



**PLACE-BASED
CLIMATE ACTION
NETWORK**

JUNE 2023

ENABLING PLACE- BASED CLIMATE ACTION IN THE UK:

The PCAN Experience



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**

ABOUT PCAN

The Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN) is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). It commenced in January 2019 and brings together the research community and decision-makers in the public, private and third sectors. PCAN consists of five innovative platforms to facilitate two-way, multi-level engagement between researchers and stakeholders: three city-based climate commissions (in Belfast, Edinburgh and Leeds) and two theme-based platforms on adaptation and finance, with a business theme integrated into each climate commission. PCAN is about translating climate policy into action ‘on the ground’ in our communities and supports a wider network of new and evolving climate commissions, including at county level (Surrey, Essex) and at regional level (Yorkshire and Humber).

PCAN builds on the policy connections, networking capacity and research strengths of its host institutions, the London School of Economics and Political Science, Queen’s University Belfast, the University of Edinburgh, the University of Leeds and the University of Oxford.

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The PCAN team wish to dedicate this report to the memory of Adeline Stuart-Watt who tragically passed away before its publication. Adeline played an important role in shaping the report and overseeing the incorporation of case studies. Adeline always left a hugely positive impression, as a person and professionally, with a mixture of kindness, positive energy, intelligence, diplomacy and quiet confidence. She established strong, trusting, supportive and collegiate working relationships with all her colleagues and was not afraid to ask difficult questions and to challenge ideas. She was extremely passionate about informing climate change adaptation and responses to climate risk and was an excellent knowledge broker between academics and policymakers. She will be very sadly missed by all.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
RECOMMENDATIONS	3
1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. CONTEXT: TURNING CLIMATE RHETORIC INTO ACTION	6
3. THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF CLIMATE COMMISSIONS	10
4. DELIVERING ON NET ZERO	14
5. ADAPTATION IN LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION	19
6. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PUBLIC	23
7. FINANCING CLIMATE ACTION	27
8. CONCLUSION	31
REFERENCES	32

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

Place-based climate action in the UK continues to grow:

- Local councils and communities continue to push on climate action. Our survey of local climate commissions identifies powerful examples of place-based climate action in all parts of the country. However, the momentum seen in 2019 following climate emergency declarations has diminished.
- The climate focus of local councils and communities is broadening out from reducing emissions to wider climate strategies, including preparedness against current and future climate impacts. However, adaptation planning to climate change is still in its infancy and local synergies between adaptation and mitigation activities are not sufficiently exploited.

New governance models are emerging:

- Successful local engagement and partnership models have emerged across the country, often, but not always, in the form of climate commissions. These new institutions are proving to be effective platforms that local communities and stakeholders can use to engage, build consensus and convene new conversations. The diversity of local models speaks to the importance of place-based approaches.
- However, there are challenges (e.g. of time, enthusiasm and resourcing) to sustaining these models in terms of their impact and effectiveness and until they can be superseded by a more formalised and better resourced mechanism for place-based climate governance. Four out of seven local climate commissions find it harder or much harder to maintain work on climate action than they did a few years ago.

Political leadership is essential but lacking:

- Local climate commissions and partnerships are not a substitute for policy and political leadership. They enable shared responsibility across all actors (public, private, civic), but national and local policymakers must lead on the delivery of climate action and facilitate interconnections across scales to enable this.
- National and, to a lesser extent, devolved climate policy continues to ignore the vital importance of local communities in the effective and equitable delivery of climate targets. Over half of interviewed local commissions see ad hoc and intermittent national policies as a challenge to place-based climate action.

Local partnerships lead to better outcomes:

- Partnerships are vital to deliver net zero at every level of place, but that collaboration does not always happen naturally when working within organisational parameters. Cultural change is required in setting priorities and boundaries, alongside conscious and designed coordination with the capacity to deliver such collaborations.
- Organisational structures and partnerships with stated shared climate aims are emerging to facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing on climate action, but they share the challenges of longevity and resourcing experienced by climate commissions.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Local authorities should:

1. Move from the rhetoric of climate emergency declarations to action with locally supported, evidence-based climate action plans that tackle both mitigation and adaptation, allocating resources appropriately.
2. Adopt a partnership-based approach to local climate action, mobilising the energy and expertise of private, public and third sector actors.
3. Embed climate action fully into local decision-making and broader local strategies such as planning, economic development and health, so they are consistent with and support the delivery of place-based climate leadership.
4. Adopt an integrated approach to financing climate mitigation and adaptation needs, working with local communities and the private sector in devising locally attractive, fundable project portfolios.



Local communities and stakeholders should:

5. Broaden the scope of climate action beyond emission reduction (mitigation) to create synergies, emphasise co-benefits and encompass measures to reduce physical climate risks (adaptation), tackling wider societal challenges (e.g. public health, energy security) and reducing social and economic inequalities (just transition).
6. Formalise the drive for zero-carbon communities through institutional structures like climate commissions to provide an effective mechanism for delivering evidence and advice, and generate local collaboration through a platform to connect public, private and third sector actors.
7. Collaborate with local universities or other local agencies to improve the knowledge base on local climate action. Local action plans and progress reports need to be informed by the most recent data on local emissions, emission reduction potentials, vulnerability assessments and sustainable growth opportunities.
8. Participate in networks and platforms to share their experience and learn from each other, while being honest and transparent about where changes may be needed in everyone's priorities, choices and behaviours.



Local businesses should:

9. Play their part in leading and supporting place-based programmes of emissions reduction, recognising that the benefits of a net zero local economy cannot be delivered by local authorities and public investment alone.
10. Understand and address the climate impact of their own operations, and use their local influence to reduce area-wide emissions through their strategies, estates, investment, workforce, supply chains, logistics and procurement.
11. Recognise that changes to current operations and practice are necessary, but can also present opportunities for efficiencies and improvements that can help make the case for long-term investment.
12. Seek active collaborations with local partners to share knowledge, skills and investment into projects, programmes and infrastructure that support sustainable places.



National government and the devolved administrations should:

13. Put in place a coherent framework to support local climate action (mitigation and adaptation together), backed by appropriate funds, resources and skills. Climate action requires joined-up interplay between national and local actors with clarity on longer-term funding and policy landscapes to enable coordinated approaches. Local action without national support will be challenging; national policy without local buy-in will fail.
14. Tackle the institutional and policy barriers holding back local climate action, to prevent national policy uncertainty and top-down approaches from hindering the energy, commitment and resources that place-based action can mobilise.
15. Recognise and leverage the agency and power of local communities in the fight against climate change. Local climate action is a critical channel for the delivery of national policies; it is rooted in and responsive to local needs, and is often more ambitious than national action.
16. Support platforms to enable local climate action groups to share experience, learning and resources to unlock action.



1. INTRODUCTION

This report takes stock of local climate action in the UK as of early 2023 and summarises the experience of the Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN) over the last five years. We do this through analysis, reflections, survey evidence and case studies.

A central part of PCAN is its support for three place-based climate commissions in the cities of Belfast, Edinburgh and Leeds. Through the three commissions and two thematic platforms on adaptation and finance, PCAN has explored different modes of place-based climate governance, partnership-building and engagement and has studied their impact on net zero planning, finance and adaptation. Other experiments and structures are now emerging and coalescing in different ways to further drive this momentum for local climate action. PCAN has engaged with over 20 local councils and communities that are experimenting with similar partnership and governance models.

Drawing on this experience, but also broader evidence, this report showcases examples from across the UK of place-based initiatives that have succeeded in advancing, informing and building consensus around local climate action. They document the power of local partnership approaches, but also make clear that the delivery of climate outcomes requires government leadership, at local and national levels. In partnership with their communities, local authorities still appear best placed to spearhead the place-based delivery of climate resilience and net zero emissions.

The examples contained in the report demonstrate the complexity of effective local climate action, in terms of the variety of types of action, the purpose of action, who is involved and how different scales need to be knitted together. Diversity and complexity do not have to lead to ineffective and inefficient fragmentation – but we must ask how we achieve the integration, across scales, stakeholders and policy domains, that climate action demands.

Structure of the report

- **Section 2** sets out the context of the local climate action that has happened since publication of our last report in 2021 (Howarth et al., 2021), exploring the evolution of action that followed local climate emergency declarations.
- **In Sections 3–7** we present analysis of the changing landscape of local climate commissions and discuss the key challenges they face. We provide an overview of what is happening on the net zero and adaptation agendas locally, highlight the important role of communication and engagement at this scale and discuss the need for more integrated approaches to finance as places seek to tackle the climate crisis.
- **Section 8** provides conclusions.



2. CONTEXT: TURNING CLIMATE RHETORIC INTO ACTION

Since we published our last report in 2021, significant national and world events have affected climate action in the UK. Some progress has been made but more is needed. This section presents this context, outlining trends that have emerged following the local climate emergency declarations.



DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

The year 2019 seems a long time ago. Then, tired of rhetoric without action and spurred on by the ambitious targets agreed at the UN COP21 climate conference in Paris, a large number of public sector organisations across the UK declared climate emergencies and committed to turn targets into reality.

This trend was at its peak when we last surveyed trends in place-based climate action in 2021, at which point we observed “strong, vibrant and broad-based support for more climate action at the local level in the UK” (Howarth et al., 2021). Three out of four local authorities had recently declared a climate emergency and were embarking on devising and implementing climate action plans.

Another two years on and that earlier dynamism has given way to a dogged resolve to persevere under increasingly difficult circumstances: the cost-of-living crisis that followed COVID-19, combined with the rise in energy prices precipitated by the war in Ukraine, has changed local priorities and further eroded the limited capacity of local authorities to deliver and advance climate action. Support from national government has become even more intermittent and erratic (UK:100, 2021). However, these crises have also made many businesses and consumers aware of their energy consumption and forced them to seek ways to reduce it.

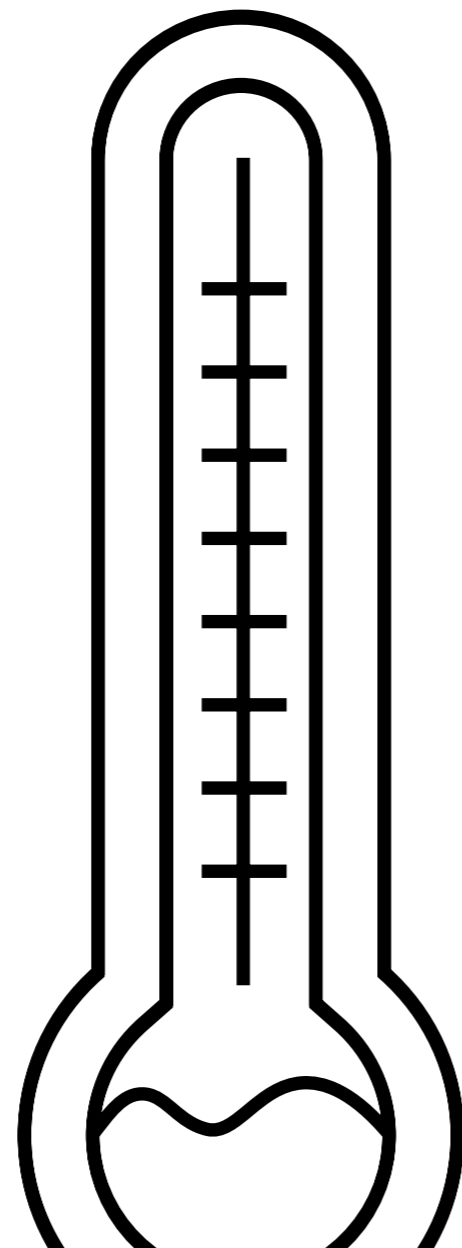


Difficult circumstances have made many businesses and consumers more aware of their energy consumption”

4 OUT OF 7

local commissions find it harder or much harder to maintain work on climate action than they did a few years ago

(PCAN Plus survey)



NEW GOVERNANCE MODELS

New forms of participatory climate governance, such as the local climate commissions piloted by PCAN, have emerged as important platforms to support place-based climate action. The PCAN team receives a steady stream of requests for help to set up local climate commissions. Local councils and communities are keen to explore whether introducing an independent form of local governance could help accelerate local climate action, and to stimulate, test and learn from innovative place-based approaches.

