

At our first Citizens' Panel meeting in March 2023, the Panel had questions they wanted the West Midlands Combined Authority to answer. The answers to the questions can be seen below and any further questions can be sent to WMGreenerTogether@wmca.org.uk

Individual level:

1. What can we really do on a personal level and how do we know they will have a significant impact?

Our own personal actions can have a big impact on reducing carbon emissions. The House of Lords Climate Change Committee report estimates that 62% of the required emission reductions in the UK depend on changes to our behaviours. Many of the necessary technological changes needed to achieve net zero, such as the adoption of heat pumps and electric cars, rely on the willingness of the public to adopt those changes. Adoption of these new technologies would see a 53% reduction in carbon emissions, with a further 9% dependent upon lifestyle changes, including eating less red meat and dairy, and changes to how we travel¹.

If you'd like to find out more, you can read the full report 'In our hands: behaviour change for climate and environmental goals' by the Climate Change Committee here; [Environment and Climate Change Committee - Publications - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

Emissions:

General

2. What are this year's emissions?

The latest emission data from the UK Government is for 2022, which saw a fall in greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, largely due to a reduction in fuel use to heat buildings².

UK territorial greenhouse gas emissions, 1990-2022

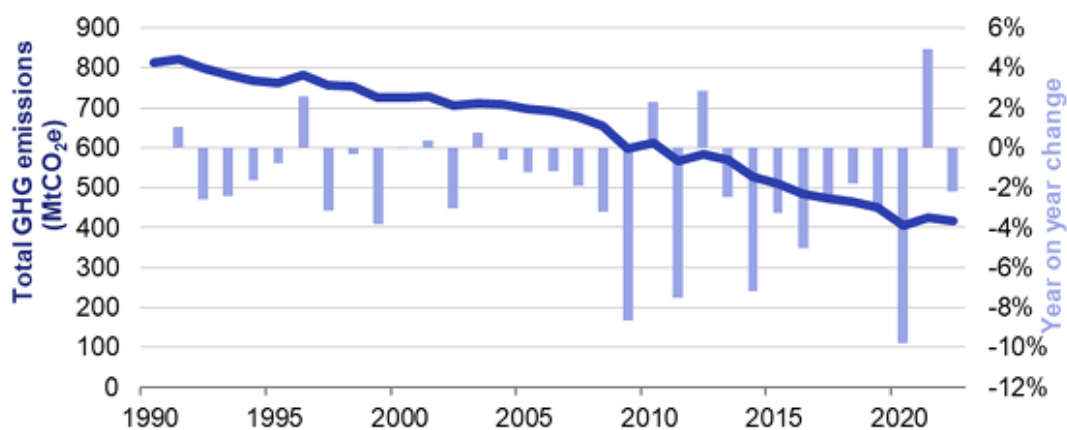


Figure 1: UK territorial greenhouse gas emissions, 1990-2022

¹ The Behavioural Insights Team, 2023. ["How to build a Net Zero society"](#).

² The Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, 2023. ["2022 UK greenhouse gas emissions, provisional figures"](#).

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in the UK are provisionally estimated to have decreased by 2.4% in 2022 from 2021 with total greenhouse gas emissions 48.7% lower than they were in 1990.

You can read the full report with all of the data for 2022 [here](#).

3. Can emissions be converted into anything useful?

Carbon emissions, particularly in the form of carbon dioxide (CO₂), are primarily produced through the burning of fossil fuels and other human activities. While it is not possible to directly convert carbon emissions into something useful in their emitted state, there are several approaches being explored to mitigate and utilise carbon emissions effectively. These approaches include:

- **Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS):** CCS technologies aim to capture CO₂ emissions from industrial processes or power generation and store them underground, preventing them from being released into the atmosphere. This technique helps reduce the overall carbon footprint by preventing CO₂ emissions from contributing to climate change.
- **Carbon Utilisation:** Carbon utilisation involves converting CO₂ into useful products or materials. Several innovative approaches are being researched, such as using captured CO₂ to produce chemicals, plastics, fuels, or building materials. These technologies aim to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and contribute to a more sustainable and circular economy³.
- **Carbon Sequestration:** This approach involves removing CO₂ from the atmosphere and storing it in natural or artificial sinks. Natural carbon sequestration occurs through activities like reforestation, where trees absorb CO₂. Artificial carbon sequestration involves techniques like direct air capture, which captures CO₂ from the air and stores it underground or converts it into usable products.
- **Carbon Offsetting:** Carbon offsetting involves investing in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere to compensate for your own emissions. These projects could include renewable energy initiatives, reforestation, restoring peat land or supporting sustainable practices in developing countries.

