

A toolkit for city regions and local authorities:

Chapter 1: Introduction



Climate action co-benefits
Cutting carbon and improving people's lives

Guide to this toolkit

This toolkit is primarily intended for use by local authority officers when briefing elected members, mayors and senior managers. Each of the co-benefits sections includes facts and figures, links to data for local areas, the business case for taking action, opportunities for action and inspirational examples of successful initiatives from around the country. Case studies are shown in boxes with Ashden Award winning organisations indicated via the Ashden logo.



These can be used as the building blocks for making the case for action in your area; the intention is that users can pick and choose the messages and examples that will resonate in their areas.

The following links take you to different sections of the toolkit, or you can click [here](#) to download the whole document.

The links to films in this toolkit are designed to bring to life some of the challenges that people in towns and cities face. The aim is to facilitate conversations around the co-benefits of climate action, ‘multi solving’ climate and social issues.

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2 Health and wellbeing

3 Economic opportunity and job creation

4 Resilience

5 Equity and social cohesion

6 Useful resources

7 Videos

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Ashden's work on co-benefits

Ashden is working with UK cities to help them realise their sustainability ambitions. Our vision is of healthy, liveable cities where people want to live and work. Through our Liveable Cities programme, we created the Sustainable City Region Network – to help sustainability leaders to realise this vision and tackle common challenges. Realising the wider benefits of climate change such as better homes, more money in local economies, clean air, healthier travel options, and new employment opportunities is essential to connect climate policy to the needs of all citizens, demonstrating that action to combat climate change can improve lives, not diminish them. We are working with city regions to develop policy that delivers these wider benefits, securing a Just Transition. Find out more about our work: <https://www.ashden.org/programmes/liveable-cities-programme>

Foreword

If we are to stay within 1.5°C of warming and avoid catastrophic climate change, we need to move with a sense of urgency that we have not seen since the second world-war. But this cannot just be imposed on citizens and communities. In order to create the consensus that local, regional and national governments need and the funds to deliver the work, we have to take citizens with us.

Protests by Extinction Rebellion, the remarkable wisdom of Greta Thunberg and the powerful film making of David Attenborough have got citizens thinking about climate change and its implications. However, much of the discussion is still about giving things up. At Ashden we have a different view.

By engaging people through structures like citizens' panels and connecting climate policy to the needs of everyone, we can demonstrate that the consequences of climate action improve lives, not diminish them. Better jobs, more money in local economies, clean air, healthier travel options, green spaces, and warm and cheap-to-heat homes – all these engage peoples' values.

By looking at these wider benefits we can solve climate and social issues at the same time and use housing, transport, infrastructure or economic development budgets in a smarter way that delivers urgent climate action. Reducing levels of air pollution, for example will massively reduce the costs of NHS treatment and in turn free-up money to be spent on home energy efficiency improvements or sustainable green transport.

Engaging the population in this way shows them that responding to climate change makes their lives better, and in turn, this gives governments, be they local, regional or national, the agency to implement more radical carbon-cutting measures and the funds to do so.

This co-benefits approach is at the heart of Ashden's liveable cities programme and at the heart of this toolkit.

We need to re-frame climate change to show how it improves quality of life for all of us. There is no better time than now.

Local authority action on climate change

Local authorities are well placed to drive and influence action on climate change through the services they deliver, their regulatory and strategic functions, and their roles as community leaders, major employers, large-scale procurers and social landlords.

Action on climate change can deliver many local benefits, including lower energy bills, economic

regeneration and creation of local jobs, reductions in fuel poverty and improved air quality.

Furthermore, increasing resilience to climate change risks can result in avoided costs from flood damage to buildings, infrastructure and services, enhanced green spaces and improved health.

” *Our vision is of healthy, liveable cities where people want to live and work. Cities that are unpolluted, well-planned, powered by sustainable energy and clean technologies. And cities where a transition to a low carbon economy protects the wellbeing of all citizens.*

Simon Brammer, Head of Cities, Ashden

The current situation

At present in the UK:

- Around 40,000 people die annually as a result of human-made air pollution; the majority of these will live in urban areas¹.
- Only half of the UK population has easy access to a green space².
- 30% of the UK's children are living in poverty, rising to almost half of children in some urban constituencies (including constituencies in London, Birmingham and Manchester).

As the world seeks to make more efficient use of its energy resources, increase energy security and meet global climate targets, it is essential that local authorities take a leading role in the energy transition.

There are enormous opportunities from doing so. Low carbon and renewable energy activities generated £44.5 billion turnover in 2017, directly employing 209,500 people (full-time equivalents)³. There are opportunities to avoid future costs by improving the resilience of council services to withstand the future climate, which is forecast to comprise hotter, drier summers and greater risk of flooding. Recent winter flooding caused damage to infrastructure such as bridges, roads and drains in excess of £250 million⁴.

