



GLASGOW'S GREENWASH

A critical assessment from the SANE Collective on Glasgow City Council's plans to tackle the climate emergency

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.....	P 2
THE ‘NET-ZERO’ TARGET.....	P 4
TARGET PERFORMANCE.....	P 5
CURRENT CO2 EMISSIONS IN GLASGOW.....	P 6
THE ‘IMPLEMENTATION PLAN’	P 8
‘GREENPRINT FOR INVESTMENT’	P 11
‘GLASGOW’S GREEN DEAL’	P 13
WHAT’S THE ALTERNATIVE?.....	P 14
CONCLUSION.....	P 18

INTRODUCTION

In this Solidarity Against Neoliberal Extremism (SANE) briefing sheet, we make a critical assessment of the plans of the local authority and other governmental bodies to rapidly reduce Glasgow's carbon emissions so that the city is 'net-zero' by 2030. We also look at the extent to which those plans stick to the principle of a fair and just ecological transition whereby poverty and inequality are also reduced. Finally, we lay out some alternative policy approaches that could be taken to more effectively reduce emissions while tackling poverty and inequality.

SUMMARY

- Glasgow City Council's target to be "net-zero carbon" by 2030 is based on the use of carbon sequestering and carbon offsetting approaches which have been widely criticised for providing a licence to continue emitting carbon to 2030 and beyond. The council should set an ambitious zero-carbon target.
- Glasgow surpassed its target of a 30% carbon emissions reduction by 2020 early, in 2015, largely due to the widespread adoption of renewable energy generation in Scotland. However, this has been described as "the low hanging fruit" of emissions reduction; the next 70% will be significantly more disruptive and expensive economically, and thus requires more radical thinking politically.
- In 2018 (the last year of recorded data) emissions in Glasgow fell by just 0.13%, and if that rate were to persist emissions would only fall by a further 1.56% by 2030. There is therefore a significant challenge to speed up the rate of emissions reduction. For Glasgow to be zero-carbon by 2030, an annual carbon emissions reduction of 216 ktCO₂ per year is required, which is the equivalent of cancelling 127,059 return flights from Glasgow to New York.
- Emissions from the transport sector have only marginally reduced from 2006–18, while emissions from industry & commerce (the largest sector for emissions in Glasgow) actually rose in 2018. Emissions from the domestic sector have fallen significantly since 2006, but fell only marginally in 2018. This highlights the major challenge of decarbonising these three sectors, each of which require major public works programmes and significant regulatory changes to deliver rapid carbon emissions reductions.
- The council's implementation plan to tackle the climate emergency is full of reviews, feasibility studies and pilots, or proposals to "encourage", "enable" or "lead by example". There is very little by way of hard commitments to initiate the scale of action and regulatory changes which is required. The most ambitious policy recommendations of the Climate Emergency Working Group, which informed the Implementation Plan, were either watered down or left out entirely.
- To illustrate the scale of the challenge and the need for radical thinking about how to meet it, to insulate all 428,000 homes in Glasgow which do not currently have a 'C' standard for energy efficiency would require 130 retrofits every day between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2030. This would require establishing a large, permanent workforce to do this work systematically, something that is not feasible using market mechanisms alone, and instead needs a public-sector led, planned approach.
- The council's 'Greenprint for Investment' business prospectus is an offer to corporations to profit from key aspects of Glasgow's climate action, whether that be through private financing of public

infrastructure or full private ownership of key aspects of the decarbonisation programme, such as the 'Glasgow District Heating Network' and 'the Home Energy Retrofit Programme'. Not only are these for-profit approaches set to embed inequality into the green transition, they are also likely to be incapable of delivering the rapid emissions which Glasgow needs to meet its 2030 target.

- The "Glasgow's Green Deal" delivery plan for climate action is light on organisational and financial detail, but it is clear that a private finance-led approach is being pursued, with the government subsidising private sector activity and even stepping in to manage "market failure". Thus, the council's "Green Deal" has very little to do with the spirit of the Green New Deal from which it took its name. The Green New Deal is based on the idea of delivering decarbonisation through a massive public works programme, backed by public finance and delivered by the public sector.
- A public-sector led approach to decarbonisation will be more cost effective due to the cheaper cost of public borrowing than private finance and will allow for delivery on a universal, rather than market-based, basis. This will ensure that, for example, all homes in Glasgow are made energy efficient, not just those who can afford to make those changes via market mechanisms. This approach would also ensure the zero-carbon transition is delivered in a way which makes the city more equal and socially just, with those businesses and high income individuals who can afford to pay more towards the significant financial costs of the transition, doing so.
- Alternative policies include a strict 'retrofit first' requirement for construction and regulations requiring the use of zero or low carbon building materials; a massive public works programme to replace gas boilers with district heating systems in urban areas; and publicly-owned, fully-integrated, free public transport, combined with a tough system of financial penalties to discourage the use of cars, especially high emissions cars like SUVs.
- A new approach to public finance would be needed for the up-front costs of such a programme, which could come from the UK level through greater public borrowing, or through monetary policy levers such as 'People's QE'. Alternatively or in coordination with this, the Scottish Government could overhaul local tax and income tax so that significant funds are raised from those who can afford to pay.



THE 'NET-ZERO' TARGET

Glasgow City Council now aims to be “net-zero” by 2030. Net-zero is defined by the council as: “The point at which all emissions emitted by the city (CO₂, NO_x, SO_x, PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}) are negated by the amount stored, offset, or sequestered by natural means.”

