

# **Creating a manifesto for a city-led, green recovery**

**The RSA and Core Cities UK**

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### **About the RSA**

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes in a world where everyone is able to participate in creating a better future. Through our ideas, research and a 30,000 strong Fellowship we are a global community of proactive problem solvers, sharing powerful ideas, carrying out cutting edge research and building networks and opportunities for people to collaborate, influence and demonstrate practical solutions to realise change.

### **About Core Cities UK**

Core Cities UK is an alliance of 11 cities - Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield. Its mission is to unlock the full potential of our great city regions to create a stronger, fairer economy and society.

### **Acknowledgements**

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# 1. Introduction

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In June 2020, Core Cities UK and the RSA held a summit involving top-level city leaders, officials, academics, and investors to discuss the terms of a locally-led green recovery in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The paper that follows summarises the discussion from that event. It also outlines a future agenda of work to flow from it: a manifesto for a city-led recovery that will raise this agenda and seek to influence the shape of the post-Covid recovery. It outlines both what might be contained in such a manifesto and how we might go about delivering it, based upon the discussions from the summit.

## Attendees at the summit:

First Name	Surname	Role	Organisation
Grainia	Long	Commissioner for Resilience	Belfast City Council
Tony	Smith	Policy Executive	Birmingham City Council
Andrew	Gregory	Director for Planning, Transport and Environment	Cardiff Council
Louise	Marix Evans	Senior Advisor	Committee on Climate Change
Tracy	Savill	Initiative Lead	Connected Places Catapult
Chris	Murray	Director	Core Cities UK
Will	Mapplebeck	Strategic Communications and Public Affairs Manager	Core Cities UK
Diane	Chan	Policy and Governance Officer	Core Cities UK
Helen	Ward	Connecting People with the Environment Team Leader	DEFRA
Liam	Robson	Senior Policy Advisor, Climate Change Adaptation	DEFRA
Matt	Ellis	Climate Resilience Lead	Environment Agency/Greater Manchester Combined Authority Environment Team
Russell	Jones	Public Health Programme Manager	Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Duncan	Booker	COP26 Stakeholder Manager	Glasgow City Council
Gavin	Slater	Head of Sustainability	Glasgow City Council
Anna	Romaniuk	Research Lead	Industrial Strategy Council
Gavin	Wallis	Head of Research	Industrial Strategy Council
Jack	Hunter	Research fellow	IPPR North
Sandy	Rutherford	Programme Officer	Leeds City Council
Pete	Gladwell	Head of Public Sector Partnerships	Legal & General

Christine	Darbyshire	Senior Development Manager (Environment)	Liverpool City Council
David	Houliston	Strategic Lead Policy and Partnerships	Manchester City Council
Elizabeth	Mitchell	Policy and Partnerships Manager	Manchester City Council
Jonny	Sadler	Programme Director	Manchester Climate Change Agency
Iain	MacAulay	Programme Manager	National Services Scotland (NHS)
Tim	Rippon	Senior Climate Change Specialist	Newcastle City Council
Jonathan	Ward	Principal Energy Policy Officer	Nottingham City Council
Wayne	Bexton	Head of Energy Services	Nottingham City Council
Laurie	Brennan	Head of Policy	Sheffield City Council
Matthew	Taylor	CEO	The RSA
Asheem	Singh	Director of Economy	The RSA
Mark	Hall	Deputy Head of Engagement	The RSA
Eleanor	Toner	Engagement Coordinator	The RSA
Jake	Jooshandeh	Researcher, Economy Enterprise & Manufacturing	The RSA
Jillian	Linton	Coordinator, Economy Enterprise & Manufacturing	The RSA
Josie	Warden	Associate Director	The RSA
Polly	Billington	Director	UK100
Clare	Linton	Policy and Research Advisor	Urban Transport Group
Ed	Cox	Director of Public Service Reform	WMCA

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## 2. Background

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The 2020s and beyond will be defined by the decisions made by national and local authorities in the next six to twelve months. The need for economic growth, and the critical necessity of decarbonising the economy and creating a just transition, has created a level of political consensus not seen for the past decade. There is consensus within government, and from the opposition, that we need highly interventionist and targeted fiscal policies. Yet, as Whitehall officials and senior political staff deliberate on the future, post-lockdown and post-Covid, cities and localities must present a united front that demonstrates ambition, realism, and ingenuity in response to the pressing challenges we now face - and the sustainable future we need to deliver.

