

Bristol Community Climate Action Project Insights Report June 2022

**Climate action requires collective action –
by working together we can take
community climate action which reduces
carbon and improves people's lives**



Bristol Community Climate Action project partners:

Geographic communities:

Ambition Lawrence Weston
Eastside Community Trust
Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust
Heart of BS13

Demographic communities:

Bristol Disability Equality Forum
ACH (refugee community)

Supported by:

Bristol Green Capital Partnership - Project Coordinator
Bristol City Council
Centre for Sustainable Energy
The National Lottery Community Fund - Climate Action Fund



A message from the Bristol Community Climate Action project partners



This informal report brings together insights developed through the Bristol Community Climate Action project to date. It's not a formal academic review of community climate action, but instead the shared reflections and learnings from a collective of committed community organisations and practitioners working on the ground with Bristol's diverse communities.

We don't claim to be definitive experts on climate engagement and are still constantly learning ourselves. We do however want to be open and generous about sharing learning and insights from our work in the hope it can usefully encourage other communities embarking on their community climate action journey, and those partners supporting them.

The collective climate action we need to take as individuals, communities, cities and regions is considerable, and so the more we can share our learning, and support one another to better achieve rapid and wide-ranging carbon reduction in an inclusive way, the better.

[Read Bristol's first Community Climate Action Plans \(full and community summary versions\).](#)



Overview of the Bristol Community Climate Action project



Over the last year Bristol's community sector has been pioneering bold and fair community-led climate action. Throughout the pandemic, six community organisations, representing some of Bristol's most disadvantaged communities, have been busy co-producing the city's first community climate action plans with and for their communities, as part of the Bristol Community Climate Action project. Demonstrating the leadership role communities are taking in the city's response to the climate crisis, the plans identify key priorities which will help deliver Bristol's 2030 carbon neutral ambition, whilst simultaneously improving the quality of life for local people, as the country recovers from the pandemic, and attempts to 'level up' inequality in the midst of a cost of living crisis.

The fundamental aims of the project are:

- Action on climate .
- Action on inequality .
- Promoting community leadership on climate.
- Cocreating community-led climate action plans.
- Using Use a coproduction process.

Throughout 2021 ACH, Ambition Lawrence Weston, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum, Eastside Community Trust, Heart of BS13 and Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust led an in-depth community engagement process to coproduce their plans – working with artists, hosting community meals and presenting radio shows to start accessible climate conversations with their communities. These conversations explored transport, energy, food, waste, nature, buildings, jobs/economy and inequality and enabled each community to create a unique set of climate priorities as part of a comprehensive community plan.

Priorities range from new green jobs for refugees and young people to closed loop food systems that tackle waste and food insecurity; from the generation of community owned renewable energy on local buildings to creating a bespoke 'Repair Hub' enabling Bristol's community of Disabled people to save money and reduce waste. The project partners are now collaborating with others to turn their priorities into action, demonstrating the contribution communities can make to the city's climate targets.



Why is community-led climate action important?



“We are pioneering the way to show that all community work is climate work. We are becoming experts in climate work because the benefits of things like warmer homes, cleaner air, better public transport, access to green jobs and nature are invaluable to our local residents.”

Donna Sealey, Ambition Lawrence Weston.

Empowered community leadership on climate is an essential ingredient to how a city/region responds to the climate emergency. Community organisations showed real leadership during the pandemic – they proved how essential they are when a city needs to respond to a crisis – demonstrating why they should be a critical part of a city/region’s strategic response to the climate and ecological crises.

In Bristol, community has been key to so much the city has achieved. It’s people working together that makes real change happen. With community we can achieve great things. Climate action is no exception.

The climate action taken by individuals and households is critically important, and the actions of governments, business and local authorities too. However, if we are to realise the bold and rapid climate action ambition required to reach Bristol’s (and the UK’s) carbon targets, we believe we need to involve communities as a core and equal piece of the jigsaw, with authentic involvement and influence.

Community organisations are experts of their place and their lived experience, and so are well equipped to develop pragmatic and targeted solutions which work for their specific communities. We need a dynamic step change in how communities can engage with and influence local decision-making on climate eg. (transport, jobs, energy, housing, waste) enabling them to be part of strategic city/regional planning, discussion and decision-making processes at an early stage and ensuring that quality of life of citizens is considered in tandem with climate.

Without strategic community involvement in climate action we risk decisions and implementation of strategic climate initiatives being inadequately informed by the unique insights and lived experience of community organisations/leaders.

