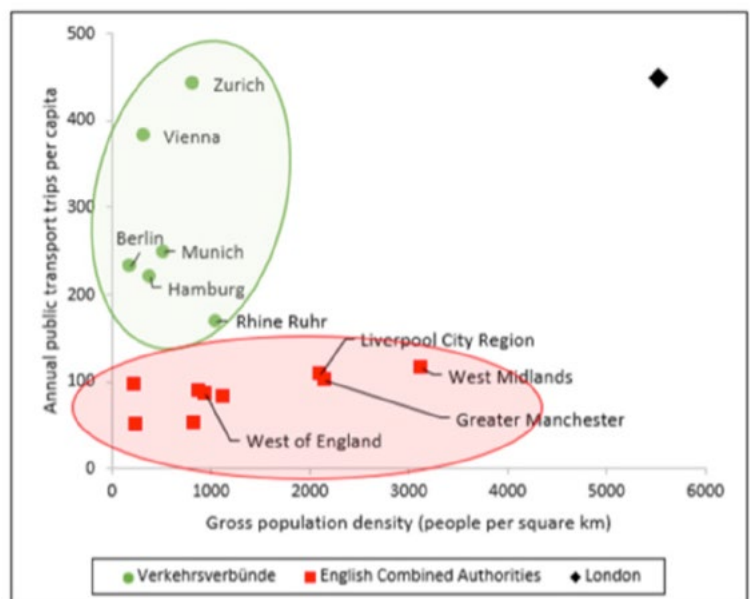
The mayor must protect the health of local people and commit to taking action to ensure air quality standards are met across the whole region.

### **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. They should also seek to secure the delivery of rail electrification on Transpennine and local rail routes.

West Yorkshire can also do much better at



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



providing safe cycling routes. Research shows that 22% 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.

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 28% of commuter journeys in West Yorkshire are by walking, cycling and public transport. As a bare minimum, the mayor should work to increase this to 62% by 2030. Money to achieve this transformation can be raised through schemes like the Workplace Parking Levy successfully pioneered by Nottingham City Council.

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**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.**

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 West Yorkshire.

### **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 473,432 GWh of renewable energy is generated in West Yorkshire. This is equal to only 3% of household energy use. If every council area within the region matched the best similar areas, then 3,399,880 GWh could be produced.

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

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**7**

## **Greening the city region 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.

### **Practical action:**

In West Yorkshire there are 39 neighbourhoods rated E (the most green-space deprived). This means 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.

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**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.**

Only 38% of household waste in West Yorkshire is reused, recycled, or composted. The best local authorities in Wales are achieving more than 70%.

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:**

West Yorkshire 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.

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**9**

## **Calling on the local government pension scheme 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.

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**10**

## **Opposing the unsustainable growth plans for Leeds Bradford Airport and joining with Metro mayors across the country to ensure regional airports keep within carbon budgets.**

Greenhouse gas emissions from flights to and from UK airports have doubled in the last 25 years. With no easy technical fixes to this problem, we need to act urgently to reduce emissions from flying to avoid dangerous climate change.

This means curbing frequent flying and stopping airport expansion.

Despite these stark facts, Leeds Bradford Airport's owners want to expand the size of the airport from its pre-COVID-19 levels of 4 million passengers per year to over 7 million per year by 2030.

Research for the independent Leeds Climate Commission showed that, on its current growth trajectory, emissions from the airport will exceed the entire greenhouse gas budget for Leeds by as early as 2026. This would significantly undermine attempts to meet the wider West Yorkshire carbon pathway.

### **Practical action:**

The West Yorkshire Mayor should recognize that the planned expansion of Leeds Bradford Airport is incompatible with the region's ambitions to become a net-zero economy by 2038.

Therefore, they should publicly oppose this expansion and any planning applications that would facilitate its growth. They should also ensure that investment proposals primarily focused on accelerating or facilitating this growth should be refused.

The West Yorkshire Mayor should also collaborate with their counterparts across the North of England to achieve a common approach to restricting aviation growth at all regional airports.

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## 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.