The use of carbon offsetting and sequestering as part of Glasgow’s climate goals is problematic as it is a licence to continue emitting carbon in the city beyond 2030, on the basis that activity elsewhere and/or in the future will “balance” out these emissions. But, as Alia Al Ghussain has written, ‘offsetting’ doesn’t do what it says “on the tin” because it doesn’t “cancel out – offset – the emissions to which they are linked.” Carbon emitted into the atmosphere now contributes to climate catastrophe now, regardless of activity elsewhere or that is planned for the future.

There is also a temporality issue with carbon offsetting: stopping emissions now is more advantageous in preventing climate catastrophe than stopping emissions in 15 or 20 years - which is how long it might take a tree-planting ‘carbon-offsetting’ project to begin to absorb large amounts of CO₂ - because once we pass tipping points of global warming it will become increasingly difficult for human action to contain climate breakdown. Full priority must be given to the next ten years in carbon emissions reduction.

Finally, plans for carbon sequestering often include pinning hopes on technologies which are not yet fully developed at scale, such as the ability to suck CO₂ out of the atmosphere, and therefore carry inherent risks of being unachievable in the timeframe required.

“Net-zero plans that rely on promises of future carbon removal – instead of reducing emissions now – are, therefore, placing a risky bet,” professor Duncan McLaren, researcher at Lancaster University’s Environment Centre, has said. “If the technologies anticipated to remove huge quantities of carbon in the 2040s and 2050s fail to work as expected – or lead to rebounds in emissions from land-use change, for example – then it might not be practical to compensate for the cumulative emissions from mitigation foregone between now and then.”

The concept of ‘net-zero’ has been widely criticised by climate scientists and others as a form of ‘greenwash’. Glasgow should take the lead among councils in Scotland in rejecting this measure of decarbonisation, and instead take the transparent approach of setting a straight-forward zero-carbon target.



TARGET PERFORMANCE

In terms of Glasgow's performance in emissions reduction so far, Glasgow City Council met its 2020 target for a 30% carbon emissions reduction early, in 2015, largely due to the large-scale shift to renewable sources of energy generation in Scotland over the past decade. There is a broad-based consensus that the next 70% of emissions reduction will be significantly harder to achieve, involving decisions which are substantially more difficult politically and which tread on strong vested interests economically.

The UK Committee for Climate Change, which advises the Scottish Government on emissions targets, has described the sources of emissions reduction in Scotland so far as "the low hanging fruit", with emissions from the power sector falling more than 12% from 2008–2018, while reductions in the other key sectors - industry, buildings (heating), agriculture and transport - have fallen at best by just over 2% (industry) and at worst have risen slightly (transport).

There has clearly been progress made, but the extent of the challenge over the next nine years is of a much steeper gradient than what has come before, requiring significantly more economic disruption and significantly more cross-sector coordination than typical market mechanisms would allow for. Understood in this way, it should be clear that a more radical politics - willing to break fundamentally with the status quo - will be needed to rise to this challenge.

It is also important to note that Glasgow's figures for carbon emissions do not include emissions from what is imported into and consumed in Glasgow. Neither does it take into account emissions from Glasgow Airport, which is located within Renfrewshire Council but is clearly utilised mostly by visitors to Glasgow and Glaswegians flying out of the city. The city clearly has some-level of responsibility for these unaccounted for emissions in its figures.



CURRENT CO2 EMISSIONS IN GLASGOW

Published in November 2020 and providing data for the year 2018, Glasgow City Council's "[update on city wide energy consumption and carbon emissions](#)" is somewhat dated, but is nonetheless the most up-to-date data we have to work with on the actual situation in Glasgow.

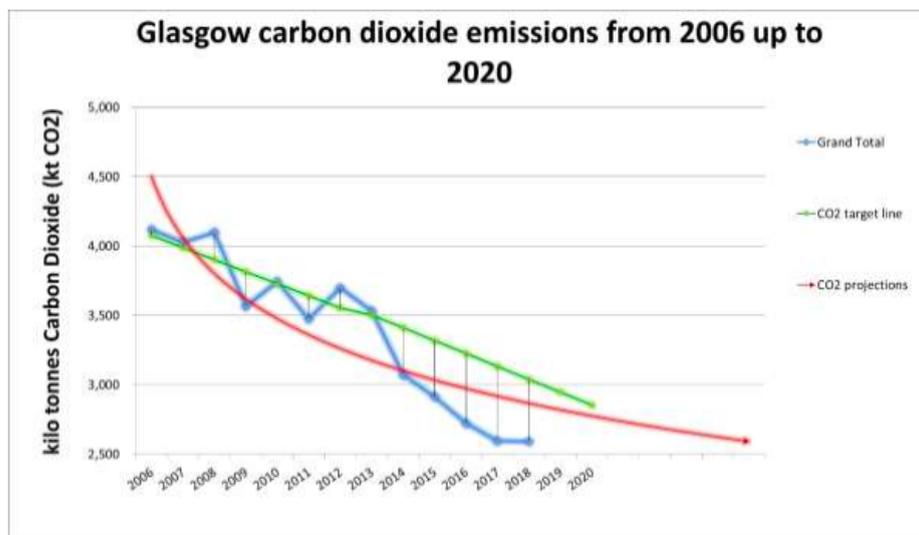
Glasgow's CO2 emissions in 2018 totalled 2,591 kilo-tonnes of carbon dioxide (ktCO₂)¹, which represents a 0.13% decrease from 2017 and a 37% cumulative decrease since 2006. Clearly, Glasgow's rate of emissions reduction will have to increase substantially if it is to meet its 2030 'net-zero' target since, if the 2018 rate persists, emissions will only be reduced in the city by a further 1.56% by 2030. Indeed, as the blue line in the 'Figure 3' graph below shows, emissions reduction in the city has slowed significantly over the past five years following a big drop in 2013.