The creation of community-led plans gives communities genuine agency on climate action and can form part of a city/region's strategic route map to zero carbon ambitions – whilst also ensuring that happens in a way that is informed by and inclusive of the diverse communities that make up our society. For Bristol to achieve its ambitious net zero carbon ambitions by 2030, the collective skills, knowledge and energy of the whole city will be needed. Communities and community hub organisations have an important role in this.

"Representatives from Bristol's Community Climate Action programme highlighted that there are communities, such as those with disabilities and living in deprived areas, who are impacted by climate policies at a national and local level. Steps need to be taken to consider them from the start: they have great ideas to offer the country and we should use them."

Professor Piers Forster, Member of the Committee on Climate Change

Cocreating a community climate action plan - the process



These ten steps summarise the process the community organisations involved the Bristol Community Climate Action project took to coproduce their Community Climate Action plans:

Step 1

Develop confidence and knowledge about climate change within your community/ organisation and access training and mentoring where possible



Step 2

Get to grips with existing climate strategy to develop understanding and confidence of the local/ regional/ national climate context/ agenda



Step 3

Generate a carbon footprint for your specific community to provide a baseline – this will help you understand where you can have the most significant carbon impact ([use the free online Impact tool](#)) and help start meaningful climate conversations with your community



Step 4

Actively connect with others who can support your climate action journey:

- Map your community's assets and build on existing strengths/activity
- Engage with local decision-makers and climate experts - don't be afraid to ask for help and information

Step 5

Collect a snapshot of what your community's current priorities (both climate and quality of life related) to help plan your community engagement events - this could be through a simple survey/ door knocking/ community conversation



Start a coproduction process – host a series of inclusive/accessible events and conversations to hear what people think and feel to inform your community climate priorities - this ensures your climate action plan has community ownership/ representation

Step 6

Develop specific priorities based on the community insights gathered during the coproduction process. Organise your priorities under specific themes such as: energy, building/housing, transport, nature, food, waste, jobs/education/ economy. For each priority consider: potential collaborators/enablers, resource required (cost and people), anticipated impact (climate and community cobenefits) and realistic timescales for implementation

Step 7

Share and refine your priorities with local partners, climate experts and decision-makers to ensure they are realistic/ strategic and to start building connections with those who can help you implement them. Rank your priorities based on both climate and community impact, to help you decide which key priorities to try and implement first

Step 8

Use your priorities as the basis of a Community Climate Action plan document which also includes key information about your wider community context and the community coproduction process you used to develop your priorities. Communicate your priorities clearly to your community to demonstrate how their input has shaped the plan

Step 9

Share your Climate Action Plan and priorities widely to help catalyse the process of implementation – realistically you won't be able to deliver the plan priorities alone and will need to lever practical, strategic and financial support

Step 10

Remember that your community owns the plan. Keep reviewing and refining it through continued conversations with your community - community plans should evolve and adapt, so aim to make it a 'living' plan. Don't forget to share the workload - this important work requires energy and empathy and maintaining your wellbeing is essential.

Using a coproduction approach



The Bristol Community Climate Action project used a co-production approach (as much as possible during the challenges of a pandemic) to ensure that the plans developed were genuinely reflective of the needs and aspirations of the communities involved.

Project partner Eastside Community Trust created a set of coproduction principles which they used to develop their Community Climate Action plan and to guide inclusive climate engagement. Their principles are:

- Do with rather than to, keeping space for residents to lead the conversation and hold ownership of the actions that emerge.
- Actively build equity and leadership, centring voices from marginalised groups in the design and delivery of the project.
- Create welcoming, open spaces for conversation, listening, peer support, shared learning and improved understanding across groups.
- Keep the conversation and communications about climate action relevant, non-judgmental and solutions-oriented with local people's experiences and priorities at the centre.
- Continuously seek to remove barriers to participation; for example, providing childcare at events and meetings, going to people where they are, and extending personal invitations through a variety of channels.
- Ask what skills, knowledge, experiences, practices and resources are already here in our community, identifying what we can do ourselves together before seeking outside support.
- Recognise and celebrate what is already happening, and highlight diversity of traditions and cultural practices linked to positive climate action.
- Make the process enjoyable, celebratory, energising and positive.

Using a coproduction process to develop a community climate plan is beneficial. It's important to never assume that you understand what is needed and wanted by a community. Using a coproduction process means there's greater likelihood that people will feel the plan 'belongs' to them. This sense of ownership is essential when it comes to mobilising people to make changes and demonstrating externally that the plans are genuinely representative.

"We've co-produced our climate action plan with local residents leading the way, after all they are the local experts who know their community the best. It is imperative to enable residents to lead when planning any kind of community action, residents have to feel that they are part of the solution, and not part of the problem."