It's important to note that while these approaches are promising, they are not a complete solution to the challenges of climate change. The most effective strategy for combating climate change involves a combination of reducing carbon emissions at their source, transitioning to cleaner energy sources, and employing carbon capture and storage technologies to offset remaining emissions.

UK Specific:

4. We could have the chance to kickstart being green because we started the industrial revolution. Would we have the chance to start a green revolution?

The West Midlands was at the heart of the first industrial revolution. Coal and steam powered a global explosion in growth that underpinned advances in science, medicine, transport and food production. We now know that this was at a cost to our planet and the West Midlands Combined Authority believe that we can be the home to the Green Industrial Revolution. You can see the approach to leading this revolution

³ National Grid. [“What is carbon capture and storage”](#)

on our website here; <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment-and-energy/home-of-the-green-industrial-revolution/>

5. The UK is the 5th biggest emitter - it's a small country. Is that figure going to change?

Yes our emissions have changed over time, we have seen total greenhouse gas emissions 48.7% lower than they were in 1990. This is mainly due to a decline in the use of coal power stations and an increase in the use of gas, which has a lower carbon content⁴.

You can read the full report with all of the data for 2022 [here](#).

Comparison between countries:

6. How can we (proportionally) compare country to country?

There are many ways of comparing countries, including Gross Domestic Product, Human Development Index and poverty or inequality indicators such as the poverty rate of a country.

In terms of comparing countries carbon emissions, this can be done on a per capita bases allowing for an understanding of each country's contribution to global emissions relative to its population size. Countries can also be compared by the Environmental Performance Index which assess countries' environmental performance by considering air quality, biodiversity, water resources and climate mitigation efforts.

7. Given the rise in carbon dioxide due to industrialisation what are the statistics now – separately from other countries or per capita?

In 2020 global fossil CO₂ emissions decreased by 5.3% in comparison to 2019, mainly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in 2021, global emissions bounced back almost to the level of 2019, reaching 37.9 Gt, just 0.36% lower than in 2019, with the world getting back to pre-pandemic CO₂ emission levels.

You can find all emissions of each country within this European Commission report; https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2022

Green alternatives:

8. Electric bikes? – disabled people who need to drive – what's their 'green' alternative? Electric vehicles may be an option; however, a challenge may be plugging them in for those with mobility issues/disabilities. Also, electric cycles, such as trikes, adapted cycles with electric assist.

9. Are you aiming for a car free Birmingham?

Transport for West Midlands are developing a new Local Transport Plan which aims to reduce car dependence and encourage the use of public transport and active travel. The current Plan and plans for updating this can be found on our website here; <https://www.tfwm.org.uk/who-we-are/our-strategy/movement-for-growth-wmltp4/>

⁴ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2022. "[2020 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Final Figures](#)".

Birmingham City Council have their own local Transport Plan, created in 2021, which [can be viewed on their website](#).

- 10.** How close are we to 50% by 2030? – Active transport
Active transport: figure posted by government of 42/43% in 2018/2019, and Transport for West Midlands are aiming to have 46% active travel figures by 2025.

Housing:

- 11.** Is it just social housing that are supported with making their homes energy efficient? How will people who own their homes be entitled to support?

There are several funding sources available to local councils to support the decarbonisation of social housing. Here are some examples:

Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF): The UK government launched SHDF to provide funding specifically aimed at decarbonising social housing. The fund was established to help social landlords improve the energy efficiency of their housing stock, reduce carbon emissions, and lower energy bills for residents.

Energy Company Obligation (ECO): ECO is an obligation placed on larger energy suppliers in the UK to help improve the energy efficiency of homes. Local councils can work with energy suppliers to access ECO funding to retrofit social housing and make it more energy-efficient.

Local Authority Delivery (LAD) Scheme: The LAD scheme is part of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) program and is focused on supporting local authorities in delivering energy efficiency measures, including in social housing. It provides funding for insulation, heating upgrades, and other energy-saving measures.

For people who own their homes, support is limited but there are the following schemes available:

The Boiler Upgrade Scheme: provides grants to encourage property owners to install low carbon heating systems such as heat pumps. The scheme will be open from May 2022 to 2025 for homes in England and Wales and administered on a first come first serve basis.