To highlight the scale of the challenge, for Glasgow to be zero-carbon (i.e. without relying on carbon off-setting or sequestering) by 2030, it would require an annual carbon emissions reduction of 216 ktCO₂ per year, which is the equivalent emissions reduction impact as cancelling 127,059 return flights from Glasgow to New York.²

A sectoral breakdown of carbon emissions shows that industrial and commercial sector emissions increased from 2017–2018, by 17 ktCO₂, although it has decreased since 2006 by 858 ktCO₂. Nonetheless, this yearly increase shows Glasgow is moving in the wrong direction when it comes to the energy efficiency of industrial/commercial buildings and the embodied carbon in construction in particular.

Transport emissions were down 16 ktCO₂ from 2017–2018, but is only down 55 ktCO₂ from 2006–2018, which shows there has been very slow progress in this area over a long period of time, reflecting limited government intervention in this area. The domestic sector was down just 4 ktCO₂ from 2017–2018, but 606 ktCO₂ from 2006–2018, suggesting significant progress in this sector has been made but may now be slowing down.

Figure 3. Glasgow carbon dioxide emissions

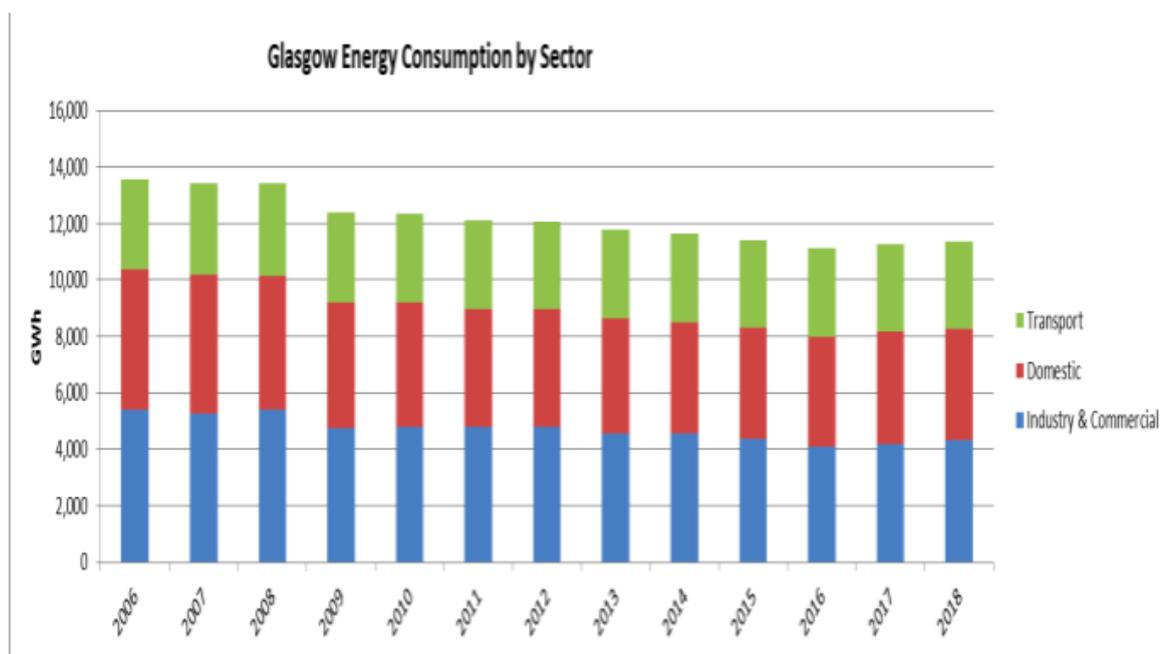


Source: BEIS. Local CO₂ emission estimates 2005-2018.

¹ This is the standard measurement for overall CO₂ emissions (see [here for more](#)), with one kilo-ton representing 1000 tonnes.

² According to the MyClimate flight emissions calculator, one return flight from Glasgow International Airport to New York John F. Kennedy airport is 1.7 tonnes/CO₂.

It's also important to note that for two years in a row the city's total energy use has increased (see 'Glasgow energy consumption by sector' graph below), which again points to the fact that decarbonising efforts to reduce energy demand, such as more energy efficient buildings and homes or moving people from cars to public transport, are either not off-the-ground yet or are failing to make an impact. It is now broadly accepted that to tackle carbon emissions it is necessary not only to green energy production and distribution but to reduce total energy consumption.



Source: BEIS. 2020 sub-national final energy consumption statistics.



THE ‘IMPLEMENTATION PLAN’

Published in October 2020, the council’s implementation plan to tackle the climate emergency contains commitments to address a wide range of areas, but many of those commitments are reviews, feasibility studies and pilots, or proposals to “encourage”, “enable” or “lead by example”. There is very little by way of hard commitments to initiate public works programmes at the scale required, nor enough proposals to regulate and enforce changes to private sector and consumer behaviour, which would create the framework for a genuine push to decarbonise the city in less than a decade.