Donna Sealey, Ambition Lawrence Weston



"If change is to be meaningful and lasting then it needs to involve the people experiencing the change in creating it. If you do things to or for people you are teaching them helplessness and creating a culture of dependency on others for solutions and action. If you do things with them, or support them to do things for themselves, then you develop problem solving and resilience and creating conditions for successful sustainable community action"

Suzanne Wilson, Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust

Community climate action and social justice



“Tackling climate change and tackling inequality aren’t mutually exclusive. As we emerge from the pandemic into a cost-of-living crisis, perhaps the biggest ‘co-benefit’ of addressing climate change could be the opportunity to also address systemic inequity (‘level up’).”

Amy Harrison, Bristol Green Capital Partnership

Tackling the climate crisis goes hand in hand with social justice. As Bristol and other cities transition to a ‘green economy’, it is vital that it’s a fair and inclusive transition, and that no one gets left behind. We want to see bold, transformative climate action, with those with more resource, and more responsibility for emissions, taking greater responsibility. We want local communities to be empowered and enabled to shape the transition, especially those who will be most affected by climate and nature breakdown and the changes needed to tackle them.

The Bristol Community Climate Action project is an opportunity to champion bold community-led climate action, which brings about wider social change and challenges existing inequality by ensuring the voices of Bristol’s most diverse and disadvantaged communities are both heard and help to influence the agenda. The project represents some of Bristol’s most disadvantaged communities who haven’t historically been given a platform on climate issues.

The ambitious community climate action plans have been developed by neighbourhoods experiencing inequality, along with Bristol's communities of Disabled people and refugees, with the aim of ensuring the city's response to the climate and nature emergencies improves, rather than worsens, inequality for local people. The communities involved believe that by creating their own community-led plans, rather than having top-down initiatives imposed, the voices and needs of Bristol's diverse communities will be better represented.

Covid exposed and compounded many existing inequalities in our communities. The analogy of the pandemic being a great leveller was used a lot, but as author Damian Barr put it "We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some have just the one oar." Our response to the climate and nature emergencies could also be a unique, pivotal opportunity to make 'levelling up' rhetoric reality and to turn the tide on some of the systemic inequality that we have seen worsen in recent years. We want to ensure that climate action responds to the reality of ordinary people's lives, right now and it's important that we're not asking the people who are least responsible for carbon emissions (and have the lowest carbon footprints) to carry the biggest burden for reducing them.



“Many in the refugee community have been impacted personally by the real-life impacts of climate change and yet typically they have some of the lowest carbon lifestyles. It’s important to raise awareness of this and ensure we are asking those with the largest carbon footprints to make the biggest changes first.”

Katya Thickpenny, ACH

We need to start intentionally interweaving our climate action and social justice aims – both on the ground and at a strategic level. The two aren’t mutually exclusive. After all:

- Insulating housing stock reduces energy poverty and provides healthier living environments.
- Easy access to quality community green and growing space reduces isolation and improves mental and physical health.
- Encouraging safe active travel and sustainable transport improves health outcomes and reduces dangerous air pollution.
- New, quality green jobs offer young people post pandemic opportunities and social mobility.

“Climate action has a history of creating new barriers for Disabled people and of leaving us out of the conversation. Our plan shows that by including Disabled people there are simple, actionable ways that we can make our cities fairer and better for both the planet and everyone who lives in them.”

Emma Geen, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum



Project reflections and insights



In this section we summarise some of the collective reflections and insights developed through the delivery of the first phase of the Bristol Community Climate Action project.

Reflections and insights for communities:

- Principles for cocreating a community climate action plan.
- Useful insights for communities starting their community climate action journey.
- Community benefits of having a Community Climate Action plan.

Reflections and insights for local authorities and decision-makers:

- Benefits of community-led climate action to local authorities and decision-makers.
- How local authorities can support and enable community-led climate action.



Reflections and insights for communities

Principles for cocreating a community climate action plan:

Use a genuine coproduction process to develop climate priorities with your community

Build on what is strong in your community already - use existing community assets such as plans, staff, volunteers, projects, champions

Try not to use jargon – use plain English and keep communication simple, explain what you mean, otherwise people won't get it and may switch off. Frame the issue for your audience in a way that they will understand and connect with

Try to access climate resources, training, peer support from climate experts and local decision-makers and ideally some resource to support your time/ community engagement process

Try not to judge or patronise people - meet people where they are at and work from there

Involve a representative group of people – ensure you have many voices heard and represented not just a small single-issue group who shout the loudest

Aspire to be accessible and inclusive – remove as many barriers as possible to enable a broad range of people to get involved in climate conversations and shaping community priorities

Get a community carbon footprint specific to your community so you can be guided as to which climate areas your community should target first ([use online Impact tool](#))

Go out and meet people where they already come together – don't expect them to come to you

Don't always start conversations with climate, instead start with what is important in people's live right now (eg. fuel poverty, cost of living crisis)

Use a range of engagement methods/ ways for people to participate – different people will be engaged in different ways

Work in partnership and collaborate where possible – both within your community and across the city/ region

Useful insights for communities starting their community climate action journey:



Frame the issues in terms of what your community cares about – climate has the potential to connect with everything (eg. wellbeing, jobs, housing, fuel poverty).



