

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Running a city is complex. Successful placemaking is complex. Regeneration is complex. Addressing the housing crisis is complex. Decarbonising our energy system and economy is complex. We need solutions that work across multiple boundaries, and collective thinking to deliver on all these agendas. We must work together for the benefit of local communities and adopt a holistic approach to these issues.

Climate change is the biggest challenge of our generation, but it also presents opportunities to design and build healthier cities. This can be achieved if the net zero transition is placed at the centre of decision-making at both national and local levels, rather than being treated as a separate, special project. Net zero should drive and catalyse change, making places more attractive, supporting successful regeneration, creating liveable communities, and sharing the economic benefits of a carbon-free future.

Net zero must not be treated as an isolated project. When managing cities, especially those with declared climate emergencies, every decision should be made with

consideration for its implications on decarbonisation. We can regenerate through decarbonisation and create an inclusive local economy through focused local investment for local benefit. Delivery naturally happens at a local level. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to achieving net zero—each region requires tailored solutions developed and delivered locally by people with vested interests in the outcomes, as they live and work there.

Connecting these agendas would allow us to make better use of limited budgets for greater mutual benefit. A unified vision should be adopted locally—a carbon-free city that provides economic and social benefits to its residents. It sounds simple on paper, but in practice, it is complex. However, our conversations with cities across the UK show that it is achievable, and we hope this report demonstrates pathways to making it a reality.

We've learned a lot from engaging with cities, local authorities, and stakeholders across the UK, and there is real opportunity for progress. Achieving it requires a mindset shift, moving away from

viewing net zero activities as special projects to integrating them into business-as-usual. Meeting national and regional carbon targets requires decision-making through a net zero lens, linking climate action directly to residents' and communities' lives. More than 300 local authorities in the UK have declared a climate emergency, demonstrating a commitment to addressing climate change at the local level. With many setting ambitious targets to become net zero within the next decade, the urgency of action is clear. To meet these public commitments, delay is no longer an option.

By integrating placemaking, regeneration, housing, and net zero, proximity to the challenges makes it easier to design appropriate solutions. While a clear national framework is needed for guidance, local knowledge is crucial for developing and implementing effective solutions.

In the transition to a carbon-free future, Local Area Energy Plans are becoming increasingly important as a way to translate national net zero targets into local actions. These plans are collaborative, data-



driven, and cost-effective, allowing local authorities to prioritise projects based on evidence and stakeholder input, and helping to create realistic pathways for decarbonisation.

The need for a step change in pace is clear: we need to move from talking to action. Not only to begin addressing the significant scale of work required but also to learn from these activities – both what works and what doesn't. Sharing these learnings is crucial for improving future plans and saving costs.

Decarbonising an entire economy and energy system has never been done before; there is no blueprint. Achieving net zero is a shared goal, and we must learn from each other. This is not a competition—true success is when we all achieve zero emissions. Engaging people meaningfully and early in the process is essential, as this is a long-term endeavour that requires maintaining trust and support. Successful transitions and infrastructure projects depend on public trust, which facilitates policy support, participation, investment, adoption of new technologies, and ultimately, behaviour change.

Linking placemaking, regeneration, and community well-being points to the importance of a place-based approach to decarbonisation—a sentiment echoed in our discussions. To succeed, collaboration between the public and private sectors is necessary. The scale of impact required means success depends on active societal participation, underpinned by understanding, belief, trust, and leadership.

None of this is inexpensive, and budgets at the local level are tight. We should instead view this challenge through the lens of optimising resource use across all agendas. When addressing the cost of net zero, we must consider long-

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term benefits like improved health outcomes, reduced environmental damage, and enhanced economic opportunities, balanced against the upfront costs. This approach can be replicated across other areas for collective benefit.

There is an opportunity to develop a local 'inclusive economy' through targeted investment that directly benefits local communities and residents.

Demonstrating how communities benefit from these changes is key to engagement. Building more sustainable neighbourhoods can profoundly impact local services and help reduce inequalities.

Given the collective nature of the challenge and the shared benefits, our work points to the need for a place-based approach to transform cities and regions through decarbonisation. By fostering a holistic, evidence-based approach to placemaking, regeneration, community living, and net zero, and centring local knowledge over ideology, we can create healthy cities where people want to live and work.✕