There are positives in the implementation plan, including the two “fundamental principles” which it is based on: that climate action “must not further disadvantage people and communities who already experience significant inequalities” and that action to create a safer and more sustainable city should also be aimed at building a just and more equal city.” These are the right principles, but it’s not clear that the council’s proposed actions match them. Looking at three key areas for decarbonisation in Glasgow - buildings, heating and transport - we can assess some of the detail, or lack thereof, of the implementation plan:

BUILDINGS

For the construction of new buildings, the implementation plan states that the council will “require Glasgow’s Gold Hybrid plus 20% low and zero carbon generating technologies (LZCGT) or better, to be achieved for all new build new homes”, and the same requirements are placed on all “non-domestic development”. This standard was introduced in September 2018 for all new planning applications in the city, where a more “flexible” approach for developers to reach “gold level” was introduced. Gold level refers to a minimum 27% reduction in carbon emissions over the Scottish Government’s current (2015) building regulation standards. The Scottish Government’s “Target Emissions Rate” requires buildings to be constructed with carbon emissions at 45% below the 2007 standards.

On top of this, the Glasgow standard includes a “minimum 20% carbon dioxide emission abatement through the use of low and zero carbon generating technologies”. It is therefore complex to ascertain from this methodology what the permitted CO2 output per square foot of any new build in Glasgow is, but we can at least say it is a stricter set of regulations than the Scottish Government and is an improvement on Glasgow’s pre-2020 approach.

It’s important to recognise the context for new build regulations: Scotland is currently undergoing significant construction growth, with Glasgow at the centre of that expansion, as part of the post-Covid economic recovery, and this growth is likely to be a significant contributor to emissions in the city. By how much depends on the exact building materials which are used in construction and the size of the buildings. The Architects Climate Action Network (ACAN) has found that emissions from construction and building materials is “vastly in excess of 10%” of the UK’s total emissions, so this is a significant matter to address.

On the energy efficiency of current buildings, the council says it is planning “a series of building rationalisation and retrofitting measures, which will see carbon reductions in the order of 50% from current levels.” This would require a massive insulation programme, considering that, according to the council’s own estimates, there are 428,000 homes in Glasgow with an energy efficiency rating below ‘C’ standard. And that is not including commercial and public sector buildings. Taking just the homes below ‘C’ standard’ that would require retrofitting, 130 retrofits would be required every day from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2030 to make all those homes energy efficient, meaning a massive, permanent workforce is needed to support that work.

How this will be achieved is not at all clear. The implementation plan only states that they will “encourage and enable retrofit of all existing owner occupied housing to EPC level C or above”, with a 2025 deadline for delivering this, but “encourage and enable” suggest that they would provide economic incentives to encourage households to do this themselves through the market, rather than the state leading such a project directly, meaning that delivery of the desired outcomes is likely to be patchy at best. The plan also states that they will “upgrade insulation and heating of all building stock in the city, city council leading by example”, with a 2025 deadline. Once again, “leading by example” does not suggest there is a concrete plan for achieving this very ambitious aim for all building stock.

There is a home energy retrofit programme for the broader Glasgow region, which includes eight local authorities as part of the ‘City Deal’ infrastructure funding, part-funded by the UK and Scottish Governments. This is not referred to in the Implementation Plan, but it is included in the council’s ‘Greenprint for Investment’ portfolio of green projects, for which they are looking to attract private finance, stating that the retrofit programme will be worth £10 billion. Any attempt to attract private finance to a major public investment programme runs the risk of a repeat of recent disastrous experiments such as PFI and ‘Lobo’ loans, where government authorities have paid massively over the odds for private financing compared to the much cheaper costs of public borrowing.

HEATING

Like most of Scotland, and indeed the United Kingdom, Glasgow is a city heavily reliant on gas for its heating. Replacing gas boilers in houses and non-domestic buildings with zero-carbon alternatives is a huge construction and engineering task, not to mention requiring significant sums to finance. What does the council have planned in this area? Very little, according to the implementation plan.

The council is developing a new “Carbon Management Plan” to reduce heating emissions from the local authority’s own estate, and is developing a local version of the Scottish Government’s Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES), but this is a plan for a plan, not concrete actions that the council is planning to do in the near future. The main specific plan the council has is to make sure all street lighting is charged by energy efficient LEDs and to add solar panels to the council’s estate. Proposals from the council’s Climate Emergency Working Group for a local publicly-owned Energy Services Company appear to have been ignored.

Perhaps some indication of how the council plans to implement a renewables’ heating strategy is found in its ‘Greenprint for Investment’ portfolio for big business, which includes the project of “Glasgow’s district heating network”, stated to be worth £40 million. The investment opportunity for business appears to include just about every aspect of delivering district heating, including “deployment of energy centres and heat networks at scale”, “district energy and associated utilities works, surveys, utilities diversions, contracts development, procurement, tendering and installation”, “the ownership, operation, management, and maintenance of district heating networks for extended periods”, and finally “skills deployment for delivery of this infrastructure”. This hyper-privatised approach will almost certainly be costly for the public purse and consumers since the profit-motive will be brought into the heart of energy generation and delivery, and thus would fall foul of the council’s stated commitment to deliver a green transition in a way that reduces poverty and inequality.