In part, these institutional experiments provide a substitute for the lack of local government capacity. However, they are an important aspect of effective and equitable climate action in their own right, and are often cheaper and more effective than top-down, one-size-fits-all approaches (UKRI, 2022). In some cases, they are complemented by more direct forms of participatory engagement, such as climate assemblies and citizen juries. Most of them concern emission reduction strategies, but attempts to adapt to local climate impacts are also increasing.

Successful climate action requires a collaborative, just, cross-sectoral, joined-up, multi-actor approach that brings together local stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors, enabling place-based transitions to be done *by and for*, rather than *to* places. This is what climate commissions and similar platforms have started to provide. They enable an integration of top-down and bottom-up climate action into the broader development of the place.



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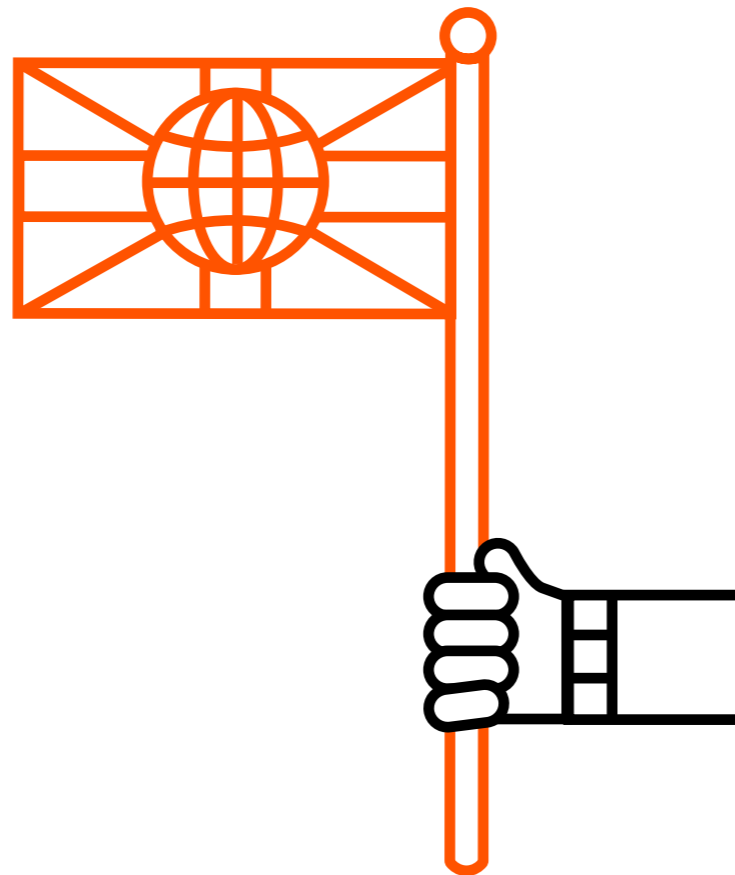
MAINTAINING MOMENTUM OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARATIONS

The creation of climate commissions and similar platforms has triggered a demand for place-based data and analysis. PCAN also receives regular requests for area-based carbon budgets and roadmaps. This area-specific evidence has proved to be a useful starting point for partnerships who want to turn their passion for change into practical action. The role of providing impartial evidence has proved to be an essential first step in taking climate action.

Declaring a climate emergency, gathering the evidence and defining the road ahead creates momentum. But how can that momentum be maintained to turn commitments into action? This is where the path becomes less clear and more subject to diversions. Momentum relies on sustaining local capacity, and local resources are no more abundant now than when PCAN started in 2019. The gap that PCAN identified between top-down targets and bottom-up action remains just that – a gap, albeit one that climate commissions have tried to fill. In fact, competition for scarce local resources has intensified. Heightened concern among local actors over the cost-of-living crisis and energy security has inevitably drawn attention away from climate.

The commitment to the grand challenge of responding to climate change is easily derailed by practical details when the commitments start to be translated into action. There are ‘crusaders’ who very effectively make the ‘climate emergency’ case and push things forward, but others spend more time on the essential but less visible work of making links and forging alliances.

However, local authorities cannot and should not seek to do this on their own; they require greater support from central government and from different public and civic actors. They also need to find a way to work more closely with the local private sector. There are multiple sector-specific climate organisations that businesses sign up to, but their involvement in place-based initiatives has been uneven. The PCAN funded project ‘Enabling rapid climate action: the experience of local decision makers’ shows how local council officers and politicians are constantly navigating a way through the constraints and tensions that exist in their particular location and organisation (see Yuille et al., 2021).



CASE STUDY

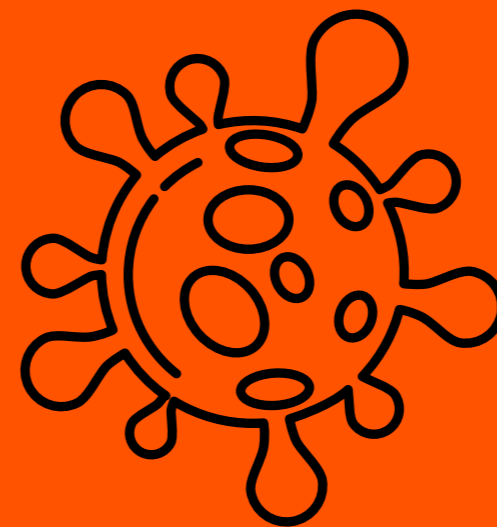
CLIMATE RESILIENCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND COVID-19 RECOVERY IN PRESTON

This PCAN-funded project explored how recovery from the pandemic could create innovative opportunities for climate action and social justice. Working with selected anchor institutions (Preston City Council, University of Central Lancashire, Community Gateway Housing Association) and local communities, it sought to translate the rhetoric of ‘build back better’ into practice, to accelerate action for a future that respects and prioritises the wellbeing of people, places and the planet.

The project’s findings highlighted the urgency of ‘seizing the moment’ – ensuring that the rare opportunity offered by COVID-19 is used as a springboard to reflect, reset and chart a new course for the future. Participants celebrated a new-found appetite for collaborative working across political and sectoral divides. They also highlighted how restrictions to mobility and social interaction have revealed glimpses of what a new and preferable future could look like and offered an alternative to ‘returning to the old normal’. However, it was also apparent that organisational stakeholders, while generally endorsing the need to prioritise the climate and ecological emergencies, lacked confidence in designing appropriate strategic and operational responses. Meanwhile, community stakeholders often found it difficult to see past the immediacy of other concerns and prioritise climate action.

Focusing on the need to ‘bounce forward’ and find new ways to secure transformative systemic change, the qualitative research findings spotlighted the Preston Model’s commitment to *community wealth building* – a democratic place-based approach that encourages institutions to carry out procurement in ways that benefit localities and ensures that wealth created locally is more equally owned and equitably distributed through community-based democratic and public ownership. This works as a compass to steer and guide COVID-19 recovery in ways that both tackle inequalities and galvanise climate action.

The research also pointed to the value of strengthening engagement with ‘doughnut economics’, which has a dual focus on meeting human needs and respecting planetary boundaries (Raworth, 2018). Bringing these perspectives together, a rapid literature review advocated *doughnut-shaped community wealth building* as a lens to guide place-based climate action, catalyse urgent and disruptive action that is sufficiently ambitious to achieve radical social and economic restructuring, and reap benefits for wellbeing.

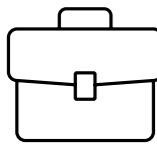




RECOMMENDATIONS



Local authorities should move forward from the rhetoric of climate emergency declarations to action, through locally supported, evidence-based climate action plans that tackle both mitigation and adaptation, allocating resources appropriately.



Local businesses should play their part in leading and supporting place-based programmes of emissions reduction, recognising that the benefits of a net zero local economy cannot be delivered by local authorities and public investment alone.



National government and the devolved administrations should tackle the institutional and policy barriers holding back local climate action, to prevent national policy uncertainty and top-down approaches from hindering the energy, commitment and resources that place-based action can mobilise.



National government and the devolved administrations should recognise and leverage the agency and power of local communities in the fight against climate change. Local climate action is a critical channel for the delivery of national policies; it is rooted and responsive to local needs, and is often more ambitious than national action.



3. THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF CLIMATE COMMISSIONS

This section looks at climate commissions. Climate commissions are area-based partnerships bringing together people from the public, private and civic sectors to work collaboratively with the local authority to help drive climate action. Commissions are independent advisory groups and do not have a governance role.

In the UK the first climate commission was set up in Leeds in 2017, inspired by the work of the Climate Change Committee. Then, with support from ESRC, PCAN established climate commissions in Edinburgh and Belfast in late 2019.

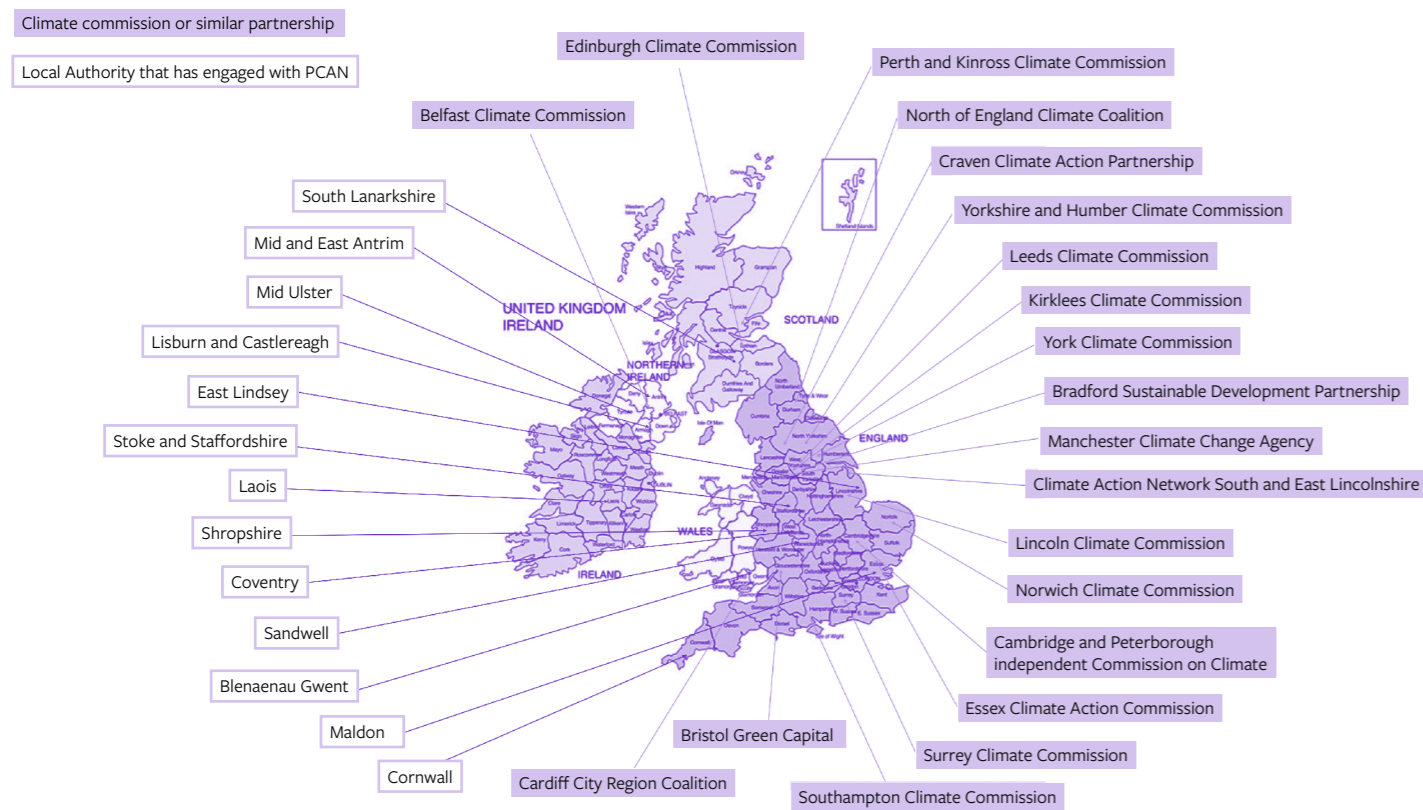


One of the main aims of the PCAN climate commissions has been to produce a replicable model for other places to establish their own commissions. The model has gained significant traction and there are currently over 20 commissions or similar partnerships across the UK. Some have been inspired by PCAN, others have developed independently. As they are place-based, the characteristics of commissions reflect local contexts. They cover both rural and urban areas, from town or city to regional scale, supported by various leadership and resourcing models. The climate emergency declarations that in many cases underpinned the establishment of climate commissions were related primarily to net zero, but many commissions have since expanded their scope to include resilience and adaptation.

