

Notes from a COP26 Seminar on Cities, Regions & the Built Environment
11 November 2021 – Enhancing Ambition on climate change in cities and regions -
watch it here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePUqdtkdK1k>

The Climate Trust hosted a Green Zone Panel session on what local government is doing around the world to address climate change. The session was hosted by Poppy Potter of the Climate Trust and included representatives from the UK, City of London Corporation, The Welsh Assembly, Guadalajara Mexico and China.

Opening remarks – Local Government has a key role to play in Climate Change and is working with citizens, education, industry and businesses to make the changes to make it happen. We often see and hear about Government targets but it's really cities and regions where this will actually happen. It's a big complicated jigsaw puzzle and requires a whole world approach to solve it. It will be important to remember to "Don't leave anyone out".

Each representative delegate had a 5 minute case study to share. (1) Implementing a net zero Wales (2) Coordinated climate action in Mexico (3) Net zero strategy for the City of London (4) Driving climate action in China's cities



Welsh Assembly

Deputy Minister for Climate Change in the Welsh Government, Lee Waters.

The Welsh Assembly has passed the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, the first piece of legislation of its kind to make sure that every decision they take has regard for the impact it will have on future generations.

The Welsh Government wanted to focus on a few things that can drive change in the next 1 to 3 years. Three areas of focus are:

- (1) Stop doing bad things – if there are no diggers in the ground on a new road scheme it won't happen – all stopped. Drive towards a modal shift of public transport, cycling and walking

- (2) Tree Planting – Held a meeting with all of the people needed and have a plan to plant 86 million trees (a 15 fold increase) by the end of the decade. Took a dozen influential people to meet 3 times a week over 3 months over 100 hours of meeting to get a workable plan with 50 things that need to change to make it happen.
- (3) Similar process to above to scale up community based renewable energy, which will be a just transition but will be hard to do. It requires the right Political Science to do the difficult things (politicians don't like plans that will take long term commitment and will likely be unpopular but it has to be done). Community Ownership is important to share the benefits as well as the pain of change. Economic History of Wales is one of capitalism taking the resources out with little to no thought about the environmental and social impact on the workers. What is now needed is a community led industrial green revolution where communities keep the wealth and benefits which stay in the area creating wealth and jobs.

An example of a just transition is the decarbonisation of travel. In UK there is a fragmented public transport system including Buses. To shift bus fleet over to an electric fleet will involve hundreds of millions of pounds of spend, if they conglomerate all of the areas future electric bus provision they could create enough demand through an order book to have a factory in Wales, creating green jobs and keeping the wealth locally. A proposal like this will help locally people see the benefits and not be just asking people to make sacrifices and change.

City of London Corporation

Alderman and Sheriff of the City of London Corporation, Alison Gowman. 96% of the City of London Corporation's carbon footprint is from its investments. The Corporation has two timescales to its Climate Action Strategy. Scope 1 & 2 emissions are actions from 2021 to target date of 2027 and scope 3 emissions is for the target date of 2040.

There is a £68Million Investment Plan for scope 1 & 2 emissions to increase and create 800 Green jobs. There is a green plan with green walls and roofs for the Corporation buildings. On its estate it's creating a car free area and lower carbon roads and manages their open spaces in a sustainable way. The Corporation has an investment portfolio which it is targeting to reduce its carbon footprint by 24% by 2025 and 55% by 2030 and 100% by 2040. They have links with the Green Finance Institute developing green investments and making capital available for green projects.

Guadalajara City – Mexico

General Director of Planning & Development at the Metropolitan area of Guadalajara City, Mexico, Mario Ramon Silva Rodriguez. The metropolitan area covers 9 districts and is the second largest city in Mexico (5.2 million people) and in terms of mitigations they are focusing on waste and recycling, transport and energy and have short, medium and long term targets in an action plan to address these issues up to 2030. All of these plans are to stop emitting 9 million tonnes of Co2 into the atmosphere a year. They are targeting reducing the waste going to landfill (less the 30% by 2030) and making better use of bicycles by increasing by 42% pedestrian and cycle network from current provision by 2030, with an increase of 142km of cycle lanes in the last two years. Regarding reducing energy usage they are receiving no help from central government and are working on their plans in partnership with local private sector businesses, to this end they have agreed a target with the private sector based in the city region to reduce their carbon energy use and to replace it with green energy sources again by 42% by 2030. In terms of adaptations they have developed strong technical tools but they are still to make this a reality in terms of how to finance this as the country still struggles from Covid-19.

China

Head of Climate Action Planning at C40 Cities, Lu Sun. C40 Cities is a Climate Leadership Group of 97 cities around the world that represents one twelfth of the world's population and a quarter of the global economy.

Cities represent 50% of the world's population and generate 70% of the emissions. Cities are clearly at the centre of the climate crisis part of the problem but they are also the solution and where the answers are to be found.

Planning is very important. Cities that have a plan are 3 times more likely to take action than those who don't.

