



Left
Behind
Neighbourhoods

Session 8 briefing: Communities and the climate crisis

Levelling up through climate action

September 2021

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All eyes will be on Glasgow later this year, as the UK plays host to COP26. Whilst effective global responses are of course critical, what happens at a local level is increasingly important, creating an opportunity for communities to better adapt and respond to the climate crisis. And with 'left behind' neighbourhoods likely to be more vulnerable than other parts of the country to the impacts of climate change, what can we do to ensure that these communities do not bear the costs of climate change mitigation and a move to zero carbon, and are instead at the heart of a just transition?

At a glance

- As it stands, 'left behind' neighbourhoods will likely face disproportionate negative environmental, social and economic impacts due to the climate crisis
- Community-led responses offer the potential of helping to meet national emissions targets whilst delivering social and economic benefits for communities
- The climate crisis makes the transfer of power and resources to 'left behind' neighbourhoods even more important, strongly reinforcing the arguments for levelling up. Targeted intervention is needed for 'left behind' neighbourhoods to develop the confidence and capacity to take action against climate change and benefit from a net zero dividend

The impacts of climate change on communities

Communities are already vulnerable to a range of negative climate impacts, likely to increase in the coming years. These can be categorised into three main themes (CCC, 2021):

- the direct environmental impacts
- the impact of the economic transition needed to meet net-zero targets
- the impact of changes to living conditions and lifestyles needed to address climate change.

The overall impact will depend upon how the transition is handled. Without a coherent plan for decarbonisation that ensures equitable benefits for communities, the most deprived areas are likely to fall further behind and be less able to respond in times of crisis.

New research to be published later this year for the APPG from OCSI (2021) highlights that 'left behind' neighbourhoods are already more at risk of flooding than the English average. A higher proportion of land in 'left behind' neighbourhoods is in National Flood Zone 3 (11.6 per cent) than the English average (10.5 per cent), with a more than one in 100 risk of flooding. And a quarter of areas identified as 'left behind' are coastal communities, bringing a number of challenges and risks associated with the impact of climate change, eg coastal erosion.

The lack of social infrastructure in 'left behind' neighbourhoods risks exacerbating the challenges faced when dealing with the direct impacts of climate change, such as flooding. In addition, many of the improvements that need to be made to our economies will be harder to achieve in 'left behind' neighbourhoods. There are fewer existing job opportunities in 'left behind' places and

residents lack transferable skills, making it unlikely that they will be able to swiftly transition to new opportunities (OCSI 2020).

These structural issues need to be addressed now so that residents are not fighting climate change on multiple fronts – environmental, economic and social. Past industrial shifts have demonstrated how a poorly managed transition can have long-lasting adverse impacts (Emden and Murphy 2019). A coordinated approach to face into the economic adjustments needed could mean that we not only overcome the issues faced by ‘left behind’ areas but also ensure that local residents have the resilience and resources to tackle the climate crisis and enjoy the dividend of net zero.

What are community responses to climate change?

A recent report by IPPR (2021:9) defined “community-led” projects as those which “draw on support from the voluntary, private and public sectors but are crucially created, led or owned by people living locally.” Community responses to the climate crisis are wide-ranging and multifaceted. Very few focus solely on tackling climate change; instead aiming to make sustainable improvements to local areas. This means that tackling climate change is often a co-beneficiary.

Based on extensive consultation, IPPR (2021) found that communities are engaged in numerous activities to tackle the impacts of climate change. These include:

- Developing community-run renewable energy programmes
- Developing low-carbon housing or retrofitting old housing stock locally
- Rewilding green space
- Developing local strategies to deal with natural disasters, such as flooding
- Establishing schemes for repairing, swapping or sharing products

What are the benefits of community-led responses to climate change?

The extent of the work being undertaken within local communities will bolster climate ambitions across a range of government’s key policy areas. That community work is inherently sustainable – largely because residents have to live with the long-term impacts of decisions – means that it will help tackle both the direct and indirect impacts of climate change. Efforts should be made to ensure that community-led responses connect with centrally driven targets and programmes, in order to maximise the full effects of locally delivered solutions. This might include helping to hit retrofitting targets or ensuring that green space is rewilded to trap excess carbon.

Providing communities with greater agency to lead change in climate-focused policy locally aims to ensure a fairer, more equitable transition. As IPPR (2021:5) notes, a community-led approach to tackling the climate crisis locally across England “will result in better policy and fairer outcomes, as it is communities, and their local leaders, who have the best understanding of their local areas”. They will therefore have the best understanding of what climate change might do and how best to protect against it.

Current approaches

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) is an independent body set up to advise government on emissions targets. In December 2020, the CCC published the Sixth Carbon Budget to advise ministers on how to achieve Net Zero emissions. It states that ‘decarbonisation strategies will need to be tailored to local circumstances and local communities’, and that opportunities exist regarding maximising investment in those areas and communities which have missed out on funding and resources in the past (CCC, 2020).