Cities and their leadership are hotbeds of innovation. But too often these energies fail to be channelled into national strategies for change. To set a compelling agenda for localism and growth, the RSA and Core Cities UK created a high-level event with the express aim of convening debate and finding practical solutions across three domains:

1. **Policy:** What are the key policies at cities' disposal – what policy levers do cities need to develop to lead the recovery and what investment levers can we pull?
2. **Advocacy:** How can cities make their case in ways which are most likely to influence ministers and officials (especially ahead of the upcoming comprehensive spending review)?
3. **Mobilisation:** How can we shape the broader debate among stakeholders – business, trade unions, academia - and enthuse and involve the general public?

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# 3. Summit highlights: the levers

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The first half of the summit was centred on discussing the practical policy levers available to local authorities when seeking to create a green recovery. Below we highlight the core points of conversation, though it is important to note a range of other policies were also mentioned including urban planning, green public spaces, and energy devolution.

## Housing

One of the touchstone discussions was around housing, especially housing retrofit. Many cities have already started thinking through how to implement this policy: Belfast have been working with a retrofit expert who supported programmes in Norway; Nottingham City Council have an ongoing piece of work to implement a retrofitting model for the city; and West Midlands Combined Authority are trying to create a circular economy roadmap, of which retrofit is a part. Housing retrofit was seen to be a win-win for local areas, aiding UK climate adaptation by cutting a huge source of carbon emitters while creating jobs, improving local skills, and reducing fuel poverty.

However, caution was also noted among many attendees. First there is the issue of the cost of such schemes: in one city a quote of £70k per household was mentioned, which is hugely difficult for authorities already under severe financial strain. A longer-term look at the funding of these schemes is needed, and there needs to be awareness of what the ‘follow-up’ will be. Secondly, there is a need to be realistic in terms of the scale and timeline of this policy. While retrofitting homes can create skills in the long run, skills are also needed in the short-term to gain momentum. This points to an overarching caution for both housing retrofit and other potential policies: there is a need to join up policy with funds (both locally and nationally) to get shovel-ready schemes going, but also to lay the foundations for schemes to get to the point where they are genuinely ‘shovel ready’.

Several options for immediate action were raised including an investigation into how housing retrofit can be made more sustainable with longer-term funding for city councils and a plan for developing the base skills needed to begin housing retrofit.

Critically, these measures will need to respond to the Government’s £3bn ‘green investment’ package that will enable homeowners to access vouchers for insulation work and make

funds available for energy efficiency upgrades of public buildings and social housing<sup>1</sup>.

## **Transport and infrastructure**

Many of the participating cities, including Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow, were already making changes to their transport network: closing roads, pedestrianising streets, and creating bike lanes. The push towards increased active forms of travel was seen as a positive for attendees and a core example of how rapid change on policies that have been passed back and forth for years have materialised because of the pandemic.

However, there were concomitant concerns about the long-term financing of changes to the transport network within cities. The financial sustainability of public transport remains precarious. There were also comments that some policies, for instance expanding the electric vehicle network, can come into conflict with other priorities such as reducing congestion - “green congestion is still congestion”.

It was suggested that cities collectively look to how they further embed the transport policies they want to keep in the long run. A more systematic review of the long-term financial sustainability of the transport network, and public transport in particular, was high on participants’ agendas.

## **Leveraging long-term funding**

It was unanimously agreed that market forces alone will not suffice in ensuring that adequate long-term funding reaches the areas that need it most. Because of the poor growth prospects of deprived areas, the chance of commercial lenders being repaid in full is reduced, creating further disincentives for commercial lending to the most cash-strapped areas. Long-term funding options from government were felt to be essential for addressing this imbalance.