With energy bills on the increase, exposure to fuel poverty is rising; health impacts of people living in cold homes costs the NHS around £1.4 billion a year. Tackling the causes of fuel poverty, rather than the symptoms, will result in this bill being reduced, making economic sense as well as increasing wellbeing.

The Climate Change Act requires the UK to reduce its emissions by at least 80% by 2050. This means greenhouse gas emissions falling from around 14 tonnes per person in 1990 to around two tonnes per person in 2050. And in October 2018, the world's leading climate scientists warned that urgent and unprecedented action was required to limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C, beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people. In May 2019, the Committee on Climate Change recommended a new emissions target for the UK: net-zero greenhouse gases by 2050⁵.



The co-benefits of action on climate change

Taking action on climate change is beneficial in many ways:

- Health and wellbeing are improved as a result of improved air quality through reduced use of combustion engine vehicles, increased activity from people walking or cycling more, as well as through reduced fuel poverty from more energy efficient homes.
- Action on climate change can improve equity and social cohesion through focusing on the most vulnerable in society, such as action to alleviate fuel poverty.

- Investing in initiatives to reduce carbon emissions can create a wealth of economic opportunities and jobs in the low carbon economy.
- Action to reduce carbon emissions can also increase the resilience of cities and their communities to future changes in energy prices and energy systems, as well as potentially increasing resilience of communities and infrastructure to the impacts of climate change.



A video providing an introduction to the concept of climate action co-benefits can be found [here](#).

Multiple co-benefits from climate action – some examples

	Carbon	Health	Economy	Equity	Resilience
Action					
Insulating homes 	Cuts energy demand and cuts carbon emissions	Reduces fuel poverty as people stay warmer	Creates jobs for local people, and people save money on their energy bills which they may spend locally	Increased access to affordable warmth	Households are better placed to withstand future energy price rises as well as overheating during heatwaves
Car sharing 	Reduced fuel consumption cuts carbon emissions	Reduced NOx improves air quality. Improved wellbeing through social interaction	People save money on their fuel, which they may spend locally. People can make journeys (e.g. to work) that they may not otherwise be able to do. Reduced congestion	Brings people together; can reduce isolation and loneliness	Increased resilience to impact of future fuel price rises
Cycling 	Reduced fuel consumption cuts carbon emissions	Reduced NOx from combustion engines improves air quality. Increased activity increases health	Money saved on petrol. Reduced congestion	Increased connections to local community through cycling initiatives	Resilience to future increase fuel costs

“Cities and local authorities are well placed to understand the needs and opportunities in their local area, although there are questions over whether they have sufficient resources to contribute strongly to reducing emissions. They have important roles on transport planning, including providing high-quality infrastructure for walking and cycling, provision of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, and ensuring that new housing developments are designed for access to public transport. They can improve health outcomes for people who live and work in the area by implementing clean-air zones that discourage use of polluting vehicles and other technologies⁶.

Committee on Climate Change

The potential for local authorities to take action on climate change

Local authorities are directly accountable to their constituents for their decisions and are better placed to take swift action than national officials. Cities progressing devolution deals can also set the agenda both for their communities and for national government.

Local authorities have powers in relation to planning, transport and skills; these vary depending on the type of authority (see table below). In England, there are ten combined authorities, of which seven have an elected metro mayor and devolution deal. Separate to these, London also has an elected mayor and a combined authority in the form of the Greater London Authority (GLA).



In addition to their formal powers, local leaders can have enormous influence, using their democratic legitimacy, leadership skills and negotiation to achieve outcomes beyond what can be achieved solely through their own legal powers and duties.

The Committee on Climate Change Net Zero report recognises the role of cities and local authorities in achieving net zero.

Climate emergencies

The early part of 2019 saw unprecedented demands for increased government action on climate change. Protests by Extinction Rebellion, the remarkable wisdom of youth activist Greta Thunberg and the powerful film making of Sir David Attenborough have all got citizens thinking about climate change and its implications. Linked to this, a wide number of local authorities in the UK have declared their own ‘climate emergencies’⁷. These are about reducing carbon emissions at the local level and also putting more pressure on national government to enable and require rapid decarbonisation.

Relevant functions of local authorities

Tier of government	Functions
District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building regulations • Council tax and business rates • Economic development • Environmental health • Housing • Parking • Planning • Sports centres, parks, playing fields • Waste collection and recycling
County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic development • Education • Emergency planning • Highways, street lighting, traffic management • Parking • Passenger transport (buses) and transport planning • Planning • Public health • Social services • Waste disposal • Trading standards
Unitary and Metropolitan	All of the above.
Combined Authority	<p>Varies depending on the devolution deal but may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and business support. • Further education and skills (including full devolution of the adult skills budget). • Spatial planning, land and housing, including the power to create a spatial plan for the area. • Transport, including powers to introduce bus franchising. • Wider public services including public health responsibilities.

