

Stockport Green Party's response to the Stockport Climate Action Now strategy document (May 2020)

INTRODUCTION

The following outlines Stockport Green Party's response to Stockport Council's strategy outlined in the Climate Action Now (CAN) document. Whereas we welcome the CAN document which demonstrates how Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) plans to address the climate emergency by reducing carbon emissions in the borough over the next five years, we have concerns that these plans do not contain enough detail and rigour. The target of being carbon net-zero by 2038 is consistent with Andy Burnham's vision for Greater Manchester, but lags behind most other authorities in the UK who are aiming for carbon neutrality by 2030. We note also that Friends of the Earth have assessed SMBC's current performance on averting climate change as 'average' in comparison with other local authorities. We believe that this plan does not go far enough and that much more needs to be done to avoid climate catastrophe. Moreover, it is important that actions are taken immediately as much time can be lost in a prolonged planning stage. It would appear, however, that little seems to have happened since a climate emergency was declared by the Council in March 2019.

Our primary concern is that CAN currently lacks actual targets, time points, and deadlines for reductions in emissions by which it can be held to account. The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research has set climate commitments for local authorities which help them quantify the implications of the United Nations Paris agreement. These recommend that SMBC should immediately initiate sustained programmes of reduction in CO₂ emissions at an average rate of 13.1% per year. It is this target that should form the basis for actions and policies.

However, the Tyndall CO₂ budget only focuses on energy. The Council must recognise that this is only part of the story. To these ends, the Council should work with partners to investigate and measure its indirect Scope 3 emissions and make sure this work feeds into the Climate Action Strategy where relevant.

According to the Anthesis data outlined in CAN, the two principal sources of direct and indirect CO₂ emissions in Stockport during 2017 were transport at 30% and residential buildings at 40%. We propose that the Council uses these figures as the main focus of its carbon reduction strategy in order to achieve the biggest wins.

This document will address the seven different workstreams, outlined in CAN, by which carbon emissions are to be reduced.

1. Stockport Council CAN: "Leading the way by building climate action into everything we do."

- There is a reference to an all-party climate emergency task group which was established last year. The membership and remit of this group should be made public. The Council should also detail how the task group feeds into and learns from, Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Green City Region Board and Partnership.

- The council must identify a councillor at cabinet level whose role is that of climate champion. This person should lead the task group on carbon reduction measures. If this action has already taken place, the named councillor should be made public.
- The introduction of mandatory carbon literacy training for all staff by March 2021 is a welcome initiative. The Council, however, has only a bronze carbon literacy accreditation which is the lowest of the four levels set by the Carbon Literate Organisation. It is essential that this level is improved for the council to demonstrate its commitment to a low carbon culture.
- The Council states its electricity is from a 'green energy supplier'. It should provide more details on this – what does 'green energy supplier' actually mean?

2. Sustainable Financial Appraisal: “We’re putting climate impact at the heart of everything we do by introducing a brand-new model of financial appraisal which informs all decisions we make.”

- The new model of financial appraisal due to be implemented in 2020 -2021, must ensure that considerations of climate impact are built into all the council’s investment decisions. Currently, we know of no lobby from the council to the Greater Manchester Pension Fund to divest from fossil fuels.
- Stockport Council’s support for investment in the major expansion of Manchester Airport and also its push for Government funding to enable the building of the A6-M60 bypass will increase carbon emissions and both these projects should be abandoned.
- SMBC should take its cue from the recent decision to uphold the appeal against Heathrow Airport expansion due to it being incompatible with the Paris agreement on Climate Change and should rule out its support for the latest Manchester Airport plans. With greatly increased capacity for handling more flights, it is forecast that passenger numbers at Manchester Airport will grow from 29m in 2018 to 50m in 2030. Such levels of air travel are incompatible with any wider carbon reduction plans. The Council has a 3.22% shareholding in Manchester Airport Holdings Limited (value at £52.7m) and receives considerable dividends from this holding, £5.4m in 2018.
- Evidence has shown that new road building invariably results in increased traffic and hence more carbon emissions. The greenbelt-destroying bypass plans should be completely removed from the agenda and the council should re-direct its focus to developing a much larger public transport sector.

3. Climate Friendly Borough: “Working with businesses and local people to take action.”

- It is claimed in the CAN document that the council’s activities account for less than 5% of the emissions in the borough. This appears to be a rather low figure, and it should be made clear how this figure was formulated. Nevertheless, SMBC has a particularly important role to play in leading by example and in effecting powers to encourage and to incentivise private individuals, businesses and other organisations to reduce their carbon footprint. We note that various initiatives for this workstream are listed in CAN, but many are only for 2020-21. This section must include more initiatives of this nature which stretch into the longer term.
- The CAN document commits to considering “carbon neutral considerations” in procurement policy by March 2021. More details must be given as to how this will work in practice when scoring tenders, along with social value factors such as supporting local businesses. The Council must

publicise details on its annual procurement spend and commit to reporting how much of this spend is distributed to suppliers who demonstrate strong environmental credentials.