There was also a concern about the readability and adaptability of green financing information for local areas, deemed too abstract and nationally focused to be usefully applied locally without additional translation work.

Local authorities need the support of national government and national organisations to help translate and secure long-term funding opportunities for their local area; a collective plan to deliver this partnership must be agreed going forward.

## **Innovating at a local level**

While speaking about the policies available to local leaders, there was also much conversation about how we enable local authorities to innovate themselves. This innovation can come in many forms, for instance an enhanced partnership has developed between Belfast and Dublin to improve electricity supply. This could be critical in shaping a green recovery and while this was once considered

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<sup>1</sup> BBC News. 2020. Sunak To Unveil £2Bn Home Insulation Scheme. [online] Available at: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-53313640](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-53313640) [Accessed 7 July 2020].

politically impossible, it is now happening at scale owing to post-Covid need.

Others mentioned that it should be possible to position cities as ‘green hubs’ which could innovate and test new projects and scale up those that work. The ‘Helsinki smart region’ was given as an example of the latter<sup>2</sup>.

However, the critical questions here are: what assets do local authorities already have to innovate, and when is central government getting in the way of local authorities? Some preliminary findings of UK100 indicate that innovation is happening across the country but often in pockets, without much ability to transfer across municipalities and with central government sometimes at odds with local authorities’ objectives. Barriers to collaboration can even come down to the ways in which R&D funding is allocated, pitting cities against each other for UKRI funds, for instance.

It was noted that facilitating the sharing of practise and skills in real time between localities is key; greater support from central government and governmental agencies for collaboration and innovation, across and within cities, is crucial.

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<sup>2</sup> Helsinki Smart Region. n.d. [online] Available at: <https://helsinkismart.fi/> [Accessed 16 July 2020].

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# 4. An agenda for practical action

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## A manifesto

The second half of the summit was dedicated to discussing how we collectively mobilise and advocate for a city-led green recovery, with both the public and central government. A recurrent theme that undergirded the below was that these issues cannot be tackled piecemeal. There was consensus on the need for a major comprehensive plan to deliver the above policy levers and others, backed by organisations such as Core Cities UK, The RSA, and UK100. We need a manifesto for a city-led recovery that puts these issues at the forefront of the national agenda in preparation for upcoming political events, such as the comprehensive spending review and autumn budget.

## Harnessing the energy of the crisis

Even before the pandemic there was growing recognition in public attitudes of the need to adapt to climate change. It was felt among attendees that the pandemic, and the shared experience of lockdown, has released a latent energy and demand for permanent change: especially around how the economy works and how we interact with the environment. If we can harness this energy, good will, and civic spirit we can transform our environment for the better.

The challenge here is ensuring that the short-term focus on such policies translates into long-term action; that this issue isn't treated in isolation. A key example here is the emphasis on bike lanes and temporary changes to transport networks within cities. In the long-term we need to make these changes permanent. It was from these roots that the idea for a major holistic intervention emerged.

## Engaging with the public in meaningful ways

In terms of building and curating this holistic intervention, the matter of citizen engagement was raised. Part of the energy for change must come from the public. While it is important that central and local government work in tandem, it was noted that intentional engagement with citizens, when done well, is an important part of how we create and sustain a local green recovery.

Local authorities need to be able to explain the challenges they face to the public they serve, not glossing over the many complexities of the situation, while also being clear in their message.

Meaningful citizen engagement, for instance through citizen assemblies, were seen by some as a positive means of enabling

conversations about complex issues. It was noted however that public engagement must add value and it is also increasingly difficult to hold these types of long-form deliberative exercises in a socially distanced way without losing a degree of inclusivity – for instance for those who need to lip read or lack access to digital technology. Thus, we need to be careful how we use citizen engagement to gather data and disseminate ideas, ensuring the process is inclusive while avoiding fatigue.

