



# WMCA Net Zero Neighbourhoods Blog

## January 2025

### ***The Pillars of the NZN Approach***

#### ***Our five areas of delivery to achieve Net Zero at the Neighbourhood Scale***

In previous updates, we've shared the progress and activities of our programme. In this edition of the WMCA NZN Blog, we focus on the key areas of our decarbonisation efforts, explaining why these areas matter and how citizen engagement underpins our entire approach.

#### ***Pathways to Net Zero***

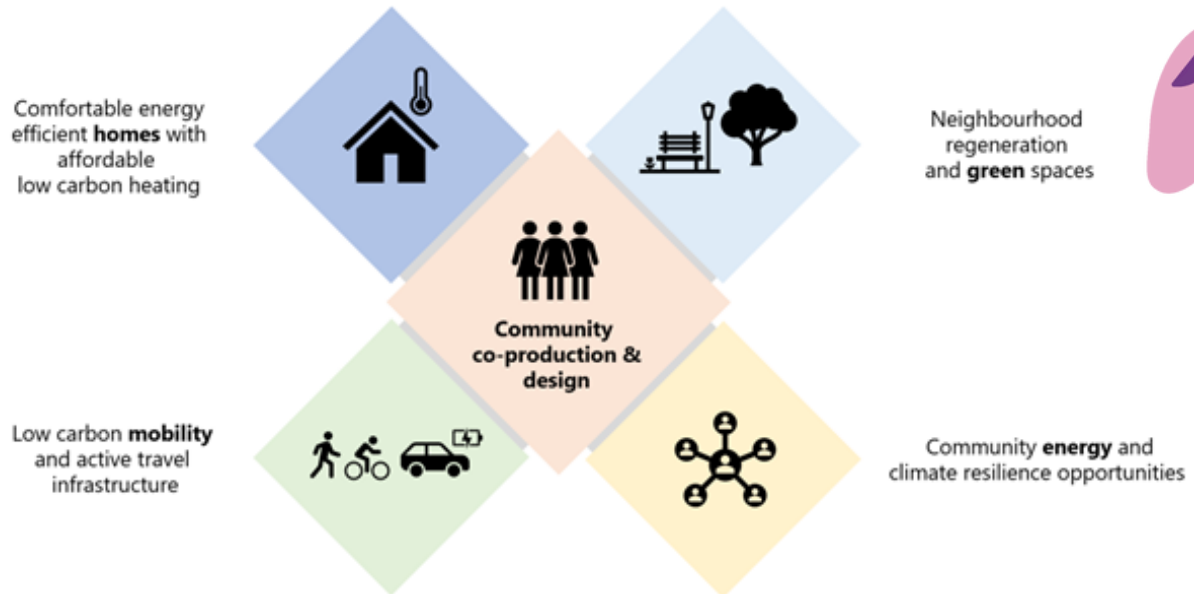
To achieve Net Zero at the neighbourhood level, we need to know what the emissions profile of our communities looks like. Nationally, over 20% of emissions come from domestic buildings, while 26% are attributed to transport. Without decarbonising these sectors, achieving Net Zero will remain out of reach.

In addition to reducing emissions, we can look to carbon sequestration and local electricity generation. Enhancing green spaces not only sequesters carbon but also provides health benefits for nearby residents. Similarly, generating electricity locally reduces reliance on the grid, helping to lower emissions while the wider energy network transitions to renewable sources. In addition to the carbon savings, this approach can also lower energy bills for residents, providing wider benefits to our places.

#### ***The Pillars***

Our programme is built around five key pillars:

1. Comfortable, energy-efficient homes with affordable low-carbon heating
2. Neighbourhood regeneration and green spaces
3. Low-carbon mobility and active travel infrastructure
4. Community energy and climate resilience opportunities
5. Community co-production and design



*\*The 5 pillars of the WMCA Net Zero Neighbourhood approach*

These pillars are intentionally centred around community co-production and design. While it might seem like engaging communities does not directly contribute to carbon reductions, it is the most important factor impacting the programme's success. Without community buy-in, decarbonisation efforts risk failure, and the benefits may not reach those who stand to gain the most.

Empowering communities to shape the decisions that affect their neighbourhoods fosters innovative solutions and ensures that outcomes align with local needs. Conversely, imposing solutions risks alienating residents, reducing engagement, and hindering lasting change. This is why community co-production and design are central to every aspect of our work.

By taking a place-based approach, the benefits compound, delivering better outcomes for residents and the places they live.

## Pillars in Practice

### **1. Comfortable, Energy-Efficient Homes with Affordable Low-Carbon Heating**

This pillar focuses on retrofitting homes to reduce energy demand, lower fuel bills, and cut carbon emissions by electrifying heat. This could be through individual heat pumps, or larger district heating solutions. Community involvement is essential, as we need the support of homeowners and tenants to carry out retrofits.

Designs must also reflect how people live in their homes to ensure they are effective and appropriate for the ways people live in their homes. Not only is each home different, but people live in their homes differently too. Each retrofit must be bespoke, taking these factors into account to ensure the best outcomes possible for the citizens of these neighbourhoods.



## **2. Neighbourhood Regeneration and Green Spaces**

Residents are best placed to identify opportunities for improving their local green spaces. This pillar will therefore be guided by community co-design. While the specific interventions will depend on engagement outcomes, we aim to secure funding to help residents implement the changes they envision.

Early engagement activities are already providing fantastic ideas from residents. These include turning small areas of unused, low quality and poorly maintained green spaces into pocket parks, to improve both the accessibility and quality of green spaces in the neighbourhood.

## **3. Low-Carbon Mobility and Active Travel Infrastructure**

Improving transport options also requires listening to residents. Their insights are crucial for identifying practical, meaningful improvements.

While implementing transport changes can be complex—requiring collaboration with local and regional transport teams—we are fortunate to work alongside great regional partners such as Local Authorities and TfWM, who share our goal of decarbonising transport for the region.

## **4. Community Energy and Climate Resilience Opportunities**


Community energy projects can range from installing solar panels on homes to creating self-sufficient microgrids. Regardless of complexity, these solutions rely on both the consent and active participation of residents. For example, a neighbourhood might seem ideal for a district heating system due to its proximity to a large anchor load.

However, without proper consultation, the project could face challenges, such as disruption to homes and streets or low resident participation. Co-designing these solutions ensures they are practical, accepted, and beneficial for the community.

## **A Pathway to a Sustainable Future**

While there is always more to do to support neighbourhood decarbonisation, we believe our five-pillar framework provides an equitable, sustainable, and holistic pathway to achieving Net Zero at the neighbourhood scale.

Thank you for staying with us to the end! In our next NZN blog, we'll explore how we are measuring and evidencing the benefits of place-based Net Zero projects.



*For more on West Midlands Net Zero Neighbourhoods, programme resources and materials visit our webpage*

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