TRANSPORT

This is the area where perhaps the most radical action is required since carbon emissions have been so persistent over the past 15 years in Glasgow, and the council itself has stated that “transport emissions are the biggest challenge for the city”. However, the council’s implementation plan falls well short of proposing anything which could put a big dent into transport emissions.

The council's Climate Emergency Working Group was certainly radical in its thinking, calling for "ambitious targets for modal shift with associated delivery plans" and that "space currently dominated by the private car is reprioritised". However, as Get Glasgow Moving have highlighted, the Working Group's proposals have either been "watered down or outright rejected". The Working Group specifically proposed an integrated system of publicly owned transport across trains, buses and active travel, which could potentially operate free of charge, but while this was referred to in the council's implementation plan there was no plans at all to act on it. In the council's 'Glasgow Transport Strategy' publication, published in November 2021, there is no mention at all of these proposals.

It's important to note that not only is such a transformative overhaul of public transport essential for delivering reduced emissions in this sector, it is also a major anti-poverty measure that would significantly increase the accessibility of the city for its poorest residents as well as being extremely popular. Glasgow's own transport strategy finds that a "large proportion of the population in Glasgow have no access to a car...there is a correlation with Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and no access to a car in Glasgow", and that furthermore "public transport accessibility analysis to jobs suggests those in lower income areas have longer journey times".

Finally, the council's own public engagement exercises have found that "people are least satisfied with the buses" and that "satisfaction levels with the cost of bus fares is low". Ending the privatised bus system, which began with former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's deregulation of bus services in 1986 and is a failure on every metric (price, reliability, customer satisfaction, accessibility), should be an obvious choice for those interested in a rapid and socially just transition. The council's main proposals include "a significant expansion of the segregated cycling and walking infrastructure across the city", which is important but without significant measures to penalise the use of cars in the city and vastly improve public transport, efforts to improve active travel infrastructure are likely to have a limited impact in terms of reducing transport emissions.

The council's "Low Emissions Zone" in the city centre will include all vehicles from 2023 (it currently operates only for buses), but while this will be important for reducing dangerous levels of air pollution in the city centre, it's not clear that it will significantly reduce carbon emissions, since cars have no more restrictions on them in Glasgow outside the LEZ than before. The feasibility of a workplace parking levy by 2025 is also being explored, as is a "salary sacrifice scheme" to subsidise public transport, but there should be question marks about how flat taxes (when users pay the same regardless of wealth or income) of this kind, stick to the council's commitment of reducing poverty and inequality while tackling emissions.



GREENPRINT FOR INVESTMENT'

In a previous SANE briefing sheet, '[Glasgow's Alchemy](#)', we examined Glasgow's post-Covid economic recovery strategy, arguing that it was a continuation of regional development strategies that have been typical in the neoliberal era in Scotland and the UK; prioritising subsidies and incentives to attract 'inward investment' to the city and developing infrastructure in partnership with, and based around the needs of, private capital.

This same strategy is also being applied to climate action in Glasgow, articulated most clearly in the '[Greenprint for Investment](#)' presentation published by Invest Glasgow, the council's inward investment team, shortly before the COP26 global summit. Aimed specifically at attracting foreign capital to Glasgow to pursue green development projects, Invest Glasgow describe Greenprint as a "new" approach to investment, but apart from it being focused on green projects it offers the exact same public incentives and subsidies in Greenprint as is offered to big businesses in general to locate in the city, whether they are green or not.

Greenprint's "green investment project portfolio" outlines eleven major development projects in the city which are "open for private investment", with a combined value of £30 billion. We have already mentioned two of these projects above, the Glasgow District Heating Network and the Home Energy Retrofit Programme, both of which are essential elements of a broader decarbonisation plan. Other projects "open for private investment" which should be considered essential public infrastructure - and therefore delivered by the public sector - include the Glasgow Metro, the Charing Cross/M8 green infrastructure cap and the advanced manufacturing innovation district.

For the 'Clyde Climate Forest' project, the council aims to plant 18,000 trees, over 9,000 hectares of new woodlands, by 2030, but it "requires funding to deliver against its targets", and is looking for private investors to buy land for the project or "incentivising landowners to plant trees". Either approach will contribute to the rapid rise in rural land values we are currently seeing in Scotland, which economist Laurie Macfarlane has [linked directly](#) to wealthy individuals and corporations across the world seeking land for 'carbon-offsetting' projects.

"Behind the flowery rhetoric about ecology and sustainability, there are growing concerns that the rapid growth in land purchases for carbon offsetting will push up land prices and rents, displacing local communities while exacerbating an already highly financialised land market," Macfarlane writes.

He adds: "In many cases, this appears to be an explicit part of the business model. The prospectus of the fund that received £50m of investment from the Scottish National Investment Bank promises that "rising land values continue to drive returns". The tax advantages are an explicit part of the pitch, with the company highlighting how "under current taxation laws in the UK, commercial forestry has the added incentive of being a highly tax-efficient investment".

The Scottish National Investment Bank is yet another government institution directly contributing to policies which generate greater inequality and exacerbate problems of housing shortages and community displacement. The fear with the 'Clyde Climate Forest' is it will play the exact same role as private investors but in this case it would be specifically mandated and directed by the local authority.

Opening up green development projects in Glasgow valued at £30 billion to the private sector leads to several questions, first of all about cost. Study after study (see [here](#) and [here](#) for example) has found that the cost of delivering public infrastructure through private rather than public finance is exorbitant, with

long-term borrowing from the UK Public Works Loans Board remaining around 2–3% in debt interest, compared to rates of between about 4–8% in the private sector. The National Audit Office found private finance can be up to 40% more expensive over the life-time of an infrastructure project than conventional public borrowing. There is simply no cost effective case for private finance over public borrowing when it comes to public infrastructure.

