

## Written evidence from Sustrans

### About Sustrans

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

We are engineers and educators, experts and advocates who work in partnership, bringing people together to find the right solutions. We make the case for walking and cycling by using robust evidence and showing what can be done. We are grounded in communities and believe that grassroots support combined with political leadership drives real change, fast.

We are pleased to respond to the Environmental Audit Committee inquiry calling for evidence on how local government can support the path to net zero.

## What should local authorities' roles and responsibilities in reaching net zero by 2050 be? How clear are the expectations about the role of local authorities?

Local government has a critical role to play in ensuring that the UK reaches its 2050 net zero target.

Local public sector organisations typically have control over a significant amount of their own emissions as an organisation, with fleets, buildings, procurement chains and employees.

They also have the ability to create and encourage change across their area, by investing in schemes that facilitate and encourage their residents and local businesses to reduce their emissions.

Their role should include:

- Delivering ambitious walking and cycling schemes.
- Ensuring policy and investment in walking, cycling and public transport prioritises people who are disadvantaged or marginalised.
- Making 20-minute neighbourhoods a central principle in local planning, transport, health and economic policy so that people can access what they need within a 20-minute return walk.
- Bringing an end to new road building schemes.
- Reducing the greenhouse gases produced by vans and lorries.
- Following existing examples of good initiatives.
- Examining internal council changes available to reduce emissions and supporting local businesses to do the same.

We have previously detailed the aspects above in our response to the Housing Communities and Local Government's inquiry into local government and the path to net zero.

## What are the priorities for change or clarification to align the national planning framework with net zero?

Historically, the planning system at both a national and local level has been failing to create beautiful and vibrant neighbourhoods or communities, and at present it does little to support the Government's levelling-up agenda and provides a barrier to achieving net-zero.

Too many new developments are built in remote locations, or are designed in ways that lock people into car dependency and have little in the way of services and amenities within walking distance<sup>1 2</sup>.

They also fail to provide suitable walking and cycling infrastructure or link to existing local provision. Locking in car dependency is bad for our health, our communities and does not align with net-zero ambitions.

We have three core recommendations for reforming planning:

- Adopt the 20-Minute Neighbourhood concept as a central principle of the planning system, including both the National Planning Policy Framework and Local Plans.
- Produce updated planning guidance to create active neighbourhoods that prioritise walking, cycling and public transport and reduce demand for car use.
- Embed the National Cycle Network, which covers 12,496 miles across the UK and comes within 800 metres of a third of households, within the National Planning Policy Framework as a UK-wide network of national importance.

*Adopt the 20-Minute Neighbourhood concept as a central principle of the planning system, including both the National Planning Policy Framework and Local Plans.*

At a local level this can be realised by councils by:

- Joining up local transport and land use planning.
- Ensuring new developments are designed in ways that prevent people from being locked into car dependency and enable people to walk and cycle to access what they need.
- Prioritising community-led street design which allows for identification of the concerns and needs of the community on transport and accessibility, and the development of options for healthy streets which can be trialled and then consulted on. To truly meet the needs of the local community it is crucial that street design is genuinely community led, rather than treating the community as a consultee for plan options which have been drawn up.
- Embedding the National Cycle Network in Local Plans, ensuring new infrastructure is provided with new developments and links are provided to the existing infrastructure.

*Produce updated planning guidance to create active neighbourhoods that prioritise walking, cycling and public transport and reduce demand for car use.*

- Currently, Planning Practice Guidance does not adequately include guidance on the need to implement high quality cycling and walking infrastructure in new developments and should be reformed. There should be specific planning guidance on embedding walking and cycling infrastructure in new developments, to aid planners.
- This will complement the work of Active Travel England that will act as a statutory consultee within the planning system to press for adequate cycling and walking provision in developments over a certain threshold, and provide expert advice on ways in which such provision can be improved.

- We are also calling for planning guidance and other complementary documents to be revised and updated to ensure that the street layouts of new developments prioritise travel by walking, cycling and public transport, while at the same time reducing demand for car use.