1/2 of climate commissions have found participation in the commission has increased since 2021, while for the other half, participation has declined (PCAN Plus survey)

In response to the growing number of climate commissions, PCAN created the PCAN Plus Network in 2020, a quarterly meeting that brings together similar partnerships interested in delivering local climate action to share knowledge and best practice and provides the opportunity for collaboration. This section reviews the experience of PCAN Plus members, whose geographical distribution is shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. Map of the PCAN Plus Network of climate commissions



Note: The map represents the current climate commissions or similar partnerships and local authorities that have been engaged with the PCAN Plus Network. The network also includes an additional 14 organisations from the wider third and private sector. We acknowledge that the fuller UK landscape will include additional climate commissions or similar partnerships. The PCAN Plus network and its members have evolved organically and we welcome any future interest and collaborative opportunities.

THE ROLE OF CLIMATE COMMISSIONS

Climate commissions play an important role in focusing climate action and spreading responsibility within a location and to broader actors across the area, ensuring they can act collaboratively and providing a consistent voice for climate locally. As should be expected with place-based initiatives, the roles undertaken by commissions vary. Resourcing is a common challenge, but ambition and participation often stem from one or two individuals who may come from the local authority, the private or community sectors or a local university.

An independent evaluation of the impact of the PCAN-supported climate commissions has assessed their value and role, key activities, main challenges and ingredients for success (see Box 3.1 and CAG Consultants, 2023). The evaluation makes it clear that an important element in the commissions' success is their ability to evolve and realign their scope to ensure they are still adding value as the landscape of local climate action changes. This shift in roles appears to have further established the commissions and moved them on (at least in the longer established commissions) from merely driving targets, writing plans and preparing reports with recommendations into a role that includes being:

- **An independent, evidence-based adviser** – providing impartial, robust evidence and advice to influence policy and monitor the delivery and progress of climate action
- **A convener of conversations** – bringing together disparate organisations and individuals to take action on addressing climate change in their cities
- **A facilitator of action** – beyond convening, creating the spaces that enable action

Transitioning from planning and creating recommendations to monitoring and implementation is a key challenge for climate commissions (PCAN evaluation)



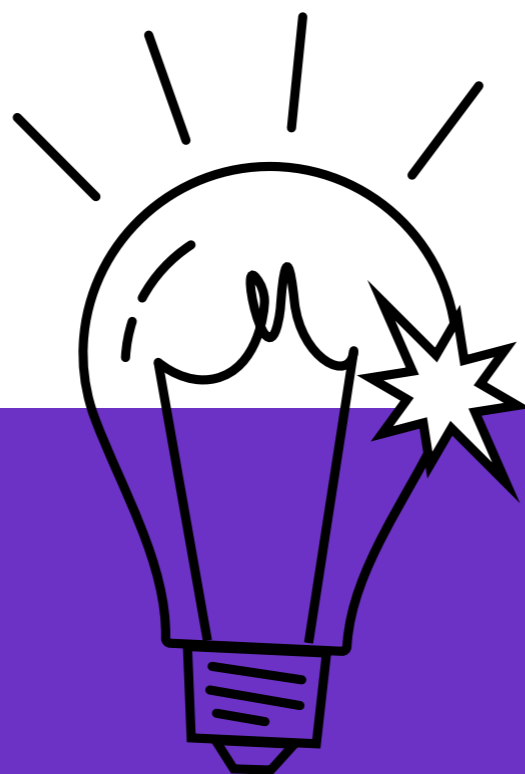
A commission's role in reporting to the local authority and the local area more broadly, is part of its advisory role, using the independent and impartial appeal of local climate commissions' work. Many climate emergency declarations require an annual update on progress and commissions or equivalent bodies are pivotal in gathering the data for those updates. For example, reporting by the Leeds Climate Commission shows that the rate of emissions reduction in the city has increased recently, from just under 3% a year to nearly 4% a year. This demonstrates progress, but the Commission also points out that the decarbonisation rate needs to be close to 11% a year if the city is to meet its target of net zero by 2030 (Leeds Climate Commission, 2020). Few other organisations are offering this kind of 'early warning' system at the local level in a timely way to influence the path towards net zero before it is too late.

New partnerships are needed around place-based issues that have important but overlooked climate dimensions, such as health impacts or access and mobility. Sometimes a climate focus brings new impetus to thorny place-based issues such as housing or regeneration. For instance, the Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub, now supported by Belfast City Council as a part of the city’s Sustainability and Resilience board activity, brings together the whole system of energy efficiency retrofitting – from supply chain through funders to occupiers – in a technically informed but action-focussed way, to improve the city’s housing stock and economic and health outcomes.

Climate commissions have played a range of facilitation roles, which sometimes means playing a role in creating the context that enables local climate action to happen. The Belfast Climate Commission was instrumental in supporting Northern Ireland’s Climate Change Act (2022) (see case study in Section 6). Facilitation may also mean ensuring that climate is not treated separately from the other pressing issues that place-based organisations have to deal with, but rather that climate action is the thread that enables those people to achieve change and improvements on multiple fronts.

Examples include connecting climate and health in local integrated care boards; connecting climate and agriculture, food and land use, as in the case of Climate Northern Ireland’s PCAN funded project ‘Building Rural Resilience’; or connecting climate and household resilience through reducing the energy cost component of escalating costs of living.

While place-based climate commissions have filled a specific gap, even if temporarily, other types of local climate agencies, partnerships, action groups and coalitions exist across the UK that are also starting to address the ‘missing middle’ where top-down meets bottom-up, and where broad targets translate into specific actions. It seems likely commissions will still have a role when more formal and better resourced mechanisms for delivering place-based climate action are established with appropriate governance structures at the optimum place-based level, whether local or regional.



New partnerships are needed around place-based issues that have important but overlooked climate dimensions such as health impacts”

BOX 3.1. LESSONS FROM CLIMATE COMMISSIONS AND SIMILAR PARTNERSHIPS

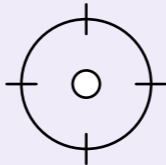
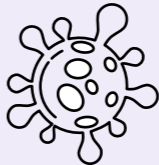

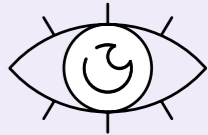
What are the main ingredients for a successful climate commission?

- Clear leadership and vision for the commission
- The right membership consisting of diverse influential experts from the public, private and third sectors
- Transparent resourcing of funding and time
- Defined scope for the work of the commission and internal governance structure
- Links to a university and other local organisations, which can produce and commission data

What are the main activities of climate commissions?

- Convening new conversations
- Providing advice through an evidence base
- Engaging with local businesses and communities
- Catalysing and supporting ambitious targets and plans
- Engaging with schools and education
- Identifying a climate adaptation plan
- Constructively challenging stakeholders on pace of delivery/action plans

What are the main challenges for climate commissions?

 Scope	 COVID-19	 Lack of resources	 Strategy
Sustaining momentum	Affected relationship-building	People’s time	Vision and direction
Engagement and learning	Not met in person	Staff/secretariat	Leadership
Political context	Excuse for inaction	Funding	Power dynamics or culture clashes
		Capacity for delivery	Diversity
		Research capacity	Disconnect from the Council

Source: Information based on an independent evaluation of the PCAN core commissions by CAG Consultants (2022-2023) and a survey of the PCAN Plus Network (2023)



RECOMMENDATIONS



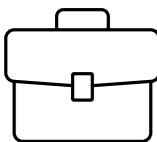
Local authorities should adopt a partnership-based approach to local climate action, mobilising the energy and expertise of private, public and third sector actors.



Local communities and stakeholders should formalise the drive for zero-carbon communities through institutional structures like climate commissions to provide an effective mechanism for delivering evidence and advice, and generate local collaboration through a platform to connect public, private and third sector actors.



Local communities and stakeholders should participate in networks and platforms to share their experience and learn from each other, while being honest and transparent about where changes may be needed in everyone's priorities, choices and behaviours.



Local businesses should seek active collaborations with local partners to share knowledge, skills and investment into projects, programmes and infrastructure that support sustainable places.



National government and the devolved administrations should support platforms to enable local climate action groups to share experience, learning and resources to unlock action.



4. DELIVERING ON NET ZERO

In PCAN, we work with businesses, public bodies and communities to understand and accelerate place-based climate action. Across these diverse stakeholders we are noticing an increasing commitment to climate action and a greater appetite to do more, but also factors that are constraining the pace and scale of climate action. What is clear is that different stakeholders can only achieve the required pace and scale by working together.

The common challenges holding back delivery reflect that climate is introducing a massive and complex additional priority into both organisational and place-based strategies, which requires entirely new ways of working and prioritising decision-making.



In delivering net zero, there are particular challenges in:

- **Policy stability**, with a widespread need for predictable national policies to set the context for place-based delivery – and in some instances actively enable it
- **Skills, knowledge and capacity for net zero delivery**, across all types of organisations
- **Programme continuity**, with projects and annual funding settlements leading to a lack of programmatic approach, short-term spending decisions and high staff turnover
- **Understanding the readiness of emerging technologies** and where and how to deploy these
- **Ability to design business models** for climate projects and connect these to investment
- **Capacity and culture** to coordinate actions across multiple organisations and stakeholders
- **Conflicting priorities and pressures** that are seen as more immediate.

National policy and strategy – including the Government’s 2021 Net Zero Strategy – has too often under-emphasised the role of delivery, and the important role that places (at different scales) can play in enabling more effective, efficient, equitable and joined-up approaches to delivery (see also UKRI, 2022). The Independent Review of Net Zero by Chris Skidmore MP (Skidmore, 2023) recognises the crucial role for people and place in the delivery of net zero – but in many instances specific measures to support regional or local delivery have yet to be put in place and capacities for delivery remain limited.

Individually or collectively, local authorities still appear well placed to lead on place-based net zero delivery, but climate commissions play an important role in supporting or facilitating this. Places need to set about sharing the challenge of net zero delivery across all their local stakeholders and organisations without delay, as ultimately what drives effective delivery is establishing and sustaining partnerships and commitment. Delivery plans must also identify the scale at which place challenges are best tackled, outcomes are best designed, and measures are most effectively delivered. This means working in different ways at different scales or levels of place, as outlined in Figure 4.1.

