



A GREEN RECOVERY FOR EDINBURGH

How Scotland's capital can oversee a recovery from Coronavirus and tackle climate change at the same time.

A Green Recovery for Edinburgh

A contribution from Green councillors in Edinburgh

Before the Coronavirus pandemic Edinburgh had set a target to be a net-zero carbon city by 2030. That is an ambitious and necessary response to the biggest strategic challenge facing the world in the 21st century: climate change.

Of course, the pandemic has, understandably, loomed largest in 2020. It has created a massive shock to the economy, to services, to livelihoods and to the way we live our lives. No-one disputes that the path to Recovery will be a long one.

That poses both a risk and opportunity. The risk is that the Coronavirus pandemic will be cited as a reason to put the climate crisis on hold. "Just let's take a couple of years to get the economy back to normal", the argument might go, "Then we can pick up the climate ambition again". That is the wrong choice. It is the economy "as normal" which is feeding the climate crisis and we do not have time to spare to set it aside for a couple of years. At the same time, thousands of people have lost jobs and livelihoods overnight. Some of those jobs will come back; others will not, so we owe it to all the people affected to offer alternatives in the emerging economy: employment and training which is sustainable in every sense of the word.

So that is where opportunity lies. The system shock caused by the coronavirus crisis and some of the unprecedented measures that have already been taken make plausible what hitherto would have seemed outlandish. Across the last 10 weeks we have seen social solidarity strengthen in ways not seen for decades as neighbours help neighbours and thousands of citizens have stepped forward as volunteers: as individuals or through community groups, charities, small businesses and social enterprises. From sources as diverse as the Financial Times and the European Commission, the message has been that a Coronavirus Recovery must be a Green Recovery.

What does that mean for Edinburgh?

In many ways Edinburgh is well-placed to take a lead in a Green Recovery.

- It has already set an ambitious target to be net-zero carbon by 2030.
- It has developed a long-term City Vision for 2050, with a “clean, green, sustainable” pillar clearly signalled by the feedback from citizens.
- It is one of the key partners in the South East Scotland City Region Deal, with resources of £1.33 billion.
- There is, within the city, an established network of businesses, representative groups and academics, among others, who can support a Green Recovery.
- It has set up an Edinburgh Climate Commission which is working on Green Recovery proposals by the end of June.

The task now must be to turn that potential into a roadmap, detailing what the priorities should be. As Green councillors we have offered some of our thoughts below.

Ten Priorities for a Green Recovery in Edinburgh

Transport	Rapidly deliver a Low Emission Zone across the city to retain the improved air quality that has been experienced during lockdown.
	Widen footways, remove "street clutter", and remove obstructions such as wheelie bins and parked cars from pavements, so that walking and wheeling are the safest and most attractive choices for all short journeys
	Deliver a connected network of safe, segregated spaces for people to cycle as their primary mode of transport for those who can do so
	Provide bikes and cargo bikes, including electric bikes, to increase the number of people with access to a bike, and couple with skills and confidence training.
	Implement enhanced safety on public transport for staff and passengers, and launch a public transport campaign to restore confidence
	Accelerate the delivery of electric vehicle charging infrastructure and on-street bike storage hangers.
	Support small businesses to take advantage of the "pedestrian pound"
Green spaces	Accelerate the tree planting project to promote wellbeing, community spaces, urban cooling and carbon sequestration.
	Develop a Natural Edinburgh programme in parks and greenspaces to enhance biodiversity.
Food	Map the food distribution networks developed during the coronavirus crisis as starting point for a new approach to tackling food poverty
	Launch a new home-growing and community growing campaign in homes, neighbourhoods and schools
	Refocus the city region deal to develop regional food resilience
Resource use	Develop a network of repair and re-use hubs
	Promote online sharing and re-use platforms
	Promote waste-diversion initiatives like the bottle deposit scheme
	Launch a campaign for a plastic free Edinburgh
Smart City	Refocus the resources going into the data innovation strand of City Region Deal to capture changing patterns of homeworking and travel demand
	Develop digital infrastructure to support significantly higher levels of remote working and online meetings and events.
	Use City Region Deal money to focus on digital inclusion
	Develop new measurement tools for assessing the success of the city, with the target of wellbeing and natural capital rather than GDP Measurement –with a focus on income and poverty in the city as a consequence of lockdown