Recognise actions that are already happening in your community and traditions/ cultural practices that positively link to climate action, especially within groups who are often excluded or viewed to be 'part of the problem'.



Start climate conversations in an informal, inclusive and active way - clothes swaps, litter picks, seed and plant swaps, community surplus food feasts and craftivism workshops are all good ways to bring people together in an accessible way.



Try and find some quick wins/ actions to implement immediately that can build trust and enthusiasm for local climate action and show it's not just 'talk'.



Value people's time and contributions – everyone is an expert of their lived experience and brings different, useful insights to the conversation.



Don't make climate another burden on individuals – demonstrate how it has the potential to improve their lives and their communities (co-benefits) .



Having a baseline (of community opinion, carbon footprint etc) is an important starting point for conversations/ engagement.



Work with young people – their ideas and voices are compelling, and they tend to be passionate, informed and enthusiastic on climate issues.



Be authentic about using a coproduction process to develop your plans from the start to ensure the community feels genuine ownership of the plan.



Try and keep conversations open, non-judgemental and solution-oriented and demonstrate how taking climate action has the ability to improve people's lives.



Be vigilant about keeping community co-benefits at the centre of your work/ plan and building out from there, especially when working with communities experiencing disadvantage.



Try starting with an issue like plastic waste which has a relatively low carbon impact but is tangible and relatable. This helps introduce other carbon impacts/ concepts that are less tangible/ conceptual.



Don't assume that previous lack of involvement in climate action equals lack of interest or opposition. Give people a chance to be a part of it and you'll often be surprised.



Try not to heighten climate anxiety when people are already stressed, instead aim to help people understand climate change and tangible ways they can feel part of the solution and that they can make positive change happen locally.



Think about who your allies and champions are. Where are the people that can help you develop and implement your plan effectively? Start building collaborations and nurturing advocates of your work/ plan.



Community co-benefits are not 'nice to have', but integral to creating just, holistic, and speedy solutions to the climate crisis.



Climate change is complex so many people feel it is either too difficult or something that other people (people in power / experts) should deal with. If we want people to take action we need to help them unlearn this sense of helplessness and build their confidence so they feel enabled to take action which feels valid their lives.



Use experts carefully. Climate experts can be helpful in understanding what the problems are, the scale of the problem, the possible solutions and what has or hasn't worked in the past. However, they can sometimes make a problem sound too huge or too complex and this can stunt people's creativity and enthusiasm by shutting down ideas too early because they haven't worked in the past.



The early stages of the process require a safe space for ideas to be creatively explored – a space which fosters curiosity, respect, kindness and encouragement, free of judgement and critique from experts. As initial ideas start to evolve towards choices and actions, experts can be helpful in identifying which actions would have the most impact and how ideas can be improved based on existing knowledge and evidence.

Community benefits of having a Community Climate Action plan:

Unites different stakeholders around a positive/constructive vision for the future

Raises the profile of community organisations and opens the doors to new and different collaborations



Provides a useful framework/ vision to start conversations about future/ new funding and partnerships - climate will increasingly become a priority for funders

Helps position community organisations as respected climate leaders, meaning external stakeholders want and value community input more in strategic conversations and decision-making. This can be particularly important for those representing equalities communities

As with a community plan, it clearly sets out the collective vision of your community and gives a route map of how you plan to make that vision a reality





Gives external organisations (eg. councils, developers) a robust framework to respect and respond to, reducing the need for communities to have to respond to multiple 'top-down' consultations when community time/ capacity is limited

Highlights the value, knowledge and unique insights of communities, increasing the likelihood of engagement and support from external stakeholders/ decision-makers

Demonstrates both within a community and externally that a community organisation cares about climate change and wants to be proactive about making positive change happen

Identifies the opportunities for climate action to also bring tangible community co-benefits/ improve quality of life for local people

Enables the opinions of a broad range of citizens to be represented in strategic climate conversations and decision-making

Residents feel like they are part of (influencing) something bigger and feel empowered to make change locally on an issue that often feels too intangible, complex and negative



Reflections and insights for local authorities and decision-makers

Benefits of community-led climate action to local authorities and decision-makers

Community-led climate action has the potential to support the strategic ambitions and targets of local or regional decision-makers in a variety of ways.