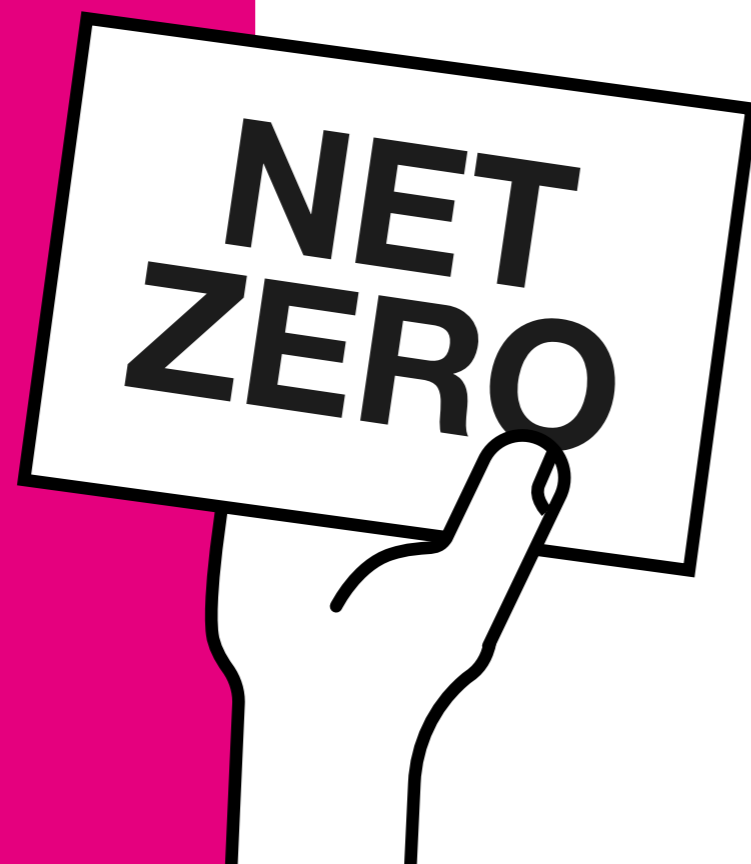
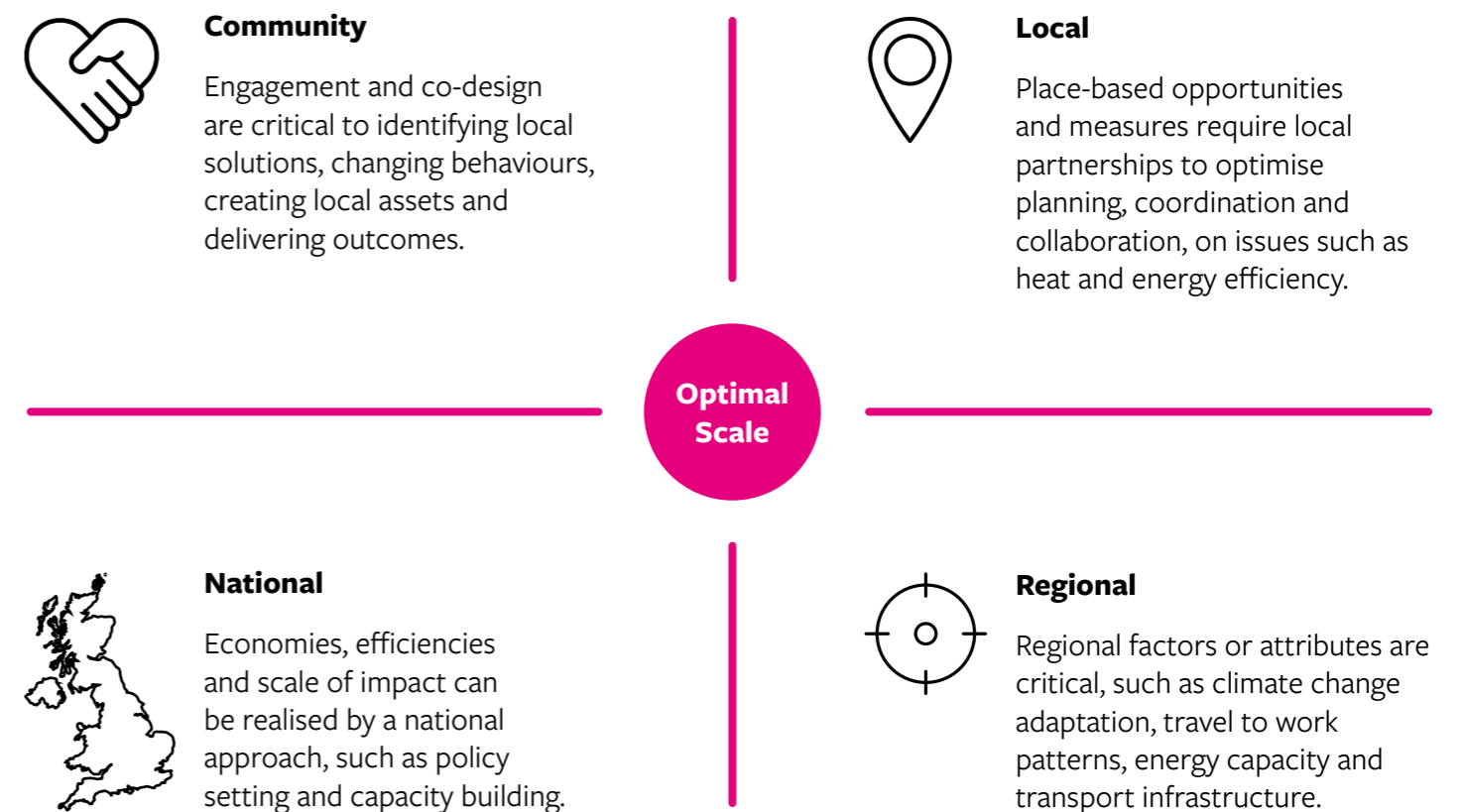


FIGURE 4.1. ACTIVITIES AT DIFFERENT SCALES TO ENABLE LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION



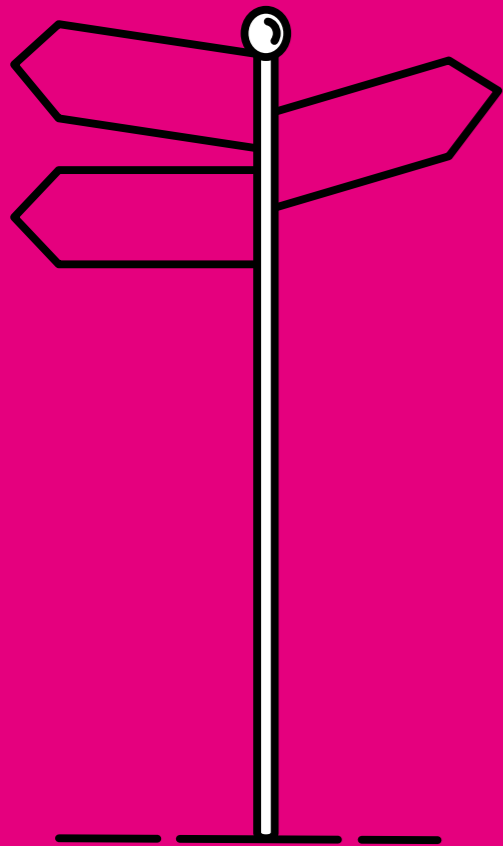
CASE STUDY

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR NET ZERO DELIVERY IN EDINBURGH AND SCOTLAND

Partnerships are vital to delivering net zero at every level of place, but collaboration does not always happen naturally when working within organisational parameters. Cultural changes in priorities and boundaries are needed alongside conscious and designed coordination and the capacity to deliver. We have seen this emerging in PCAN-supported work in Scotland to address net zero delivery challenges. For example:

- **Shared capacity-building** is being supported at the national level, with the Sustainable Scotland Network creating a practitioner network across all of Scotland's public bodies and the development of a national Climate Intelligence Service to build capacity for net zero delivery across local authorities.
- **Local partnerships for strategic planning** are connecting infrastructure investment to local needs and benefits while delivering net zero. An Infrastructure Investment Programme Board brings together city stakeholders to govern design and delivery of infrastructure components to enable Edinburgh's 2030 net zero strategy.
- **Innovative partnerships are forming** between city partners, such as the Edinburgh Climate Compact, which has created shared climate commitments across city businesses, and partnerships such as that between the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) towards net zero.
- **Community partners are leading engagement** with their stakeholder groups, with the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce engaging and supporting local businesses in net zero delivery, and a Community Engagement Forum run by EVOG, the city's third-sector lead.

Together, these actions have and are developing Edinburgh's capacity for more effective and joined-up delivery of net zero, aligned to the social, economic and environmental needs of the city as a whole and specific communities within it. However, there is still much work that needs to be tackled in Edinburgh as a city collective to increase the flow of projects needed to deliver net zero, overcome the challenges and realise the opportunities of net zero delivery.

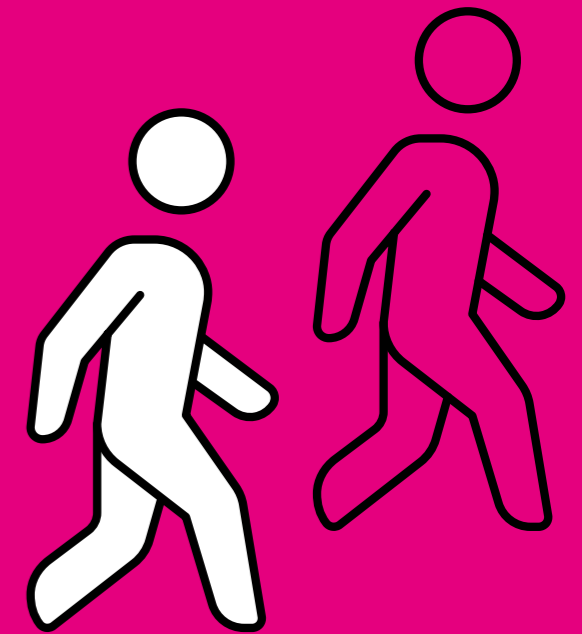


CASE STUDY

NEIGHBOURHOOD RESILIENCE IN EDINBURGH

Elevated concerns about environmental sustainability have led to a surge of policy interest in the idea of '20-minute neighbourhoods' (sometimes also known as the '15-minute city'), where the everyday needs of citizens can be met within a short walk from home. Meanwhile, urban studies research has highlighted the enduring issue of 'Anti-Adaptive neighbourhoods': the product of siloed urban design practices that have prioritised construction of single-use residential housing estates. These remain places where communities fail to embrace the organic dynamism in service provision long associated with urban life.

Focusing on the city of Edinburgh, a PCAN-funded fellowship found that while the 'neighbourhood' does offer a more socially grounded scale for climate action than that of the city or the nation, it is not clear how existing governance regimes can be reformatted to take advantage of this. In the pursuit of more sustainable futures, urban governance should focus on opening up spaces within which a sense of community and walkability can blossom from below, rather than trying to re-engineer cities by sub-dividing them into abstract 'neighbourhood scale' spatial units.



CASE STUDY

BUILDING A NATIONAL CLIMATE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE FOR SCOTLAND

Scotland is building momentum to establish a national service that will support capacity-building for climate action and embed climate impact into decision-making across local authorities. This recognises the challenges and commitments made by all of Scotland’s local authorities to meeting the country’s legally binding targets on climate change, the need for consistency in planning, measuring and monitoring progress, and the lack of knowledge and capacity across local authorities to deliver.