Homes and neighbourhoods	Ensure that the emerging City Plan 2030 fully embeds Green Recovery
	Develop investment vehicles for upfront provision of sustainable infrastructure for heat networks, waste and water systems
	Scale up work to bring empty homes into use and expand that work into bringing empty holiday lets back into residential use.
Energy	Ensure that all new development and major retrofit incorporates renewable energy capacity and LED lighting in all common areas
	Launch a jobs and training-led energy efficiency programme for buildings: both residential and commercial.
	Support additional capacity in community projects like Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative and in the council's own Energy for Edinburgh company.
	Re-introduce discussions on a regional energy masterplan which were omitted from the City Region Deal
Community support	Refocus Neighbourhood Environment Programme grants as Community Climate Action Grants
	Increase funding for city-wide volunteering infrastructure to sustain appetite for mutual aid demonstrated during lockdown.
International city	Recognise the over-reliance of the city economy on unrestricted tourism growth and focus the tourism strategy on rescaling the industry and city festivals with lower carbon footprint.
	Promote rail connectivity as the key access to the city over Edinburgh Airport.
	Through Climate KIC and other peer group networks in other countries, share good practice and mutual learning on city sustainability.
Education and training	Oversee a significant increase in capacity for and training in outdoor learning in schools as part of a safe return to schools in August.
	Review school online learning capacity developed during lockdown
	Refresh all school active travels plans to maximise the number of pupils walking and wheeling to schools from August onwards and introduce electric mini-buses for special school transport.
	As key partners in the City Region Deal, invite the city's four universities and Edinburgh College to revamp their engagement with the international student community.
	As part of this Green Recovery Plan develop a comprehensive Sustainable Economy training and re-skilling programme

Public Health

A major bridge between where we are now and a Green Recovery is the top priority which is given to public health measures. Central to that is a well-organised, properly-resourced Test, Trace, Isolate and Support (TTIS) programme. The extent to which Edinburgh is able to move from crisis management into planning for a different future depends on the effective implementation of TTIS.

Around that, many of the proposals that we have championed both in this document and elsewhere point to enhanced public health prominence: from the role of active travel in reducing pollution and promoting health and wellbeing; to the vital role of open and green spaces in our cities; to income security measures that protect people through times of crisis. A public health pathway through the coronavirus crisis can go hand in hand with a Green Recovery.

Funding and delivering the programme

The coronavirus crisis has reshaped the way we live our lives, but it has also overturned traditional norms about the role of public finances. Public money has been poured into job furlough schemes and business support, quite rightly, to protect jobs and enterprises at the most difficult time. The pandemic is the most immediate strategic challenge but the climate crisis remains by far the largest. That means it needs resources of at least comparable scale. Across Europe that has been recognised, with the European Commission preparing a massive injection of funds into a Green New Deal.

Here in Scotland's capital we need an Edinburgh Green New Deal. Investment valued at £4-8 billion could deliver up to two-thirds of the target to be net zero carbon and be fully paid back by savings generated. While these are huge sums; the council also has potential leverage over that kind of funding. For example:

The £1.33 billion City Region Deal and the need for it to be recast as a Green City Deal to support a sustainable and resilient city region economy.

While the City Regional Deal is based on a series of partnership and contractual agreements, the pandemic has created a space where it is both possible and prudent to examine the fit of what is agreed to an utterly changed context:

- Is it right to spend £120m on one junction at Sheriffhall?
- Is £45m for a new concert hall the right cultural priority for the city?
- Could £36m on west Edinburgh transport be more effectively directed to broader active travel connectivity?
- The single biggest investment in the Deal is for data-led innovation. Could that more purposefully be focused on supporting low carbon transition and inclusive working?

The City Region Deal is the most obvious starting point for a refocused programme of investment but it is not the only one. For example:

- The £8 billion Lothian Pension Fund and the potential to invest in zero carbon development; in renewable energy; and forest regeneration.
- £2.5 billion investment in the council's housing stock with the aim of being zero carbon by 2030.
- The City Plan 2030 with its capacity to shape billions of pounds of development towards a zero-carbon city: reducing fuel bills, making walking, cycling and public transport much easier; and enhancing green spaces.
- Access to £2 billion within the Scottish National Investment Bank with a primary focus on securing a zero-carbon economy.
- The potential of over £200m of investment from a workplace parking levy to reduce demand and create attractive alternatives to cars.

Conclusion

We are at a critical point in Edinburgh's future. In the midst of a crisis we can choose to harness the energy and creativity of the city and the resources at our disposal to be in the vanguard of building out of crisis towards a successful zero carbon city which will be a magnet for investment and talent and a rich seam of jobs and training. Or we can watch as competitors do it instead. That's no real choice.

Edinburgh's Green Councillors, June 2020