Involving communities as a core, and equal partner helps catalyse innovative and ambitious climate action. This action is more likely to be successful because it is inclusive, has public support and directly meets immediate local needs alongside the more abstract and intangible needs of the climate crisis.

Community hub organisations are trusted and relatable messengers, they are the 'constant' within their communities, the 'glue' which helps bind communities together. This makes them essential engagement and communications partners for local councils working on climate action.

The urgency of the climate and ecological crises necessitates rapid change. The pace of change which citizens will need to accept/ adapt to as we rapidly transition to a low carbon society, will be challenging and could result in resistance/ anxiety which could be detrimental to achieving carbon goals. Integrated community climate action at an early and strategic stage could not only help mitigate this resistance at a local level, but also help accelerate the pace of change needed to meet a city's/ region's climate target.

Failure to involve communities in climate action can risk ineffective, piecemeal consultations and solutions being promoted from above, which can disempower communities and local organisations from taking supportive steps and increases the risk of public backlash.

Community organisations can be valuable and trusted 'agents of change' which local authorities can effectively mobilise to support a city/ region wide approach to climate action.

Community-led climate action plans and priorities provide useful intelligence and evidence of need for local authorities and other strategic partners. This evidence can usefully contribute to the case for support/ evidence of need for attracting strategic climate funding and investment to a city/ region.

Achieving rapid climate action, with the consent and participation of the population, requires the active engagement of the public, or it is unlikely to succeed – community organisations can effectively support this engagement at a local level.

“Bristol has a bold One City Climate Strategy, with ambitious targets for 2030. If we are to reach these targets, we all need to work together – the council, businesses, individuals and of course communities. Community organisations have such an important role to play, and by developing their own Community Climate Action plans, six of Bristol’s communities have identified clear climate priorities which also bring benefits – like saving people money during a cost of living crisis – to local people. We as a council are keen to support these communities as they put their plans into action and champion community-led climate action in the city.”

Nicola Beech, (former) Cabinet Member for Climate, Ecology, Waste and Energy, Bristol City Council



How local authorities can support and enable community-led climate action:



By involving community partners/ leaders in strategic climate conversations at a city/ regional level, ensuring that plans and decisions are made with diverse community insights embedded from the start.



Be willing to work with communities as equal and trusted collaborators - community organisations have unique insights and have the trust and respect of their communities – this credibility can be more complex for local councils to develop and sustain.



Providing a specific officer acting as accessible and supportive central link/ advocate for community organisations who can act as a two-way conduit and help community organisations navigate the complex ecosystem of local authorities.



Giving a public platform and exposure to community organisations, especially those representing equalities communities, to celebrate and promote their role as climate leaders.



Being open with information and communications – proactively sharing information that can support and enable communities to implement climate action and proactively amplifying the climate priorities and climate action stories generated by communities.



Being open to incorporating community climate priorities into strategic city/ regional plans and strategies (where possible) helping to make the transition to net zero more inclusive and representative.



Being open to exploring opportunities for council owned land and buildings to be used differently for the benefit for of climate, nature and communities.



Being supportive critical friends e.g. by involving specialist officers and members in reviewing draft climate action plans and shaping realistic priorities. There are limitations to what communities know technically and to what they can realistically implement on their own.



Demonstrating a holistic, joined-up approach to climate and connected community cobenefits and not being too siloed.



Try not to inadvertently stifle enthusiasm early on in the engagement process by shutting down ideas. Initially just listen and respect the views and priorities of communities and then feed in with relevant practicalities, expertise and parameters which might pragmatically shape next steps and actions.



Summary

As communities we have a collective responsibility to respond to the climate and ecological emergencies. However, embarking on community-led climate action journey can feel overwhelming. Remember that communities are experts of their place and their lived experience and that's a strong starting point. When communities pull together, they have collective power, energy, capacity and influence to make positive change happen and community-led climate action is no exception.

There's no such thing as perfect plan or process and there will always be more people to talk to; more ideas to explore, and the social and political context will inevitably continue to change. But we'd encourage other communities to just make a start - whatever your budget, with whatever number of people, just take the first step.

[For further information and inspiration read Bristol's first Community Climate Action Plans \(full and community summary versions\).](#)



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This Insights Report was compiled by Amy Harrison, Community Manager, Bristol Green Capital Partnership on behalf of the Bristol Community Climate Action Project partners, June 2022

“ Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has”

Margaret Mead