A consortium of the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, Improvement Service, Sustainable Scotland Network, COSLA [Convention of Scottish Local Authorities] and the Scottish Government have advocated a shared approach to building data and knowledge capability on climate, delivered by a shared service. This has received strong political and policy-level support and is set to be developed over the period 2023/2024. The proposed national service will work initially with local authorities and then seek to integrate with other public bodies and the private sector.

Primary components:

<p>1</p> <p>Build and maintain a national dataset on area-wide carbon emissions, consistent across Scotland and aligned to international standards</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Evaluate and embed the best tools and techniques for using climate data insights to inform decision-making across Scotland</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Provide an insight and assessment service to embed climate impact into local decision-making</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Deliver a national programme of capacity-building for local authorities</p>
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CASE STUDY

LEEDS PIPES ENERGY FROM WASTE HEAT NETWORK

With partnership, vision and determination, city-wide transformative projects are possible. Heat networks have been actively promoted for around a decade in national policy as part of reducing carbon in cities, and Leeds PIPES provides a case study of what can happen.

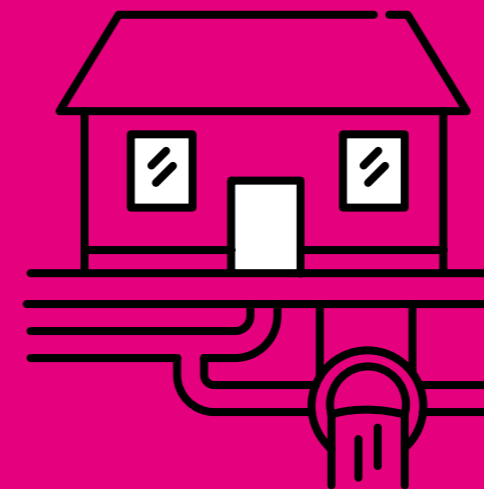
Heat networks are, by definition, place-based and local. They connect multiple heat users to a reliable heat source, unlocking renewable energy opportunities that are larger than a single building can support. Heat networks often facilitate the use of ‘waste’ heat. The infrastructure of district heating through a heat network is a system of underground pipes that deliver heat via hot water to buildings connected to the network. The network consists of two parallel insulated pipes; one carrying hot water to homes and the other returning the cooler water to be recirculated. District heating is used across the world: Denmark leads the way in Europe with around 65% of all homes connected to a heat network (IEA, 2022). Besides Leeds, there are also UK networks operating in Glasgow, London, Manchester, Nottingham and Sheffield.

The ‘Leeds PIPES’ network district heating project is delivered by Leeds City Council in partnership with Vital Energi to provide affordable, reliable and low-carbon heat and hot water, as part of its climate action work. The scheme uses energy recovered from the city’s non-recyclable household waste at the Leeds Recycling and Energy Recovery Facility, currently operated by Veolia. It was a winner in the Association of Distributed Energy Awards 2022, in the Heat and Efficiency (Operational) category.

£49 million invested so far has created the network, which now stretches to around 26 kilometres in length, with work underway to extend another 2.5km in the next phase. The networks serves nearly 2,000 homes as well as public and commercial buildings. Several more customers (including the Ministry of Justice and the Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust) have announced plans to connect and doubtless more will follow. Leeds PIPES provided more than 15,000 megawatt hours of heating over 2021–22 and once fully developed, the scheme should have the capacity to save more than 16,000 tonnes of carbon emissions every year. The project also provides local employment opportunities and is used to educate local school pupils on climate change.

PIPES in numbers

- Investment: £49 million
- Size: 26.5km of district heating installed and supplying council, social housing and some public buildings since mid-2019
- Provided more than 15,000 MWh of heating over 2021–22
- Reducing city’s emissions by 16,256 tonnes of CO₂ per year
- Connected to 1,983 homes, helping alleviate fuel poverty
- 7 civic and 2 commercial buildings





RECOMMENDATIONS



Local authorities should move from the rhetoric of climate emergency declarations to action with locally supported, evidence-based climate action plans that tackle both mitigation and adaptation, allocating resources appropriately.



Local communities and stakeholders should formalise the drive for zero-carbon communities through institutional structures like climate commissions to provide an effective mechanism for delivering evidence and advice, and generate local collaboration through a platform to connect public, private and third sector actors.



Local businesses should play their part in leading and supporting place-based programmes of emissions reduction, recognising that the benefits of a net zero local economy cannot be delivered by local authorities and public investment alone.



Local businesses should understand and address the climate impact of their own operations and use their local influence to reduce area-wide emissions through their strategies, estates, investment workforce, supply chains, logistics and procurement.



National government and the devolved administrations should tackle the institutional and policy barriers holding back local climate action, to prevent national policy uncertainty and top-down approaches from hindering the energy, commitment and resources that place-based action can mobilise.



5. ADAPTATION IN LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION

Local climate action tends to prioritise mitigation of emissions and targets to reach net zero. However, recent efforts to focus on the need to adapt to the impacts and risks of climate change have given climate adaptation a larger, if not equal, seat at the local climate governance table. This is providing a further role for local climate commissions and other partnerships in tackling this issue.

As climate change impacts are most often experienced locally, place-based adaptation is essential to respond to the unique ways in which these climate impacts manifest and to ensure local priorities, values and knowledge are incorporated into adaptation action. Local authorities are increasingly recognising the importance of addressing climate change risks and, in response, have developed adaptation strategies and plans, although the extent to which these plans have resulted in tangible action 'on the ground' is patchy.



Local adaptation shares many of the same challenges as local efforts to transition to net zero – but also it faces specific barriers. These are hindering the ability of local actors to turn rhetoric into action despite commitment at this level, especially through existing climate emergency declarations from local authorities.

In particular, there are challenges related to:

- **Weak governance:** a lack of suitable conditions to enable prioritisation, resource mobilisation, coordinated efforts and decision-making for local adaptation. This is due to a weak mandate and unclear roles and responsibilities for local adaptation under existing national and devolved government legislation and policy, particularly for local authorities (especially since the lack of formal requirement for local authorities to report on progress on adaptation since 2010); and fragmentation between levels of government, public sector departments and local actors.
- **Limited fit-for-purpose information:** insufficient information required for adaptation planning and decision-making, including local hazard mapping, socioeconomic and environmental data, and evidence to support investment decisions, such as economic assessments and understanding of community priorities. Unlike mitigation, it is difficult to quantify progress on adaptation, its effectiveness, and costs and benefits.
- **Lack of knowledge, skills and capacity:** insufficient capacity within organisations and knowledge and skills in the broader economy to understand and assess local climate change risks and design effective adaptation measures.
- **Goals:** there is a lack of clear adaptation goals and metrics.
- **Siloed approaches:** prioritisation of mitigation in local climate plans and projects, which often miss the opportunity to leverage the synergies between mitigation and adaptation.
- **Securing finance:** there is less finance flowing towards adaptation than to mitigation. This is in part to do with the challenge of attracting private and public investment to adaptation projects unless they demonstrate a clear financial return on investment, which makes it easier to defer investment in adaptation due to it being an investment against uncertainty (e.g. to future risk). However, in many cases it is due to the barriers that local adaptation faces more broadly; policymakers and project staff continue to face challenges communicating the value of investing in local adaptation.

Despite these challenges, awareness and recognition are growing of the need to prioritise local adaptation and for adaptation to be part of the broader vision to empower local authorities and communities, and to support equitable development across the UK.

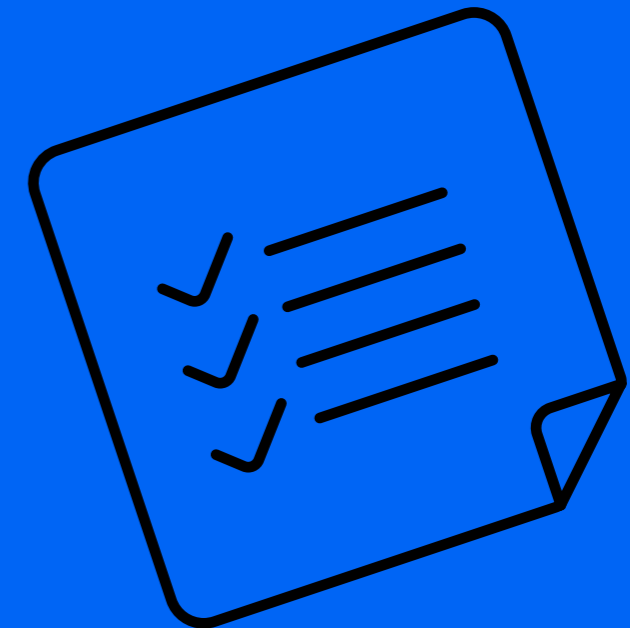
CASE STUDY

COMMUNITY-BASED CLIMATE RISK ASSESSMENT FOR EDINBURGH

The PCAN-funded Climate Change Risk Assessment project aimed to implement a community-based climate risk and vulnerability assessment of the impacts of climate change on the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh (ONTE) UNESCO World Heritage Site and its communities. Insightful place-based data provided a baseline to inform a draft ONTE Climate Action Plan, designed to address local challenges while preserving the character of the ONTE. The assessment results are now being used to inform local policies – including City of Edinburgh Council’s 2030 Climate Strategy and future Climate Adaptation Strategy, and the ONTE Management Plan 2023.

The project demonstrated the importance and multiple benefits of engaging diverse communities associated with a specific place, collecting and sharing their local knowledge/experiences with policymakers. Better understanding of place-based problems experienced by communities can help define more efficient and relevant climate adaptation policies. Importantly, involving communities at the very start of the process by asking them to reflect on what is important to them, and how this will be affected by climate change, enables a better involvement in and acceptance of adaptation measures.

The Edinburgh experience shows that community-based climate risk and vulnerability assessment can be complex. The scope, objectives and timeframe of the assessment need to be carefully considered from the outset, choosing appropriate methodologies, and supported by sufficient resources and staff. The assessments may need to be complemented by experts’ desk-based research to provide evidence required to produce or maximise the efficiency of subsequent policy proposals.



CASE STUDY

HEAT RISK RESILIENCE IN LONDON, MANCHESTER, YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER AND ENGLAND

In July 2022, the UK experienced record-breaking temperatures reaching over 40°C, leading to the Met Office’s first red warning for extreme heat, and resulting in more heat-related deaths than in any other year on record (ONS and UKHSA, 2022).

Climate projections show that extreme heat events will become more frequent and severe in the UK: climate change may increase the chance of reaching 40°C to once every 3.5 years by 2100. A place-based collaborative approach to managing extreme heat is fundamental to building societal resilience.

Collaborative work between the PCAN Adaptation Platform and the British Red Cross analysed immediate responses to the summer heatwaves in 2022 in London, Manchester, the Yorkshire and Humber region and England as a whole. An analysis of policy documents and interviews with first responders (e.g. ambulance and fire services), local authorities, utilities, third sector organisations, government departments and others showed unequivocally that the UK is not ready to respond to heatwaves of this severity. During summer 2022 there were limited resources with which to react to the extreme heat and complex ways in which the heatwaves were amplified and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities (e.g. occurring during a peak in COVID-19 cases and hospitals being at full capacity); even acknowledging these factors, responses to these events were inadequate, due to several barriers identified during the interviews and focus groups.

Barriers to an adequate response during the heatwaves of summer 2022 in the UK



This work highlighted important shortcomings both nationally and in individual locations when it comes to the UK’s response and ability to adapt to the impacts of extreme heat (Howarth et al., 2023). To address these, firstly, the UK needs to establish a *culture of heat* whereby society accepts the increased risk of exposure to heat it will face. This will ensure responses are better integrated in the wider strategic, operational and societal fabric of the local area, as the country is going to become more exposed to heatwaves. Secondly, at the local, regional and national scales places need to put together heat action plans to identify and map heat vulnerabilities and impacts across sectors to inform cohesive, coordinated, collaborative planning and action at the operational and strategic levels.