If, on the other hand, what the council is looking for is less private finance for public developments, and more private investment to take an equity stake or full ownership over development projects, that is in effect the privatisation of climate action in Glasgow, and a whole other series of questions therefore must be asked.

How can the public be sure that, for example, if a private company owned and operated Glasgow's district heating network, there would not be a major hike in energy prices for residents? Bringing the profit-motive into infrastructure development creates incentives for the owner to charge energy service providers a high fee for use of the infrastructure, which is then passed on to the consumer at higher prices. There are also incentives to cut costs when it comes to the maintenance of the infrastructure, in order to maximise profitability. And what about the financial stability of these companies: what happens to the infrastructure if the firm goes bust? Finally, what about the wages and conditions of the staff working for the heating network if it's under private ownership?

In California, there is widespread despair about all of these issues due to the disaster of privatising the electricity grid. However, it's not necessary to look so far from home to find examples of the failure of privatisation and outsourcing in the delivery of public services - there are plenty in the UK, from social care to buses to railways and indeed to energy, where generation and distribution is controlled by the 'big six'. It is simply unfathomable that a privatised climate action plan in Glasgow could deliver a just green transition that reduced poverty and inequality, which the council claims are the "fundamental principles" of their approach.



Glasgow Metro

Glasgow Metro is a new transport provision that will improve connectivity within Glasgow and the wider City Region, driving inward investment, business growth and inclusion.

Project value: **£ multi billion**

Investment type: **Various including design and build, franchise partner, development partner(s)**

Location: **Glasgow City Region**

UN Sustainable Development Goals: **3 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 13**



Glasgow City Region Home Energy Retrofit Programme

A ten year £10 billion programme to upgrade the insulation of all homes in the Glasgow City Region and explore the use of innovative renewable technologies to deliver clean energy.

Project value: **£10 billion**

Investment type: **Public infrastructure/private investment**

Location: **Glasgow City Region**

UN Sustainable Development Goals: **1 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 13**

Two projects from Glasgow City Council's 'Green Investment' Portfolio

That is not to say there can never be a role for the private sector at all in development of public infrastructure, but that role should be strictly under the direction of the public sector, based on a procurement process which has very precise requirements for the effective delivery of the contract, and without the private sector able to take equity stakes in the ownership of the project or to be involved in the overall financing of the project. This sort of strict and limited public procurement process is typical in the Nordic countries.

‘GLASGOW’S GREEN DEAL’

The council’s implementation plan and the ‘Greenprint for Investment’ have been wrapped together under the title of “Glasgow’s Green Deal”, in a “roadmap” published by the council in October 2021.

The council states that its Green Deal is “not a new plan or strategy – but the way of delivering systemic transformation which bridges the gap between ambition and implementation.” However, there is very little in the document by way of concrete proposals for how it will deliver on its plans, nor how it will finance them.

A ‘Green Deal Unit’ is being explored as one option to oversee this work, while a £30 billion public investment price-tag over 10 years has been put on the Green Deal, but there are no details as to how that will be raised or what specific projects it will be spent on.

However, it is worth noting that £17 billion has been ear-marked for spending on the energy efficiency of the “commercial/industrial” sector, which suggests the council is planning to spend huge sums - the majority of its public investment budget - subsidising the insulation and retrofitting of business-owned premises in Glasgow. A much smaller £7 billion is set aside for domestic energy efficiency measures, despite the fact that there are 886,156 homes in the city, according to the council’s own statistics, with almost half of these (428,000) currently having an energy efficiency rating below ‘C’ standard.

How does the council hope to deliver home insulation on such a meagre budget? The document states that the broader Glasgow City Region has identified “creating market demand” as a key priority in this area, suggesting it is pursuing a market-based solution to home insulation and retrofit that will rely on households deciding to make a significant financial commitment (even if it is a subsidised one) to insulate their homes. This is likely to lead to an outcome that is patchy and that does not take the opportunity to tackle major inequalities in the city connected to the disparity in the quality of housing between rich and poor.

The Green Deal document also states that the council will be financially prepared for “market failures” which will “necessitate intervention by the public sector to solve”. This shows the council is in fact aware of the financial risks in pursuing a market-based approach to climate action, but rather than responding to this by pursuing a public-sector led model, the council is instead preparing to step-in when private sector actors fail. This is a massively inefficient use of public money and a massively risky strategy in terms of actually delivering climate action in the short-time scale required. It is also entirely in line with the neoliberal norms which were highlighted by the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis but have only continued thereafter - that the profits are privatised while the risks are socialised.

What is truly remarkable is that such a policy approach can come under the title of a “Green Deal”, which is lifted from the popular idea of a ‘Green New Deal’ in the climate action movement. Those who originated the idea of a Green New Deal were explicit that it was about *public-sector-financed and run* public works programmes to decarbonise the economy. Glasgow City Council is by no means the only institution to have hijacked a popular idea for appearance’s sake and turned it into a toothless slogan - the European Commission’s ‘Green Deal’ is similarly reliant on big business - but that does not make it any better.

WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?