The CCC’s Adaptation Committee published its Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk in June 2021. This identified more than 60 climate change risks and opportunities that are fundamental to every aspect of life in the UK, covering our natural environment, health, homes, infrastructure and economy. It found that the gap between the level of risk we face and the level of adaptation underway is widening, and whilst the UK has the capacity and resources to respond effectively to these risks it has not yet done so. Eight risks were identified that require the most urgent attention.

National Adaptation Programme (NAP) sets out actions that government will take to respond to climate change. The second NAP began in 2018 and runs until 2023. Although it recognises the need for significant regional variation, local government is “at the forefront of local action to protect communities” (DEFRA, 2018:64). However, this seems to underestimate the role communities themselves can and will need to play in tackling climate change on their doorsteps. From its series of evidence sessions over the past year, the APPG has heard of untapped potential for driving change within ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods themselves, and that residents can really help to deliver sustainable improvements to their local area when provided with the resources to do so.

The Cabinet Office’s Community Resilience and Recovery Activities. The Cabinet Office is working to develop local resilience in the face of increased extreme weather. It aims to put communities in the lead of emergency planning, response and recovery (Cabinet Office, 2019).

The National Lottery Community Fund’s Climate Action Fund is a ten year £100million fund supporting community-led partnership projects across the UK to take the lead in tackling climate change through a significant investment in community-led partnership projects. Round Two of the programme is now open.

What prevents ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods from developing community-led responses to climate change?

‘Left behind’ and other deprived neighbourhoods are significantly underrepresented in community responses to climate change – primarily due to a lack of community confidence, capacity, and ability to access funding and resources. Funding for climate-related initiatives can often be difficult to come by without adequate knowledge of available grants or government-backed schemes (Community Energy England, 2021) and the capacity to submit successful grant applications.

Furthermore, as they have some of the lowest levels of social infrastructure in the country, ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods face additional obstacles to building the community engagement necessary to broker local solutions and put them into practice.

What can be done to support them?

To fully enable ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods to respond to the climate crisis requires a ‘paradigm shift’ in how the UK’s climate policy is designed and delivered – involving “a genuine devolution process that is inclusive of communities” (IPPR, 2021:40). This should begin by investing in building the capacity of residents in ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods to drive local climate action, as Community Energy England (2021) has called for. Coupled with this, Nesta (2010) has previously made the case for an independent income stream to bolster community-led climate initiatives, such as preferential access to capital and early-stage investment for community-led initiatives. Similarly, the proposal for a Community Wealth Fund (CWF), which the APPG supports, would provide the foundational investment for ‘left behind’ areas that could invest in building community capacity as well as providing the seed capital to deliver specific climate-focused projects.

IPPR (2021) notes that byproducts of community-led initiatives are often that they are sustainable and provide a net benefit for the local environment. Given the multifaceted nature of deprivation in ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods, tackling climate change may not be the most important priority for residents in the local area, particularly when compared to the challenges that the APPG has seen residents face with regards to employment, health, transport and education. Nevertheless, IPPR’s findings suggest that giving residents the resources and the skills to support themselves will also provide a climate dividend in these areas over the long-term.

Case studies

Case study: Ambition Lawrence Weston

Lawrence Weston is a post-war housing estate in north west Bristol with a population of roughly 7,000 people. Ambition Lawrence Weston (ALW) is a third sector organisation, set up to oversee and deliver local regeneration on behalf of a resident-led partnership. After discovering that 70% of residents were struggling with energy bills, they partnered with Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC) to build a solar farm. It generates enough electricity to power 1,000 homes a year, with profits reinvested into community projects. The Partnership isn’t stopping there and has secured planning permission and external funding to build a community-owned wind turbine. The planned 4 MW turbine will power 3,500 homes and generate £50,000 a year.

Case study: Greenmoor Big Local

Greenmoor Big Local is in Bradford, comprising a post-war council-built estate Scholemoor, and the adjacent area of Lidget Green. In 2012, the area received funding from the Big Local programme. From the outset, a key priority identified by residents was to transform local green spaces. The Big Local partnership has regenerated Lidget Green Memorial Park, which now has a community growing space, a community orchard and nuttree, and hosts sustainability events for local school

pupils and community groups. Greenmoor are also supporting residents to save energy and reduce their energy bills, through an ongoing partnership with the Big Energy Savings Network.

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About the APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods is a cross party group of MPs and Peers. It is committed to improving social and economic outcomes for residents living in 'left behind' neighbourhoods, through the development and advocacy of hyper-local initiatives and policies. The group will look at ways to support and rebuild these communities following the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, to ensure they are stronger and more resilient in the future.