



Footsteps

Faiths for a Low Carbon Future



FOOTSTEPS STATEMENT:

Birmingham City Council Full Council Meeting 15 September - R20 Climate Emergency Taskforce report and action plan

In June 2019 Footsteps, the Birmingham faith leaders and over 40 local community faith leaders welcomed Birmingham's climate emergency declaration 'To aspire for the City to be net zero carbon by 2030 or as soon after as a just transition permits - making sure we take communities with us, protecting employment and without impoverishing deprived communities.' The Declaration included establishing a Taskforce charged with developing and taking back to Full Council a plan that 'sets out how the aspiration for the City and the ambition of the Council to be net zero carbon by 2030 can be best achieved.' Footsteps also welcomed the (Council) Cabinet's agreement on 25 June 2019 to add a new priority to the Council Plan stating that Birmingham will be a city that takes a leading role in tackling climate change.

In April 2020 the Birmingham faith leaders group wrote to Cllr Zaffar expressing its gratitude that the Council remained committed to its ambitious target of the city becoming carbon neutral by 2030. They supported the call 'for the transition to a carbon neutral economy be inclusive and just, ensuring that the city will embed in its plans measures to reduce inequality'

Footsteps has welcomed the Council's invitation to send a representative to the Taskforce meetings and so to represent the Birmingham faith communities. It has participated in Taskforce meetings, run a number of community engagement events and activities, worked with other members of the Taskforce and submitted reports to the Taskforce. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on all aspects of the Taskforce's work, but also provided opportunities to 'build back better and greener'. The Birmingham faith leaders in their response to the Covid-19 crisis stated, 'Above all, we call on all people, during these difficult times, to live as people of hope; that the threat we all face can be overcome, and that we will emerge stronger, more resilient and wiser from the experience.'

The Taskforce's plans for achieving the Declaration's ambition and aspiration are now being brought to Full Council meeting on 15 September, having been delayed by Covid-19 and other factors. The plans have two parts: firstly, a Carbon Emission Reduction Study for the City prepared with assistance from consultants, Anthesis, with interventions and recommendations and, secondly, a paper being written by officers covering wider aspects of the plans being made and how the journey towards net zero carbon is to be accomplished. In Footsteps' view, the covering officer paper needs to explain how a number of further critically important areas will be addressed and communicated, including - the Council's overall vision, future Taskforce governance arrangements, funding the just transition and engagement with local communities and citizens.

Whilst Footsteps welcomes the Council's cross-party and collaborative approach and the progress that has been made in challenging times, it has a number of specific serious concerns. These include:

- that the ambition for becoming a net zero carbon city has slipped from 2030 to 2041 without explanation;
- that 'just transition' aspects of the original Declaration 'making sure we take communities with us, protecting employment and without impoverishing deprived communities' are underdeveloped in the Carbon Emission Reduction Study action plan;
- that little attention is given to funding the transition apart from the need for central Government funding and the Council's own limited resources. Funding should include, for example, mobilising residents' own savings, pension funds and innovative sources of finance such as Green Bonds and crowd-funding;
- that insufficient attention has been given to communicating and engaging with Birmingham's citizens and building up their support.

These issues need to be discussed urgently by councillors and officers before the Council meeting in September and we hope will be addressed in the covering paper being prepared by officers. Our concerns are shared by many who supported the original Declaration in June 2019 and want to continue working with the Council to achieve a net zero carbon city.

Ruth Tetlow, Chair, Footsteps - Faiths for a Low Carbon Future

Chris Martin, Secretary, Footsteps & representing faith communities on R20 Taskforce

Rabbi Dr Margaret Jacobi on behalf of the Birmingham Faith Leaders' group

1 September 2020