Is there a viable alternative to the council's approach to climate action? Yes, but it is also important to recognise that the council is correct to say that it has "limited" influence on the three big emitter sectors in the city - industry/commercial, domestic and transport - and that for the city to have a truly effective climate action strategy requires changes not just at the council level but at Scottish Government and UK Government level too.

Once again, we will focus on the three motors of carbon emissions in Glasgow: buildings, heating and transport, as well as looking at how to finance this.

BUILDINGS

To reduce emissions from the construction of new builds, the first thing which is required is to build less. Repair, renovation and retrofit should always be prioritised over new builds wherever possible, with demolition only occurring in cases where it can be clearly proven that it is not possible to repair or retrofit in a socially useful way. It requires significantly fewer emissions to repair and retrofit, as well as being a labour-intensive form of building work which creates high-skilled jobs. More than 200 architectural practises, organisations and individuals have backed the 'RetrofitFirst campaign' based on exactly this approach.

ACAN finds that "embodied carbon emissions are unregulated in the UK. Current policy and regulation focuses solely on operational energy use, as distinct from embodied carbon, and there are currently no national planning policy or Building Regulation requirements to assess, report or reduce embodied carbon emissions." It is therefore of urgent necessity to develop a strong regulatory environment to reduce or eliminate embodied carbon from new builds.

If new builds are to be constructed, they should prioritise timber in building materials, and failing that then recycled materials. Buildings should have a minimum 60-year lifespan and have an AAA rating for electricity efficiency. These changes must be regulated so that they are a requirement on builders, with significant penalties for those firms which breach these regulations, and the standards should apply equally to housebuilding and non-domestic developments.

For current buildings, a huge insulation programme is needed to improve energy efficiency in the vast majority of Glasgow's housing stock. The most socially just way to do this is for the public-sector to deliver it as a free service on a universal basis, and pay for that through raising taxes on the most high-income, high-wealth people and businesses. Additionally, private landlords should be required to pay directly for the cost of making rental properties well insulated and energy efficient. Since those on low-incomes have least means to make their homes more energy efficient and pay the biggest price in terms of the cost of energy bills relative to income and/or of damp, freezing homes, it is clearly a major redistributive measure to organise an insulation programme in this way, one that will significantly reduce poverty and tackle poverty-related health issues in the city.

Such an insulation programme would undoubtedly be expensive, with the Common Weal think-tank estimating a cost per property of around £15,000, which comes to about £6.42 billion in the Glasgow City Council area alone for all homes with an energy efficiency rating below 'C' standard. Some of this money would be recouped to the public purse in the increased taxes paid by the big, skilled workforce which would be required to carry out this work, as well as reduced public subsidies needed to tackle fuel poverty, which could potentially be wiped out by such a programme. The alternative is a market based

approach which would be significantly slower, more patchy and less socially just than the universal public insulation programme we have argued for above.

HEATING

It's important to recognise that Scotland has the smallest proportion of renewable heating in Europe, with 90% coming from natural gas. Decarbonising the heating system is therefore a huge challenge. There are multiple possible approaches Glasgow could take to this, but if the city really does have the ambition to achieve such a significant change in less than a decade, all approaches will come with significant costs. The removal of hundreds of thousands of gas boilers and their replacement requires coordinating a large workforce to operate as efficiently as possible, which almost certainly means taking a state-directed approach rather than one that is reliant on market actors and consumer incentives.

A rapid study should be conducted on whether individual electric heating or district heating systems are a preferable alternative to the gas boiler across Glasgow. Our preference would be the district heating system, as although they are expensive and disruptive to local infrastructure (roads will have to be dug up), they have multiple advantages over the alternatives: household heating costs are substantially cheaper, the systems last much longer (up to 100 years), and any renewable energy source can be put through the pipes, making it versatile, adaptable and reliable, with the downside that individual consumer desires are not accounted for (for example hot water takes longer to warm up through district heating than individual heating) and individual control over the household heating system is weakened.

Replacing gas boilers with electric household systems seems like the more obvious and convenient solution but, as Common Weal have pointed out in their 'Common Home plan', there are numerous problems: for most houses, radiators would have to be removed and replaced, it would put massive strain on the electric grid (especially at peak times), and it could increase household heating bills by three times.

It is important to recognise that the favourability of district heating is primarily in places where houses are in close proximity, like Glasgow. In rural areas it may well be the case that more individual solutions are more advantageous.

TRANSPORT

There are numerous examples of cities across Europe pursuing more ambitious approaches than Glasgow to reducing carbon emissions from transport. As Friends of the Earth Scotland point out, "Rome is banning diesel cars from 2024. Athens and Paris will remove diesel cars and vans from their cities by 2025. Meanwhile, a huge coalition of cities around the world have pledged to introduce electric-only bus fleets by 2025, and remove fossil fuel vehicles by 2030."

The truth is, however, that even these approaches are not significantly ambitious enough in and of themselves to deliver a modal shift in urban transport in under a decade. Bolder thinking is required.

Part of the answer has been provided by the campaign group Get Glasgow Moving, which demands a "a world-class, fully-integrated & accessible, publicly-owned & accountable, public transport network for Greater Glasgow", a call which is now backed by over 11,000 supporters in the city. It did not go unnoticed that during the COP26 Global Summit, which brought together government and corporate elites from across the world to Glasgow, it was possible to provide the delegates with a free travel pass which was usable across all forms of public transport. If it's good enough for COP26 delegates then why not for the people of Glasgow?