Notes: Stakeholders’ (N=38) responses to a question about ‘barriers to heat responses’ in the UK. The numbers represent the number of ‘codes’ for this. Data should be interpreted as ‘frequencies of codes’ per question, rather than ‘number of respondents’. Work on this analysis is ongoing and frequencies of codes may change in final reporting.

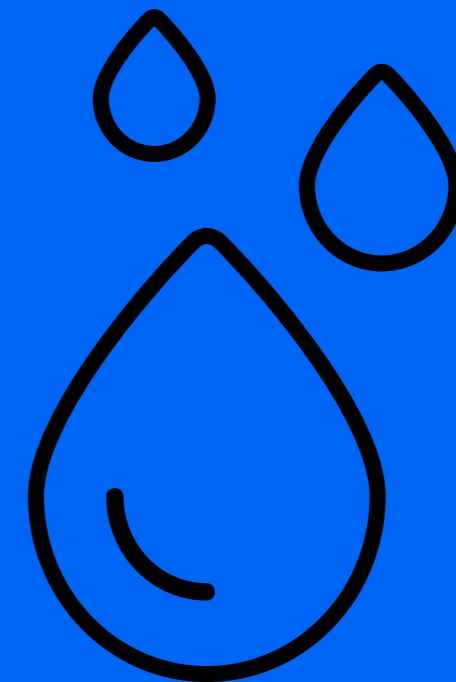
CASE STUDY

ENGAGING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY TO ENHANCE FLOOD RESILIENCE IN LOWESTOFT

The town of Lowestoft on the North Sea coast in Suffolk is at high risk from storm surges and is increasingly vulnerable to tidal flooding. As part of the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (ZFRA), the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics and East Suffolk Council collaborated with local stakeholders to assess community flood resilience in Lowestoft.

By engaging with local experts, households and community members, civil society representatives, local businesses and the private sector, the team were able to identify key challenges and weaknesses in local flood resilience and identify priority areas to address. East Suffolk Council also measured community resilience using ZFRA’s [Flood Resilience Measurement for Communities tool](#), which measures community resilience across five forms of capital – financial, natural, physical, social and human.

This work improved understanding of the community’s resilience and how it is changing over time and has helped the Council to secure £43.5 million of funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to support the construction of a tidal barrier. The tidal barrier has been designed in a way that considers how the climate might change over the next 100 years. The height of some of the defences can be increased in the future, so they can be flexible to adapt to different climate change scenarios.





RECOMMENDATIONS



Local authorities should move from the rhetoric of climate emergency declarations to action with locally supported, evidence-based climate action plans that tackle both mitigation and adaptation, allocating resources appropriately.



Local authorities should create ways to embed climate action in broader local strategies such as planning, economic development and health. In doing so, they should emphasise the co-benefits of climate action by connecting climate adaptation and mitigation to broader local development, health and sustainability strategies.



Local communities and stakeholders should broaden the scope of climate action beyond emission reduction (mitigation) to create synergies and encompass measures to reduce physical climate risks (adaptation), tackling wider societal challenges (e.g. public health, energy security) and reducing social and economic inequalities (just transition).



Local businesses should play their part in leading and supporting place-based programmes of emissions reduction, recognising that the benefits of a net zero local economy cannot be delivered by local authorities and public investment alone.



National government and the devolved administrations should put in place a coherent framework to support local climate action (mitigation and adaptation together), backed by appropriate centrally-driven funds, resources and skills. Climate action requires joined-up interplay between national and local action with clarity on longer-term funding and policy landscapes to enable coordinated approaches. Local action without national support will be challenging; national policy without local buy-in will fail.



6. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PUBLIC

The presentation of climate change as an emergency has in recent years become mainstream, although there is some contention about the consequences of doing so. Many people across the world agree that there is a climate emergency, including in the UK, where there is a common view that governments, businesses and the public all have a responsibility to address the issue. This includes a recognition of the need for substantial action in the areas of transport/mobility, diet and energy use.

This section looks at the use of place-based language to communicate climate change to the public and mobilise action, and the role of climate assemblies and universities in this engagement.



TRANSPARENCY ABOUT TRADE-OFFS

Using place-based climate language is vital in terms of communicating with and mobilising the public.

Place-based solutions derive from a deep understanding of, and engagement with, the expectations and concerns of local people and communities. There are significant limits to a purely science-based and policy-led approach. Encouraging people to become ‘place protectors’ is a good way to support them to ‘act locally, think globally’ in relation to climate adaptation and mitigation.

COVID-19 has hindered community engagement on climate action since 2020, and the focus on the cost-of-living crisis has also caused dips in public concern and debate on climate change. Also, some people are cynical about declarations of climate and ecological emergencies, particularly if they are not followed up with commensurate action.

Yet public support for climate policy in the UK remains among the highest in the world (UNDP, 2021). COVID has seen an increase in people and places working together, which has additional value for the climate emergency, and vulnerability to COVID has led to more awareness about exposure to other risks. The rising cost of living has led to more discussion about fuel poverty and retrofitting to improve energy efficiency.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

for climate policy in the UK is among the highest in the world

(UNDP, 2021)

To deliver the change we need, a transparent, local, place-based approach is critical, with honest conversations about the potential, but not inevitable, ‘losers’ that could arise from the transition. Action to ensure that people are not excluded from the benefits of a net zero, climate-resilient future includes retraining and reskilling, and making space for discussing and altering climate action plans. Communities need to hear how they will benefit from climate action, and in particular the local potential for well-paid green jobs (ECIU, 2023).

The Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill, which received Royal Assent in June 2022, is a good example of best practice here. The Bill was initiated by a civil society group, the Climate Coalition in 2020, with active involvement from PCAN Belfast. When first presented, the Bill provoked a strong negative reaction from farming and agricultural interests, underscoring the level of contention often hidden behind the narrative of ‘win-win’ or ‘just transition’. Getting the Bill through the political process required the chair of the Climate Coalition NI, and Green Party Member of the Legislative Association to engage honestly with local perceptions of winners and losers from the energy transition, and to include education, compensation and retraining into the policy package.

LINKING THE CO-BENEFITS OF CLIMATE ACTION TO PUBLIC CONCERN

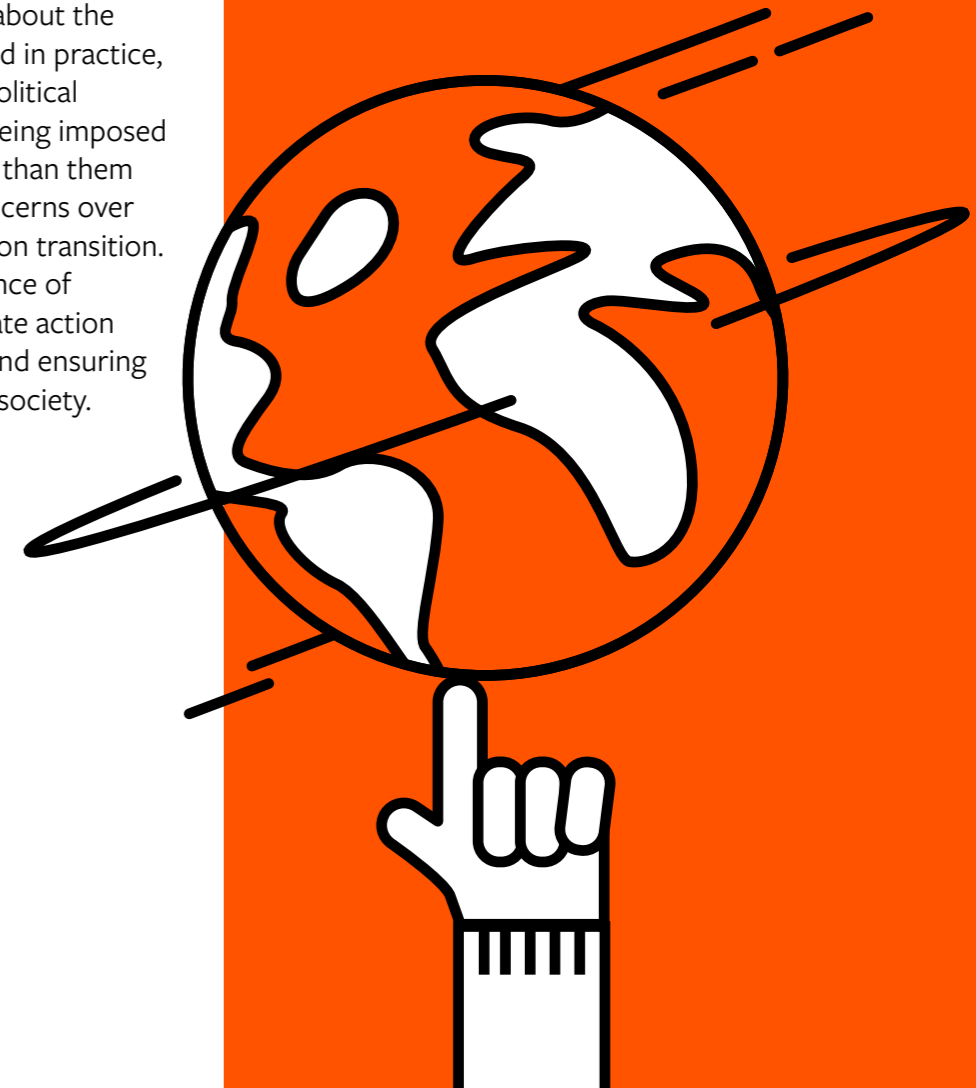
There is established evidence of the range of co-benefits that may result from climate action (e.g. improving air quality and public health; reducing fuel poverty), but there is a gap in research on how the UK public currently perceive such co-benefits. Engaging with the public on this topic is key, and can help guide the framing and focus of climate-related policies.

A PCAN-funded study has found that the co-benefits considered most important by the UK public are improving air quality and health, providing homes that are more affordable to heat, improving energy security, and reducing inequality (Jennings, 2021). Members of the public involved in the research welcomed the opportunity to discuss and share their views and experiences.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis was evident in the focus group discussions and steered views on what co-benefits were most important to the UK. There was a degree of scepticism about the likelihood of co-benefits being delivered in practice, stemming from some lack of trust in political leadership, the perception of change being imposed on communities and individuals rather than them being part of decision-making, and concerns over the costs associated with the low-carbon transition. These findings emphasise the importance of community engagement, aligning climate action with addressing other priority issues, and ensuring outcomes are distributed fairly across society.



The co-benefits considered most important by the UK public are improving air quality and health, providing homes that are more affordable to heat, improving energy security, and reducing inequality”



CLIMATE ASSEMBLIES

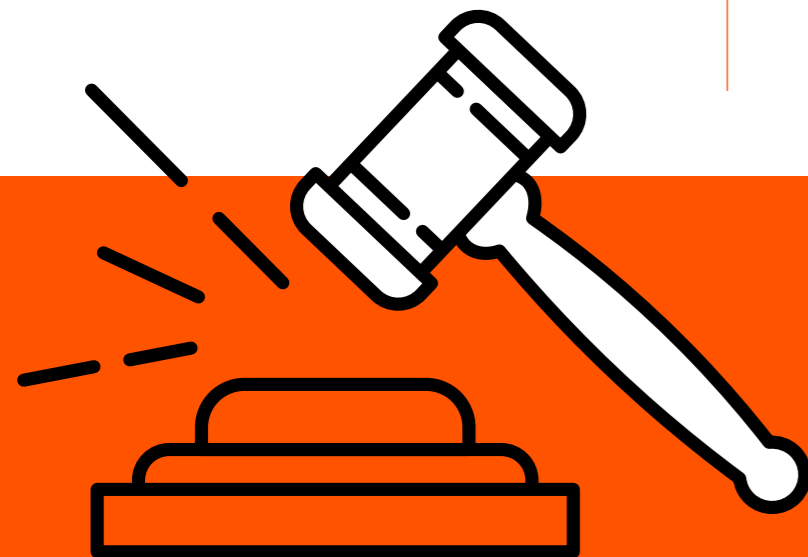
A PCAN-funded project recently produced a guide for local authorities and other bodies looking to commission climate juries or assemblies (Shared Future, 2020). This work demonstrated that the levels and types of engagement are diverse and uneven across the UK, and thus require tailored approaches.