You can find more information about the grants on [our website](#).

Green mortgages: There are several offers available for either rewarding you for living in an energy efficient home or those that reward you for carrying out 'green' home improvements. These offers differ depending on the lender but you can find more information on the [Money Saving Experts website](#).

The council

- 12.** Who's In charge of saying how they spend money at Council?

The responsibility for overseeing how money is spent in local authorities lies with the elected local government officials and the local council. Local authorities in the UK, are responsible for delivering a wide range of public services and managing local finances.

The local authority is typically led by an elected council, consisting of councillors who represent the interests of the local community. The council sets the budget and decides how funds are allocated across various services, including education, social services, housing, transportation, and infrastructure development.

The council's decision-making process involves consultations, debates, and votes among council members. They consider input from residents, local stakeholders, and government guidelines to make informed decisions on spending priorities and resource allocations within the local authority's jurisdiction.

There are also national laws, regulations, and guidelines set by the UK government that local authorities must adhere to in their financial management and spending decisions. These frameworks provide a level of oversight and ensure accountability in how public funds are used at the local level.

Like local authorities, the WMCA must adhere to national laws, regulations, and guidelines set by the UK government around financial management and spending decisions. This ensures that public money is spent legally and presents good value for money for taxpayers.

The WMCA Board approves the annual revenue budget prior to the start of the financial year. The draft budget is taken to WMCA Board in January with the final budget approved in February. This includes setting the Transport Levy and contributions from Member Councils and estimating income and expenditure for transport and operations for the year. The Board also agrees an annual programme of capital expenditure, together with proposals for financing that programme. Both the revenue and capital programme are closely linked to the WMCA's Annual Plan which outlines key activities to be delivered in the financial year to achieve the WMCA priorities.

The revenue and capital budgets are subject to review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure that they are robust. Consultation on the budget proposals is carried out with stakeholders, including with Member Councils.

The Mayor must set a budget for mayoral functions. The other members of the West Midlands Combined Authority can propose amendments to the Mayor's draft budget.

Throughout the financial year, WMCA Board receives regular financial monitoring reporting allowing it to see progress against the approved budget.

Citizen Panel process questions

13. How can you assure that this isn't a tick box exercise?

With the approval of the WMCA's Five Year Plan, funding was allocated from the to support the establishment of a Citizens' Panel. The aim of this was to bring ideas and input from a representative group of citizens, through a process of 'deliberative democracy, into the work of the environment and energy team. This could be through influencing policy, delivery or taking decisions on where budget might be allocated within the remit of the programme.

Establishing a Citizens' Panel is not a requirement for the WMCA, but there is a strong desire for citizens to feed into decisions we are taking which will impact the region.

All of the recommendations from the Panel will be presented to our Energy & Environment Board. The board is chaired by John Cotton, Leader of Birmingham City Council and each local authority has a councillor represented on the board. You can see who sits on the board here;

<https://governance.wmca.org.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=152>

- 14.** Will the same people in the group stay together in future sessions?
Yes each group will stay together in future sessions.

- 15.** If we have further thoughts after the session how should we get in touch?
If you have any questions after the session, please contact Involve UK at wmgreenertogether@involve.org.uk

- 16.** We only have dates for this year, what happens next year?

We will plan future dates in autumn of 2023 to ensure you have plenty of notice for sessions in 2024.

- 17.** What other decision events are our opinions part of (relating to the authority board)?

The West Midlands Combined Authority has many routes the public can influence our work, such as through public consultations and specific taskforces such as the Faith Strategic Partnership Group and the Race Equalities Taskforce.

With the Greener Together Citizens' Panel, the recommendations, and actions you collectively agree on within the Panel, will be taken to the Energy and Environment Board who are an advisory rather than a decision making board. On a case-by-case basis recommendations by the Panel may go to the Combined Authority Board.

- 18.** I work within the community. Is there scope to gather their views and bring them to sessions?

Yes – outside of this Panel we host a West Midlands Greener Together Quarterly Forum. The Forum brings together people and organisations from across our region committed to creating a sustainable and net zero carbon future for all of us.

The forum aims is to help us share knowledge and collaborate in support of the environment and anyone is able to join one of the Forums. Please do share the Forum around your community groups for them to join in with discussions and have their voice heard;

<https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment-and-energy/west-midlands-greener-together-forum/>