4. Low Carbon Buildings: “More energy efficient homes and buildings, now and in the future.”

- We are informed that only 30% of Stockport homes are well-insulated. Indeed, CAN states that 70% of homes in the borough have an EPC rating of D or below. The Council must now identify fuel poor or vulnerable households so that the energy companies can insulate these as part of their legal Energy Company Obligations.
- The Council must use its powers to aim for all new houses and commercial properties to be carbon neutral and show pioneering leadership by achieving this well before Greater Manchester’s current target of 2027. The minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) regulations should be actively enforced in the private rented sector in Stockport.
- CAN reports that the council has so far installed biomass heating in 2,100 homes but it is not clear whether these are new or existing properties. We propose that the council upgrades its boilers in current residential and other properties that are over ten years old with a biomass or new higher efficiency condensing model. The addition of a flue gas heat recovery system can achieve extra gains in the performance of boilers. Combining very efficient heating systems with effective insulation will result in considerably lower carbon emissions from the residential sector.
- More work needs to be done with the private sector to promote the use of low carbon systems in offices and industrial buildings.

5. Renewable Energy: “Ensuring that the future energy needs of the borough can all be met in a sustainable way.”

- The installation of solar PV units on Council buildings and homes is welcomed and the aim should be to greatly increase the numbers of these by installing them on more buildings over the coming years.
- Stockport has 31551 megawatt-hours (MWh) of renewable energy available through various schemes which is enough to power only 2% of homes in the borough. If the area matched the best of similar local councils, it would already have 94652 MWh. We need to move VERY QUICKLY towards having 100% clean energy from sustainable and renewable sources.

6. Sustainable Transport: “Moving to carbon-free transport options and increasing walking, cycling and use of public transport.”

- Transport is a large contributor to carbon emissions. It is estimated though, that only 25% of journeys in the borough are made by public transport, cycling or walking. The council should aim to increase this to 50% by 2030. The council states that it is planning a considerable expansion in infrastructure for cycling and walking, a move which we applaud, but dates need to be set by which specified goals will be achieved.
- Bus companies must introduce many more low carbon and electric vehicles. A radical overhaul of ticketing arrangements is essential to make travelling by public transport simpler, more affordable and an attractive alternative to using private cars.

- To discourage the use of polluting vehicles, we propose the introduction of differentiable charges for Council car parking permits with the rate of charge dependent on the emissions level of the vehicle.
- We note that the council currently has only 3 zero-emission vans and 4 electric vehicles. This number has to be substantially increased in the future.
- The number of EV charging points should be greatly increased in both council-owned locations and private sector locations
- The Council must recognise that its commitments to sustainable transport in the CAN document are completely opposed to its current road investment plans.

7. Natural Environment: “Protecting and enhancing our natural environment.”

- All plans which relate to council land must aim to reduce carbon emissions. We welcome the tree-planting schemes and the aim to establish woodlands by 2030. Currently, only about 20-30% of Stockport has tree cover, so considerable tree-planting needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency to achieve these aims. This would not only assist in the reduction of carbon emissions but would also improve the quality of life for Stockport residents. Carbon offset achieved through changes in land use can be used to compensate for the effects of non-CO2 emissions which cannot readily be reduced to zero, such as from agriculture (methane, nitrous oxide, etc.).
- The CAN document does not refer to Natural Capital. Natural Capital accounting is a key part of Greater Manchester’s 5 Year Environment Plan; the Council should put a complementary plan in place to measure and report on Natural Capital and identify a priority list of the most promising projects for investment.

CONCLUSION

CAN is a good starting point and covers all the main areas that need to be addressed if Stockport Council is to be successful in averting the worst effects of climate breakdown. The CAN document, however, is woefully short on detail. The overall target for becoming carbon neutral and the target date should be clearly defined. Every one of the 7 areas should have clear numerical targets, milestones, and completion dates for each action. The Climate emergency declared by Stockport Council needs to be treated as just that, an emergency; it must be given top priority and should underpin *everything* the council does, especially in the areas of investment, transport, and housing.

Stockport Green Party is keen to see real action in Stockport about addressing the climate emergency and so call on the Council to set up a Citizens’ Assembly with a cross-section of the Stockport public invited to take part. Such a representative group, informed by scientists and climate professionals, can bring together views to help the Council set priorities and increase accountability for the delivery of their plans.

REFERENCES

- (a) STOCKPORT CAN - Climate Action Now. February 2020 Climate action Strategy (pdf document)
- (b) Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research - Quantifying the implications of the United Nations Paris Agreement for Stockport, April 2020
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- (e) The Carbon Trust – What are scope 3 emissions?
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- (f) Manchester City Council Manchester Airport Master Plan to 2030 (pdf document)
- (g) Centre for Sustainable Energy
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