A form of citizens' assembly that brings together a group of people to discuss climate change and reach conclusions on what action they think should be taken, climate assemblies and juries are an increasingly popular tool used by local authorities and others to ensure that climate change policymaking is informed and driven by the insight and wisdom of local citizens. These processes can also create the political space for climate action, gathering clear evidence of support.

The growth in popularity of climate assemblies is welcome but must be accompanied by a commitment to robust processes, including recruitment (e.g. sortition) that brings together a diverse group of citizens that truly reflect the diversity of the local population, over a time period sufficiently long to enable the challenging problem to be unpacked and for meaningful deliberation to take place (e.g. a minimum of 30 hours), and a commitment from the commissioning body to act on the recommendations. With these processes in place, and combined with a desire to experiment, tremendous creativity and insight can be realised.

Local authorities that have started to experiment with this kind of public deliberative process include Wandsworth on air quality and climate change and Birmingham with home-owners and social housing tenants and climate change. The Environment Agency has also used deliberative processes to work with local communities to understand the value of watercourses and rivers so that actions can be prioritised to reflect those locally-held values.

Holding a climate assembly is sometimes seen as a one-off event, with a perception that they won't have much longer-term impact. However, the value of this participatory approach can be enhanced so that it becomes a deliberate part of an area's long-term radical attempt to empower and forge a citizen-led vision for addressing the climate emergency.



THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

Some sectors have greater power and responsibility to act than others. Universities have an important role in climate action through research, education, and by reducing their own carbon emissions, including through coordinated and collective action. They are in a unique position to help shape low-carbon futures and engage with wider society, as well as their own staff and students and the communities in which they are located. Scientists working at universities are also highly trusted communicators on climate change (BEIS et al., 2023), making them well-placed to convey both the problems and potential responses to it.

In 2019, under pressure from staff and students, some UK universities began declaring climate emergencies: public-facing statements that emphasised the need for far-reaching action and the part universities should play in this. Research into these declarations shows that they did signal a recognition by universities that they were confronting shared and significant concerns (Latter and Capstick, 2021).

Staff and students were also positioned as key collaborators, perhaps reflecting the high level of concern from students about climate change (Students Organising for Sustainability, 2021). Nevertheless, we express some concern that these declarations may be used for publicity and promotion (Latter and Capstick, 2021), while detracting from new commitments and action. Although many did include action-oriented statements, more transformative change was rarely touched upon.

Overall, it is positive that some universities have made climate emergency declarations, but the sector faces a more fundamental challenge when it comes to its underlying business model, for example in terms of a reliance on international students and staff, which implies a considerable carbon footprint from overseas travel. For universities to tackle the climate emergency comprehensively, there may need to be a more fundamental reimagining and repurposing of the sector (Stewart et al., 2022), whereby climate action is placed at the heart of universities' civic mission and organisational structures (Facer, 2020). There is a need for more concerted action and efforts in addition to words.

“

Under pressure from staff and students, some UK universities began declaring climate emergencies: public-facing statements that emphasised the need for far-reaching action and the part universities should play in this.”



CASE STUDY

NORTHERN IRELAND RURAL RESILIENCE PROJECT

Agrifood (agriculture, horticulture, and food and drink processing) is Northern Ireland’s largest industry, playing a much bigger role in the rural and regional economy of Northern Ireland than of the UK as a whole. Farmers, the primary producers, manage more than 75% of Northern Ireland’s land area, and their livelihood is one of the most vulnerable to climate change.

The Rural Resilience Project in Northern Ireland supports farmers and agri-sector leaders with information on climate change risks and opportunities for farm businesses, and shares practical adaptation measures through peer-to-peer learning (in regional farmer workshops), co-designed factsheets, and online, print and local radio messaging. Stakeholders in the collaboration include Ulster Farmers Union, dairy cooperatives, research institutes, agricultural colleges and government. Project findings are being fed into agri-policy discussions and climate change action plans, and a research gap analysis, public perception surveys and adaptation case studies will help prioritise future research.

Several challenges have been identified, including fear and resistance to imposed future change around climate mitigation targets and Northern Ireland’s first Climate Change Act passed in 2022, uncertainty around farming schemes and subsidies to aid transition and investment at a time of rising costs and falling profit margins, a lack of a united vision for the future of farming and not having a devolved government for four of the last six post-Brexit years, all of which are occurring alongside a perceived pressure to increase production. However, there is reason for optimism, as interest in regenerative and adaptive practices is slowly growing and there is widespread acknowledgement among farmers of the importance of the environment to the future of farming.

The Rural Resilience Project findings show how an open dialogue about climate risks and opportunities can improve mutual understanding between different interest groups. A growing number of farmers in Northern Ireland are showing interest in adapting grazing, crop and livestock management practices to reduce erosion and flooding, and trialling new species that are more resilient to drought, pests and pathogens. The project has demonstrated the potential of engaging more effectively with farmers about how adaptation actions can offer mutual financial and environmental benefits, and with local consumers about why sustainable food and farming systems are important.

Other work in Northern Ireland includes cross-sector networks such as Climate NI and the local-government-led Regional Community Resilience Group, which are increasing awareness of climate change impacts and risks, and facilitating coordinated adaptation actions. Plans such as the NI Climate Adaptation Programme 2019-24 focus on key priorities and shared responsibility for adaptation action.



RECOMMENDATIONS



Local authorities should adopt a partnership-based approach to local climate action, mobilising the energy and expertise of private, public and third sector actors.



Local authorities should embed climate impact fully into local authorities’ own decision-making so their actions are consistent with and support delivery of place-based climate leadership.



Local communities and stakeholders should formalise the drive for zero-carbon communities through institutional structures like climate commissions to provide an effective mechanism for delivering evidence and advice, and generate local collaboration through a platform to connect public, private and third sector actors.



Local communities and stakeholders should collaborate with their local university or other local agencies to improve the knowledge base on local climate action. Local action plans and progress reports need to be informed by the most recent data on local emissions, emission reduction potentials, vulnerability assessments and sustainable growth opportunities.

7. FINANCING CLIMATE ACTION

Financing climate action requires an integrated approach, with local councils and communities creating a portfolio of projects and interventions that respond to multiple local concerns, including the mitigation and adaptation requirements of a locality but also social, economic and environmental priorities. Such an approach can support the development of a social contract with residents so that they feel ownership and are empowered. Local net zero transitions need to be just and resilient.



IDENTIFYING SYNERGIES BETWEEN ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

The PCAN finance platform has seen emerging best practice in how local authorities can build an integrated approach to climate mitigation and adaptation projects to deliver on their net zero ambitions.

We can draw on evidence from various programmes to identify the factors that are necessary to mobilise capital for integrated approaches – examples include Greater London Authority’s LEEF and MEEF investment programmes, the Bristol City Leap (see opposite), Greater Manchester Ignition, the Local Climate Bonds programme (from Abundance) and projects like United Downs’ geothermal power project. These show that crucial to a successful mixed portfolio approach is establishing a partnership and having clear governance for how that partnership can operate in local places. Partnerships can be with private enterprise, across different local government teams or with the local community. The PCAN commissions are one partnership model that has been successful in bringing together different stakeholder groups to discuss climate challenges.

How local government can effectively partner with private enterprise and make use of different skill sets is also important for delivering integrated approaches – see London case studies (see opposite) for good examples.



Crucial to a successful mixed portfolio approach is establishing a partnership and having clear governance for how that partnership can operate in local places”

CASE STUDY

INTEGRATED APPROACHES IN BRISTOL AND LONDON

Bristol

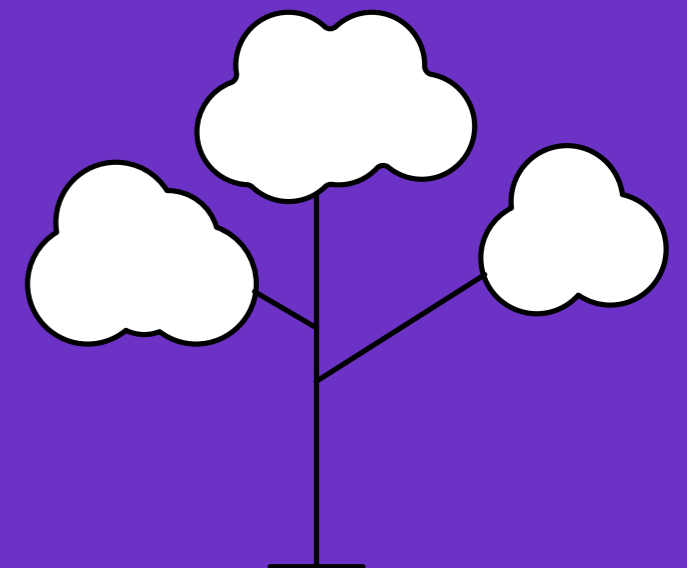
Through the Bristol City Leap programme, the local authority has created a prospectus of the city’s needs and put it out for tender to attract the necessary additional investment to meet the city’s decarbonisation goals. The programme involves £424 million of investment being committed to infrastructure spending in Bristol over the next five years and total investment is expected to reach over £1 billion. Social considerations are at the centre, with £61.5 million of social value expected to be returned to the city over the same period.

£61.5m

of social value expected to be returned to Bristol

London

The Greater London Authority’s Mayor’s Energy Efficiency Fund (MEEF) is managed by a private investment company that manages the relationship between investor banks and policymakers. It builds on the previous London Energy Efficiency Fund (LEEF). Partnering with the local community is essential as it can help identify wider place-based benefits but also provide those people impacted with a sense of ownership and maintain a focus on social justice. Westminster Council has also recently introduced an Environmental Justice Measure, which informs decision-making by first collating necessary data on local environmental impacts and then using that data as an informative tool.



BUILDING PROJECT PIPELINES TO UNLOCK INVESTMENT

Building integrated pipelines requires a supportive (or incentivising) regulatory environment and necessary public grant funding to enable project development and planning activities to take place. This can take the form of technical assistance (for which the UK Infrastructure Bank now has a programme for local authority upskilling) but the funding can also be essential to establishing mitigation and adaption projects in a place.

A good example is the Manchester Ignition scheme, which received €4.5 million from the EU’s Urban Innovation Actions initiative to develop financing solutions for investment in Greater Manchester’s natural environment. This funding has enabled the programme to develop solutions such as rain gardens, street trees, green roofs and green spaces. These green solutions improve socioeconomic outcomes (e.g. more efficient transport, warmer homes and cleaner air) as well as climate change adaptation, resilience and mitigation and associated health outcomes for the city.

PROGRESS IN PLACE-BASED CLIMATE FINANCE

Our last PCAN trends report published in 2021 highlighted the increasing demand from banks, investors and insurers to finance climate action (Howarth et al., 2021). Since that time, both financial regulation (e.g. transition plan requirements in the UK) and private capital have been responding to the drastic need to ramp up the finance deployed. There has also been progress in terms of investing in place-based climate action in the UK: the UK Infrastructure Bank (UKIB) is now fully formed and investing across the country, supporting the upskilling of local authorities to invest in their own local net zero pathways.

