

Birmingham Economic Recovery Plan

Response from Birmingham Friends of the Earth

- **Do we have the correct vision?**

The vision commits to building a greener Birmingham, including the recognition that working towards net zero carbon can be a catalyst for economic recovery and jobs, which we welcome. Decarbonising the economy is vital for the health and security of Birmingham citizens and must be mainstreamed in all plans and decision-making.

However, the vision is not radical enough. The disruption of the pandemic should be used as an opportunity to rethink existing plans and question whether they will help or hinder us when it comes to meeting the future needs of people in the city. We have seen that the city is capable of adapting to change quickly but also the negative impact of a disorderly transition. It has highlighted the many inequalities in our current economic system. We should now plan for an orderly and just transition to a low carbon economy that works for Birmingham people.

The vision should put people's wellbeing at its centre, using economic growth as a means to improve quality of life for people in Birmingham rather than as an end itself.

The vision should say more about the ways that people will live and work in the city. It should include an aspiration that Birmingham will move towards a network of '20-minute neighbourhoods' with thriving local highstreets, walking and cycling as the default transport choices, and jobs and services accessible from people's doorsteps.

- **Are the principles correct and do they provide a robust basis for delivering the vision?**

The description of Inclusive Growth as "an overriding priority" raises concerns. The overriding priority should be to maximise the wellbeing and quality of life for people in Birmingham, within environmental limits. Inclusive growth may be one of the tools used to achieve this but should not be seen as the sole goal.

Maximising opportunities for jobs and skills is a positive principle, however this should not necessarily be delivered through existing and planned projects. For example, remote working and shopping may mean that there is a surplus of office and retail space in the city centre and a reduction in the demand to travel in peak periods. Instead, all projects should be reviewed to determine whether they are still relevant given the social changes brought about by the pandemic and whether they will improve quality of life and the environment in the city. The focus should be on the creation of green jobs that will be sustainable in the long term. Every project should be reviewed against the criteria of whether it reduces carbon emissions.

The list of stakeholders indicates a focus on large institutions and businesses at the expense of SMEs and community organisations. There is a growing network of small independent businesses, social enterprises and environmentally focused enterprises in Birmingham and nurturing this section of the economy should be central to the economic recovery. BCC should be ambitious about growing the circular economy and nurturing the voluntary and community sector. Shifting this focus from large businesses and institutions to smaller local organisations is vital to ensure that the economy becomes truly inclusive.

The principles of economic recovery should include a commitment to decarbonising the economy and enhancing the natural environment in the city. Birmingham Friends of the Earth has submitted

detailed recommendations on achieving net zero that we believe will make the city a greener, happier and healthier place to live; these recommendations are attached for reference.

The principles should also include a commitment to Local Wealth Building, utilising the spending power of BCC and other anchor institutions to support local organisations and create social value.

- **Have we identified all of the relevant strategic challenges?**

The impact of the pandemic on particular jobs and communities has not been considered in detail.

The impact on the community and voluntary sector in the city is another strategic challenge which should be considered. Charities and community organisations support a significant number of jobs in the city and play a crucial role in supporting communities and the environment.

The impact on the care sector is another strategic challenge which should be considered. Childcare settings have lost significant revenue as a result of being forced to close during the pandemic. The provision of high-quality childcare settings is vital to the economy as it enables women's full participation in the labour market. Similarly, care services for older people in the community or care homes enables working age people to participate in the economy.

The impact on public transport is another strategic challenge which should be considered. Revenue from fares has declined dramatically during the pandemic. Public transport is disproportionately relied on by low income workers, younger people, people past the age of retirement and people with disabilities. If future public transport provision is reduced, this will limit the participation of these groups, weakening the economy.

- **Have we identified the key opportunities?**

The low carbon and environmental sector is rightly identified as an opportunity. However, the opportunities are much broader than identified here. The plan mentions the green automotive sector and low carbon transport. There are further opportunities in green infrastructure, decarbonising housing and buildings, the circular economy and nature recovery.

The voluntary and community sector is another area of opportunity. The pandemic has highlighted the potential of community action and the importance of local grassroots organisations that are able to respond quickly to the needs of their local area.

- **Have we identified the key projects under each theme**

The 'green recovery' should be a thread running through every project rather than confined to one theme. If we are to achieve the goal of decarbonising the economy by 2030 – or the national target of 2050 – every project must be designed to meet this goal.

- **Are there any other projects which should be included?**

The economic recovery plan should take a broader view of the economy and include projects that will improve quality of life for the city's residents.

The recovery of nature and the enhancement of biodiversity in the city should be included as a project. The city's natural spaces contribute to the economy by bringing in income through tourism and recreation. They also benefit the economy indirectly by improving the health and wellbeing of people living in the city.

- **Are there any other funding opportunities which we should identify?**

- **Are there any further partners that can assist in the delivery of any of these projects?**

BCC should seek to work in partnership with the many SMEs, social enterprises and voluntary organisations in the city. These organisations can play a key role in delivering many aspects of the plan and their participation is crucial if Birmingham's economy is to become more inclusive.