There are 4 essential components to the C40 Cities science based solutions:

1. Ambitions mitigation targets
2. Resilience to climate hazards
3. Inclusivity and benefits
4. Governance and collaboration

China has 19 out of the top 100 largest cities in the world, and has over 100 cities with a population over 1 million residents, and this figure is set to double over the next decade.

Mitigations - In China one example of future solutions is from public transport. In the Chinese city of Zhengzhou (population in 2019 of 10.3 million) has an expansive bus electrification scheme where they have converted the whole of their 11,000 public transport buses to electric and installed 4,000 ev charging stations across the city. Another Chinese city has more than 120,000 public shared bikes, enabling 300,000 citizens to use the bikes every day. (For western capitalist democracies this is harder to achieve but shows how much of a challenge the current public transport system has in the UK but if harnessed what potential there could be)

Adaptations – another coastal city in China has an extensive plan to adapt its citizens homes to cope with rising sea levels. Other cities have used the example of London's low emission zone to replicate in several large Chinese cities and have seen the benefits of improved air quality in only a few years from its implementation.

Turning ambition into action

The panellists were asked where did they begin their climate action planning process? There feedback included the following responses:

- It needs to be science led, have local evidence which leads to analysis to help to identify the focus area
- Work with all tiers of government and local universities and community groups (both climate based community groups and other non-climate focused groups)
- Work with local people, be honest with the scale of the problem, provide tangible help
- For local authorities it is vital that all pull in the same direction, from the Members, Chief Executive Officer and the leadership team across to all service delivery areas
- Establish metrics for each area of the Council to see how they are moving towards sustainable solutions?

- Set early milestones so you can know if you are on the right path to meet the 2030 target
- Measure your carbon footprint then communicate what you are trying to achieve
- Partnerships are really important – team up with others to reach common goals
- Incentivise good behaviours, such as active travel and recycling
- Fines for local authorities who don't reach their targets (need carrot and stick)

Questions from delegates

- A councillor from a district council in England asked for examples and advice regarding the challenge of retrofitting homes - coupled with the need to deliver new homes which are not currently zero carbon/passive house and currently having no powers to make them be zero carbon?

Response from Wales: In Wales they have the Optimised retrofit scheme (Optimised Retrofit Programme to **transform over 1,000 social housing properties in Wales**. A new Welsh Government initiative backed by almost £20m has been launched to transform the quality and sustainability of social housing in Wales and boost the green economic recovery. The Optimised Retrofit Programme (ORP) is funding a suite of smart energy efficiency measures that will help Wales move towards a net-zero carbon economy and is a key part of the Welsh Government's plans for a green recovery. [Optimised Retrofit Programme to transform social housing in Wales](#)) In addition, in Wales there is now a policy to move away from importing nearly all of its wood for construction projects from currently 4% to a target of 80% by 2040, a large scale tree planting programme has already begun to make this ambition a reality. By doing this the Welsh government will create a Wood economy and supply chain that currently doesn't exist.

Response from Mexico: This is a major problem in Mexico, there are a large number of people in poverty involved in the construction industry and other toxic industries such as mining. Workers often have poor health and have to work in terrible conditions so there are challenges affecting social, public health, economic and environmental aspects. There are also problems with urban sprawl.

Response from China: In China they are beginning to tackle the huge challenge of retrofitting huge numbers of high rise tenement buildings. The country is in the grip of an exponential expansion in its house building programme to accommodate its huge population. The standard of the construction with regard to insulation and energy use for a large part of these buildings have been at a very low level so retrofitting them all will be a very large task. China is embracing new technologies and renewable energy for heating and cooling systems. They have introduced legislation on clean construction, which affects the whole supply chain, setting standards for lower carbon for each element of the chain and which codifies the requirements for the lifecycle of the building. Under new regulations each building needs to what the climate impact of the building is. In addition through the private sector consumers are widely using an App that names and shames the worst polluters in a city (including residential housing developments) so this is forcing change on private investment to clean up their act.

City of London Corporation

Over 200 financial institutions including the high street banks, investment banks and building societies are working together to make green mortgages available to fund social housing and retrofitting schemes.

What measures are being taken to support active travel of walking and cycling with the 10 minute cities initiative? In Mexico the bike sharing scheme has increased

cycling in the areas that it is available by 66% but it in itself is just one part of the solution. In public transport solutions in Wales they are seeking to address the problem that in the UK over half of all journeys are under 5 miles in length and 10% of car journeys are under 1 mile in length. Cycling is not an option for all of the population, people with acute health conditions etc. may not be able to access it, but many can and need to be provided with options to access it. Cycle storage is often an issue for those living in flats or cramped housing, so other innovative schemes need to be provided so that making the right thing to do is also the easiest thing to do. Active travel is hard to achieve as you are going against 70 years of custom and practice, using the car first. Local authorities should ask themselves what sort of cycling infrastructure do we have in place to encourage cycling, safe storage, easy access?

Practical suggestion for E&E:

Some non-cyclist Members be taken on a tour of Stevenage's cycle network on a cycle tour of the town (possibly by an active cyclist – Cllr Speller?) to see what the experience is like and to come up with possible suggestions to encourage reluctant cyclists?