Ashden's work on co-benefits



Ashden supports and promotes sustainable energy projects from around the world. At the heart of our work is our annual awards scheme that rewards and raises the profile of the very best sustainable energy pioneers.

Ashden is working with UK cities to help them realise their sustainability ambitions. Our vision is of healthy, liveable cities where people want to live and work.

Enabling a just transition

Recently we tested an approach to create policy initiatives that have multiple social outcomes through a one-day event in Birmingham that brought together a diverse range of attendees from city regions and local authorities, the NHS, community groups, Ashden Award winners and policy organisations. Drawing on the lived experience of Birmingham citizens, we gained insight into the pressures on vulnerable people and ways in which taking a low carbon approach

to challenges can offer multiple benefits. The gap in action we identified inspired us to design a programme of work to help embed a new holistic approach to climate policy, one that concurrently tackles inequality and enables a Just Transition.

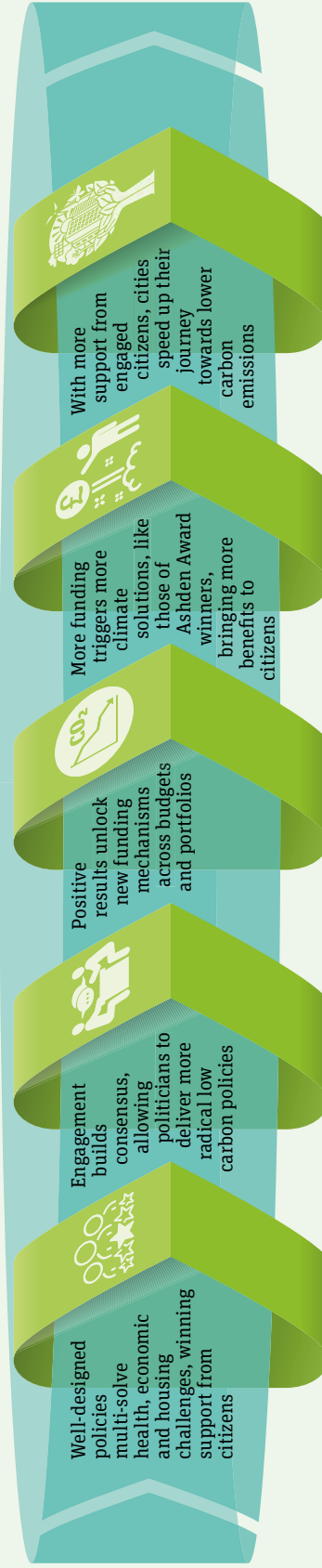
Our theory of change is shown below.



An animation of this diagram can be found [here](#).

How does citizen engagement drive action on climate change?

To avoid catastrophic climate change, we must radically cut carbon emissions – 80% of which are created by cities. Convincing residents they can benefit from climate action is key to creating change.





Our city region network

Through our Liveable Cities programme, we created the Sustainable City Region network – to help sustainability leaders to realise this vision and tackle common challenges. Network participants told us that a better understanding of the co-benefits of a low carbon economy would enable them to make a more convincing case for climate action to city leaders, who face a range of competing priorities. So we have created this toolkit for local and combined authorities, particularly those that have declared a climate emergency.

We have also been working with the Grantham Institute who recently published a paper on the co-benefits of climate mitigation in the UK⁸. Through our work with city regions we were able to contribute to the paper's recommendations for policy makers.



The Ashden Awards process discovers city-wide low carbon solutions

Ashden winners represent pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of solutions that are required to decarbonise our cities. Our work with cities is identifying missing pieces in the jigsaw puzzle – which we can help find through our Awards programme. We have over 90 winners in the UK who we support, helping them to scale up and replicate their work.

- ¹ Public Health England, “Associations of long-term average concentrations of nitrogen dioxide with mortality (2018): COMEAP summary”, August 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nitrogen-dioxide-effects-on-mortality/associations-of-long-term-average-concentrations-of-nitrogen-dioxide-with-mortality-2018-comeap-summary> [Accessed 8 May 2019]
- ² Defined as being within 300m.
- ³ ONS, “UK environmental accounts: Low carbon and renewable energy economy survey, final estimates: 2017”, January 2019. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/finalestimates/2017> [Accessed 9 May 2019]
- ⁴ BBC, “Winter floods cost councils £250m, says LGA”, March 2016. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35891857> [Accessed 8 May 2019]
- ⁵ See: <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/>
- ⁶ Commission on Climate Change, 2019, Net Zero – the UK’s contribution to stopping global warming <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/>
- ⁷ See: https://www.campaigncc.org/councils_climate_emergency
- ⁸ See: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/grantham-institute/public/publications/briefing-papers/Co-benefits-of-climate-change-mitigation-in-the-UK.pdf>