Such a move would require re-nationalising the buses and bringing them under one public transport umbrella with rail and subway. There are precedents for this, as there are for free public transport, for example in [the Estonian city of Tallinn](#). The costs of such an approach can be weighed against the reduced costs to the NHS which would come from fewer road accidents in the city, as well as the increased purchasing power of Glaswegians who would no longer have to pay significant sums for transport. In the case of Tallinn, the city authority says it turned a profit on its transport services due to the increased number of tourists using and paying for the service, and the extra tax revenues which come from more people registering to pay taxes in the city so they can access the travel pass. Such a policy would also be fully in line with the council's stated aims of reducing poverty and increasing social inclusion while tackling the climate crisis.

Even such an ambitious idea as free public transport may not be sufficient to get enough people out of their cars. While free public transport (and, crucially, a higher quality of service than currently with significant investment in electric buses and increased routes) would be the carrot, a stick is required to de-incentivise unnecessary car journeys within Glasgow.

One idea could be to ban the use of petrol or diesel cars for trips which occur solely within the city's boundaries. A slightly less radical policy would be a frequent car user levy, an incremental tax so that those who emit the most carbon when driving pay the highest rates (the most carbon-intensive cars tend to be the bigger and more expensive ones, like SUVs), with the money raised going towards public transport and active travel.

FINANCE

To provide the up-front funding to deliver these proposals requires a complete overhaul in approach to public finance at every level.

First, the UK Government has to use either fiscal or monetary policy tools to provide the Scottish Government with a massive decarbonisation budget, which should at least in part be passed on to local authorities to deliver. This could be done through what has been called '[People's QE](#)', where rather than the Bank of England creating [£895 billion](#) in new money to finance banks and UK corporations (money which has largely been used to inflate asset prices in the UK, increasing wealth inequality) it could instead be used to finance public works programmes to decarbonise the economy. Because the money would go directly towards new, productive economic activity, it would not be inherently inflationary.

Failing any significant changes to public financing at the UK level, there are still things the Scottish Government could do. For example, the Scottish Government could make the long overdue overhaul required to local taxation in Scotland by scrapping the council tax and replacing it with a tax on land/property which substantially increases the amount of revenue council's raise and is based on 'each according to her ability, each according to her need', unlike the council tax, which is one of the most punitive taxes on those on low incomes that exists in the UK today ([see here for more](#) on the inequities of council tax in Glasgow).

The Scottish Government could also reform non-domestic rates to collect much more from big businesses at the local level, reform income tax so that those in the top 30 percent of income earners pay significantly more, establish a green bond to finance decarbonisation (potentially via the Scottish National Investment Bank), and seek to [attract funding](#) from Scotland's huge pension funds, including the Scottish Local Government Pension Scheme, which is worth £35.4 billion. It would also be possible for Glasgow City Council to establish a green bond for public investment on a similar basis.

Alongside acquiring the requisite public funding, mechanisms would have to be established for ensuring a public-sector led delivery of these plans could be done with maximum possible support from the planning system to reduce costs and increase speed and cross-sector coordination of delivery. For example, a public land value capture policy could ensure that any land which has to be purchased for, for instance, establishing district heating systems, could be bought at use-value rather than market value. A public decarbonisation company would potentially also have to be established as the organisational vehicle to deliver these changes, which could be connected directly to a green bond and coordinate across sectors.

It's important to remember that although the up-front costs of many of these proposals would be significant, many of them will pay for themselves over the long-run by improving the healthiness and financial security of Glaswegians. For instance, a well designed free public transport system would reduce road accidents, reduce deaths from air pollution, and eliminate transport costs for citizens, increasing their capacity to spend in other areas and to pay taxes.



CONCLUSION

In this briefing sheet we have tried to outline some of the problems with Glasgow's current approach to meeting its carbon emission reduction commitments up to 2030 and point to solutions. All of these alternatives break with neoliberal approaches to climate action which are doomed to fail on their own terms, not to mention the fact that they also miss the opportunity to use the process of decarbonisation - a radical restructuring of our economy - to create a socially just society.

This opportunity is huge: poor-quality housing, costly energy bills and expensive, inadequate public transport are some of the most important drivers of poverty and poverty-related ill health. Through transforming homes so that they are built to be energy efficient and built to last, through creating district heating systems which provide cheap and reliable heating, and in overhauling public transport so that it is accessible and affordable, Glasgow itself can be transformed, so that zero-carbon and zero-poverty are joined at the hip.

However, it is a fairytale to believe that could ever happen if big business is put in charge of the green transition. We have experienced neoliberalism for 40 years and thus have plenty of experience of what more corporate control of the city means: higher prices, poorer quality of services and no universal access to the things we all need to live well. The danger of a corporate 'Green Deal' is not only that we fail to take this chance to tackle poverty and inequality, but in fact these problems become more deeply entrenched, generating misdirected resentment and anger against climate action as the source of a growing class-divide, when the real driver of inequality is a profit-driven model which is neither desirable nor necessary.

Ultimately it is the people of Glasgow who need to decide if what the council is doing is really treating climate breakdown as an emergency. If Glaswegians do not believe it is sufficient, they should design an alternative based on the wealth of experience and know-how contained within the citizenry. That's why Solidarity Against Neoliberal Extremism advocates a People's Plan for Glasgow to develop a new model for the city which is ecologically-conscious and tackles the city's endemic poverty and inequality. Real municipal democracy is not responding to local government consultations which then get ignored by those in power, it is the people taking control of where they live to forge a better future for people and planet.