*Embed the National Cycle Network within the National Planning Policy Framework as a UK-wide network of national importance.*

- The National Cycle Network should be embedded within the NPPF and updated planning guidance as a UK-wide network of national importance.
- The Network connects to every major town and city. It should be regarded as a national asset in the NPPF and should be referenced as something that new developments should connect people to. Local planning authorities should assist in the completion of the Network and key links to and from the Network through the mechanism of new development. Currently, the vast majority of new developments do not create convenient and safe links to existing routes which would enable more people to walk and cycle between and within settlements.

## What funding and resources are available for local authority work on net zero, and what are the priorities for improving local authority funding?

Local authorities have numerous funds available to work on net zero, however due to years of reduced funding to local authorities, they can lack the capacity and expertise required to produce bids and schemes that will help achieve the Government's targets. A gradual, but sustained, increase in funding and support from bodies such as Active Travel England will be required to boost this capacity.

Currently, many local and combined authorities have issues developing enough pipeline schemes to be able to bid for the increased levels of capital funding available. It also means that schemes are delivered which don't meet best practice guidelines and therefore don't effectively make it easier for more people to walk and cycle.

The priorities for improving local authority funding should include:

- Providing a long term funding plan – this will prevent a rush to plan and delivery of poor schemes, purely to meet sudden funding deadlines.
- A gradual but sustained increase in funding to build the staff resource, skills and knowledge to deliver high-quality schemes which meet the Government's targets.
- A mix of capital and revenue funding for active travel schemes. Sustrans recommends that initial funding should be split 70% capital 30% revenue, moving to 80/20 as infrastructure is delivered, with additional support for local authorities that require capacity building.

It is important when considering existing funding schemes that local authority leaders can see how schemes can deliver multiple benefits. Existing funding includes:

- The Levelling-Up Fund, which should be used to fund projects which are aligned to and support net zero goals. For example funding can be used to invest in new or existing cycling provision or improve public transport facilities.
- The Capability Fund enables local transport authorities to promote cycling and walking in their areas through the development of infrastructure plans and also carrying out behaviour change activities, such as training and promotion.
- The Towns Fund can be used to improve and develop local transport schemes, when thinking about net zero, this should prioritise active travel and public transport. The funding can also be used for place making, this is a critical part of improving the experience of walking and cycling and giving people somewhere local to walk and cycle to.
- The Active Travel Fund, supports local transport authorities with producing cycling and walking facilities.

## What should government's analysis of net zero funding to local authorities focus on in the next Spending Review?

There are several aspects to net zero funding that government analysis should consider:

- How funding can reduce inequity
- Balance in distribution of funds
- How funds can be used to plan for the longer term

### *How funding can reduce inequity*

- To ensure approaches to net-zero are supporting those most in need, all work should be required to be planned to address, and be evaluated against, how it reduces inequity for different communities.

### *Balance in distribution of funds.*

- It can be hard to find a balance between rewarding councils who have ambitious plans and supporting those who have a poor track record of delivery.
- But the pace of change shouldn't be set by the lowest common denominator. Indeed ambition should be supported in order to create exemplar places that demonstrate

the kinds of change possible in the UK context. This will require robust monitoring to evidence the impact of investment.

- Additional support is required for councils with a poorer track record through guidance and sharing best practice.

*How funds can be used to plan for the longer term.*

- One existing issue is the inconsistency and immediate demands of funding, which can prevent Authorities from feeling confident in being ambitious with their plans.
- To address this future capital funding needs to be clearly set-out over multi-year timescales. Local Authorities also need ring fenced revenue funding to ensure the capital funds can be spent effectively. Together these things will allow councils to deliver ambitious strategies with confidence that funding will not dry up.

## What role can local community groups play in helping local authorities achieve their net zero ambitions

It is essential in the creation and consultation of schemes to listen to all voices, not just the ones who shout the loudest.

This ensures that the whole community is behind the scheme. It's also essential to give schemes time to bed-in, whilst carefully monitoring their impacts in the immediate and surrounding area, making changes to improve them as necessary. Strong links with community groups can help to bring a wider range of voices to the process.

*August 2021*

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<sup>1</sup> [BBC News, 2018, Young couples "trapped in car dependency"](#)

<sup>2</sup> [BBC, 2020, New UK housing "dominated by roads"](#)