## **Understanding local needs and political landscape**

Latest figures show that over 100 local authorities say they may face bankruptcy without injections of cash from central government. It was also mentioned that the long-term viability of local authorities undermines their attractiveness for long-term commercial investment. A key problem here is the way in which local leaders are incentivised away from longer-term investment and thinking.

It was agreed that we must marry conversations on local financial resilience with green and labour market resilience. Long-term commitments and emphasis on sustainability is needed across the board.

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# 5. Making it happen: creating a manifesto for a city-led green recovery

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We concluded with consensus: this agenda matters, and further work needs to be done. Specifically, three critical challenges must be successfully met:

1. We must fully develop the content of the manifesto.
2. We must ensure we act swiftly and effectively to properly hit key moments for decision makers and opinion formers.
3. We must ensure that this manifesto is developed and delivered strategically alongside other research and interventions in this space.

## Content of the manifesto

The below outlines six pathways to gather further intelligence on the content of a green recovery intervention.

Task	Detail	Purpose
Interviews with cities	Interviews with city leaders on specific policy initiatives.	This will add the necessary detail and nuance to the policy points above, and others that emerge.
Roundtable events	Roundtables with specific city leaders on specific subjects.	This will add detail to the known policy initiatives but also allow for a wider selection of policy initiatives.
Enhanced policy research and analysis	Thorough literature review of the policy proposals already in circulation.	To fully understand and build upon the scope of policy ideas already in circulation.
Interviews and engagement with industry experts	Interviews with experts from outside cities: academia, civil society, government, and industry.	To expand our policy horizon and quickly take in ideas and views elsewhere.

Public surveys	Quick-fire polling with the public on key issues.	To act as a critical means of gaining impact and cut-through, as well as adding an extra dimension to our research findings.
Rapid ethnographic research	Qualitative research with the public on their views.	This will add depth and a level of emotional buy-in from story-telling that is not accessible by other means.

## Getting the message out at the right time

It is also critical that we are timely and targeted in terms of when this work is completed and who we target. The RSA, Core Cities UK, and other groups such as UK100 need to work together to ensure this content aligns with key events:

- Summer fiscal adjustments by the Chancellor.
- The autumn budget and spending review.
- COP26 in Glasgow, November 2021.

## Complementing other work

It is essential that this manifesto is developed and delivered strategically alongside other research and interventions in this space. We would look to develop key partnerships to ensure we are adding to a collective body of knowledge.

Organisations with research and reports that emerged over the course of the summit include various city councils, UK100, Committee on Climate Change (CCC), DEFRA, Industrial Strategy Council, and Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN). Our research will utilise the work of this list and beyond.

## Pathways for delivery

The following represents three approaches to delivering the manifesto.

1. **Rapid approach.** Interviews and roundtables with city leaders on highly specific policy initiatives, and some light-touch policy research and analysis.  
This will give us greater detail to flesh out the agenda horizontally. The document that emerges would be a ‘best practice’ agenda to take forward. It should gain traction with policymakers though perhaps less among media.
2. **Public advocacy approach.** Interviews and roundtables with city leaders, enhanced policy research and analysis, interviews with outside experts, and rapid polling at national level.

As well as detail on the known policy initiatives, this will expand the horizon of policy ideas, as well as give us ammunition, in the form of public opinion polling, in our subsequent advocacy and engagement work to make inroads with policy and media.

3. **Belt-and-braces approach.** Interviews and roundtables, enhanced policy/desk research and analysis, interviews with experts, public opinion polling at local level, and additional rapid ethnographic work to deliver social media content.

This option would give us a highly detailed manifesto, as well as a full arsenal in our advocacy work to ensure cut-through.

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## 6. Conclusion

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We found a remarkable degree of consensus from a diverse variety of local leaders on what needs to happen next, so much so that we left the intervention with an ‘oven-ready’ idea to take forward. This is rare but also reflective of the fact that we must act quickly and act decisively as key moments for influence are fast approaching. We hope that if we can take advantage of this moment, we will be able to look back on this summit as an instance when the recovery tilted in a locally-driven, sustainable trajectory.