The UK’s public finance institutions are enhancing their focus on place-specific investment with the UK Infrastructure Bank (UKIB) investing across the regions, for example supporting the growth of local carbon heat networks with the Government. The UKIB also recently made its first natural capital investment (of £12 million), supporting a nature restoration project in the Scottish Highlands and Islands which aims to tackle climate change, boost biodiversity and deliver local community benefits (UKIB, 2023). For SMEs, the British Business Bank has undertaken research to assess their progress across different parts of the UK but there is yet to be a clear programme providing climate-specific finance (beyond the SME Climate Hub Programme, which is welcome but lacking resources).

Research has shown that many regions of the UK that have been historically characterised by low productivity and under-investment now have comparative advantage in technologies needed for the net zero energy transition. The LSE and Resolution Foundation’s *Economy 2023 Enquiry* found that places including Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly could all benefit from net zero investment (with benefits including investment and increased local productivity) (Curran et al., 2022). Furthermore, recent research from PwC, Otley Energy and Leeds University (as part of PCAN) suggests that adopting a place-specific approach to investment in the net zero transition will be significantly more efficient both in terms of investment cost and achieving wider social benefits (UKRI, 2022). That report demonstrated that ‘place-agnostic’ approaches (adopted uniformly across places) require investment of £195 billion compared with just £58 billion for place-specific approaches. By making approaches specific, social co-benefits (e.g. positive health outcomes) were shown to be almost doubled in value (£444 billion v. £825 billion), highlighting that these approaches also perform better from a just transition perspective.

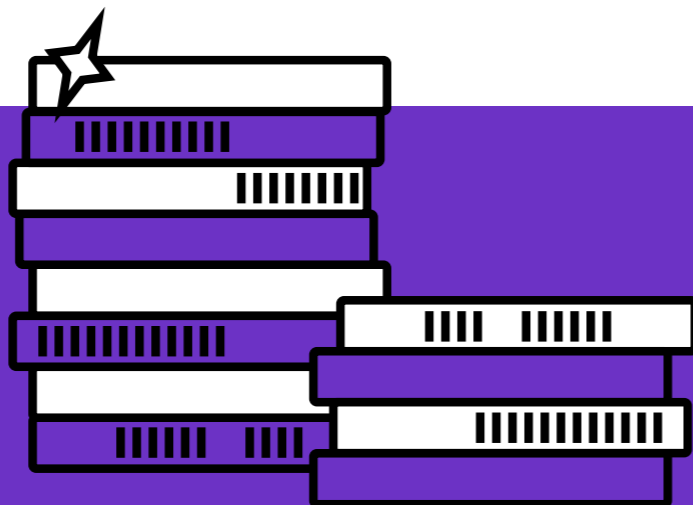
With there being social and investment value in local approaches, it is positive to see more examples of local investment programmes. Besides the Bristol City Leap programme mentioned above, other local portfolio approaches include the West Midlands Combined Authority’s partnership with Legal & General of £4 billion for urban regeneration and construction of new homes to support the combined authority’s goals of net zero, affordable housing and inclusive growth (Legal & General, 2022).

Another example is UK Research and Innovation’s support for smart local energy system approaches with its £104 million Prospering from the Energy Revolution programme, running from 2018 to 2023. However, with that programme coming to an end and no new support outlined in the Government’s recently published *Green Finance Strategy*, there is uncertainty around how many more local authorities can replicate the success of Bristol and the West Midlands. Certainly, smaller cities, towns and rural communities will need more support to build investment propositions that can attract both the UKIB’s capital and available private capital. Investors are generally drawn to established and proven business models so while emerging practice in major cities may enable more investment in similar urban areas, mobilising finance for other places remains a challenge.

We will need more innovation in business models and more appetite from investors for different approaches if we are to scale up local climate finance approaches across all regions of the UK. Until such time, the UK will be missing opportunities to achieve wider social co-benefits, and to build local and inclusive growth and community wealth.

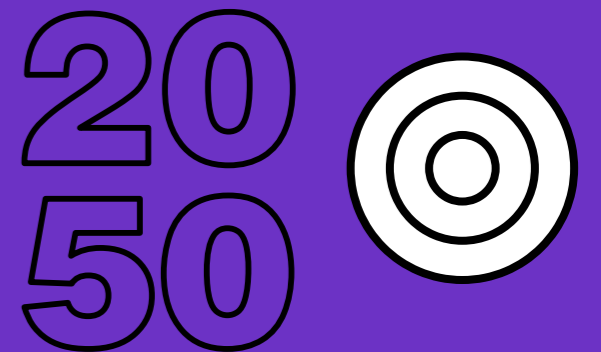
€4.5m

for the Manchester Ignition scheme from the EU’s Urban Innovation Actions initiative to develop financing solutions for investment in Greater Manchester’s natural environment



£104m

UKRI’s Prospering from the Energy Revolution programme



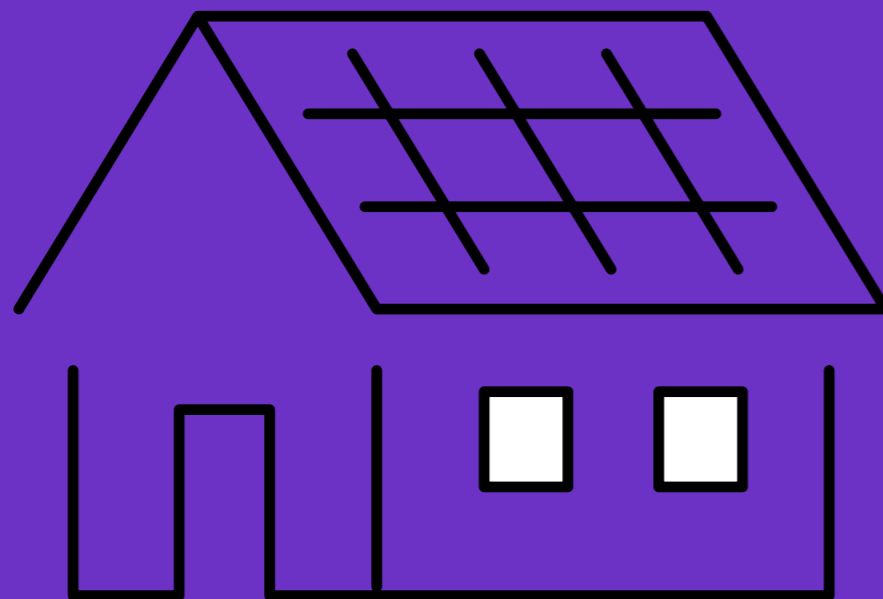
CASE STUDY

WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL CLIMATE BOND

In the summer of 2020, West Berkshire launched the UK's first Community Municipal Investment (now known as a Local Climate Bond). This investment opportunity offered retail customers the opportunity to invest in West Berkshire's portfolio of green projects and support its ambition to be carbon-neutral by 2030. £1 million of investment was raised, from 643 individual investors. A quarter of this came from local residents, highlighting a strong community engagement angle to the programme.

The project portfolio includes both mitigation projects such as solar PV on rooftops and adaptation projects such as urban tree planting and habitat creation as part of flood alleviation projects.

The CMI programme was part-funded by PCAN.



RECOMMENDATIONS



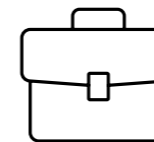
Local authorities should move from the rhetoric of climate emergency declarations to action with locally supported, evidence-based climate action plans that tackle both mitigation and adaptation, allocating resources appropriately.



Local authorities should adopt an integrated approach to financing climate mitigation and adaptation needs, working with local communities and the private sector in devising locally attractive, fundable project portfolios.



Local communities and stakeholders should broaden the scope of climate action beyond emission reduction (mitigation) to create synergies, emphasise co-benefits and encompass measures to reduce physical climate risks (adaptation), tackling wider societal challenges (e.g. public health, energy security) and reducing social and economic inequalities (just transition).



Local businesses should recognise that changes to current operations and practice are necessary, but can also present opportunities for efficiencies and improvements that can help make the case for long-term investment.



National government and the devolved administrations should put in place a coherent framework to support local climate action (mitigation and adaptation together), backed by appropriate funds, resources and skills. Climate action requires joined-up interplay between national and local action with clarity on longer-term funding and policy landscapes to enable coordinated approaches. Local action without national support will be challenging; national policy without local buy-in will fail.

8. CONCLUSION

Over the past 30 years the UK's greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 50%. Over the next 15 years they have to fall by 50% again from this lower base. This is the pace required by the UK's statutory carbon budgets and its commitment to reaching net zero emissions by 2050. At the same time, the impacts of climate change are increasingly being felt, in the UK as around the world (Rising et al., 2022). At the moment, the UK is not on course to meet either its emissions reduction nor its adaptation challenge (CCC, 2022, 2023).

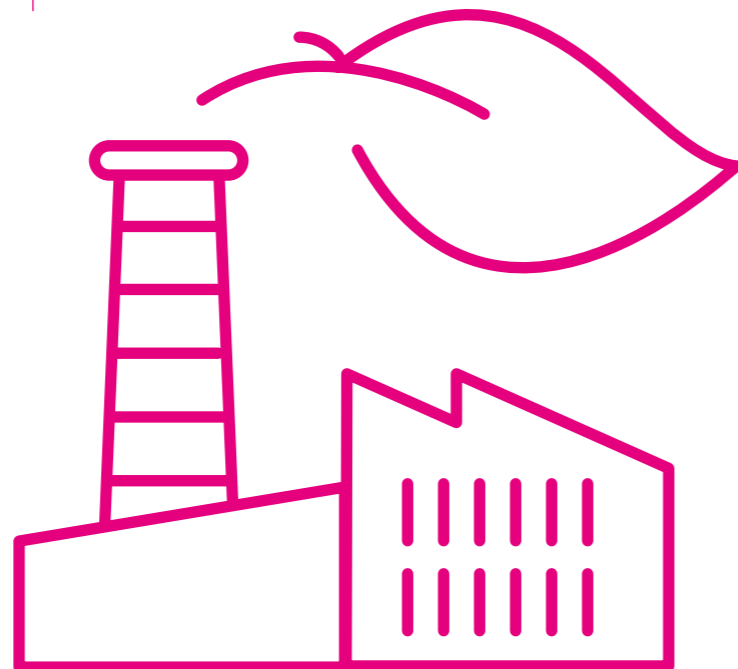
Place-based climate action, supported and guided by national policy, can make a critical difference in bringing us back on track. This report has argued that national climate action needs to be integrated and joined up with place-based development priorities to ensure it is effective, efficient and equitable. Improving integration and synergies between action to address climate change and efforts to tackle wider societal issues will also help bolster the UK's resilience to external shocks like the cost-of-living and energy security crises.

Since 2019 there has been a powerful wave of experimentation in local climate governance, which started with climate emergency declarations and often led to the establishment of local climate commissions or similar partnerships. Several local authorities have set up citizens' climate assemblies or juries to help them formulate their climate action plans. These initiatives have galvanised place-based climate action. Local climate commissions and partnerships have played an important role in providing engagement platforms for the exchange of knowledge and expertise, often in close partnership with local authorities.

This report shows that if local councils, communities, organisations and businesses are sufficiently empowered, they can be ready and able to play their part. However, this requires urgent changes at the level of national government, local government and local communities, and clarity on how the UK can build on this momentum and consolidate progress. This work needs further resources to be sustained and embedded into the fabric of places.

PLACE-BASED CLIMATE ACTION

supported and guided by national policy, can make a critical difference in bringing us back on track



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This report takes stock of local climate action in the UK and summarises the experience of PCAN since 2018. We do this through analysis, reflections, survey evidence and case studies. Throughout, it provides recommendations to the following stakeholders: local authorities, local communities and businesses, national government and the devolved administrations.



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