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West Midlands Greener Together Citizens Panel

Launch Event 13 May 2023

PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF DECISION-MAKING
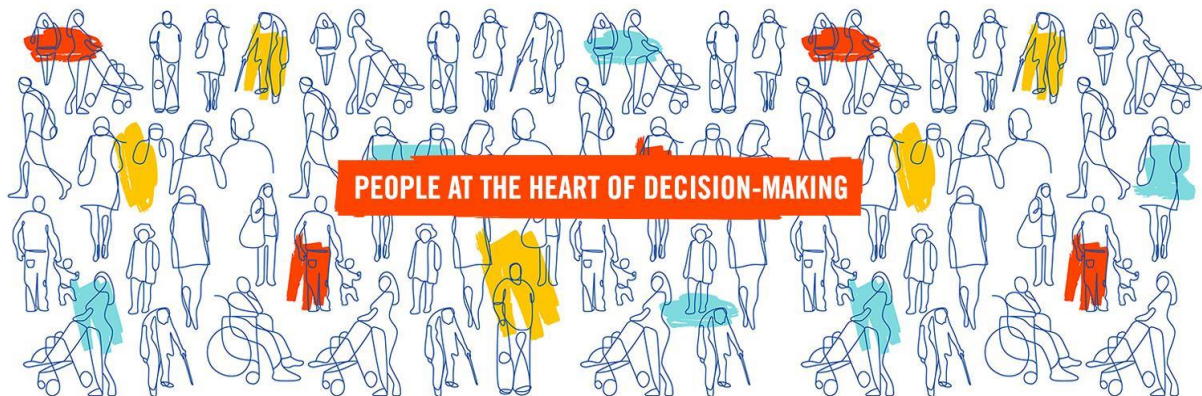
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01. A Greener West Midlands

Icebreaker: What would a greener West Midlands look and feel like

Summary of participant responses:

Participants felt that a greener West Midlands would mean better air quality, facilitated by efficient energy use and controls, improved and incentivised transport and waste management systems, a responsible and sustainable built environment, and access to protected green spaces to encourage empowered and connected communities. Transport should be climate efficient, ensuring climate friendly means of transport that are accessible, reliable and effective. Landlords should also be incentivised and monitored on green initiatives. Participants feel that in order to achieve these measures, Local Authorities would need to ensure an evidence-based approach and adequate funding.

Transport
- Make public transport more viable, more frequency and reliability, like transport for London i.e. one organisation
- Stop punishing motorists
- Why can't we have the integrated London model for public transport?
  - Some are aware of the travel app in Birmingham where they pay once and ride for 24 hours, but others are unaware of this
- Less cars on the road x2
- People encouraged to walk/more cycle paths
- Better transport accessibility and reliability
  - Older buses don't display stops making them harder to use
  - We need better knowledge of what bus routes are available so people can use them more
  - Bus timetabling not reliable
- Quicker to get around

Green space
- Access to safe green spaces
- Stop building on green spaces. Areas are turning into concrete spaces
- Focus on protecting all life in the environment
- More greenery - Bartley green is a good example
- Facilitated to grow own veg

Evidence based:
- Local Authority acting on data/impact report from NGOs

Community:
- People helping each other
- Places to connect and share
- Empowering people to create change

Good / fresh air quality x 2:
- There is noticeable air pollution
- Control on gases

Waste management needs updating (x2):
- Micro and macro environment. Micro Less trash/rubbish. Macro - debt collecting and council tax to pay for it
- Fly tipping issues
- Previously Aston used to collect big items at the corner of the street which encourages fly tipping, this penalises poor people (if you don't have a car, how do people take items to the tip?)
- You have to book a time for a visit to the tip
- The operation of waste management differs for each authority e.g. Birmingham and Dudley are very different
- More bins, less trash
- Bin threats – there aren't as many bins around anymore as the IRA used to place bombs into bins
- Have recycling bins next to general use litter bins
- Bring back rewards for recycling
- More incentives to recycle

Energy efficiency
- Following the German/Austrian model
- Localise renewable energy sources. Hard to find info on what options are available

Increased Prosperity x 2:
- Double the funding

Effective and sustainable built environment:
- Knock down old buildings/eyesores and build new ones
- More maintenance of infrastructure (roads etc are in disrepair)
- Longer lasting infrastructure
- Make whatever is done meaningful, and not just a tick box exercise
- There is lot of student accommodation that is vacant in the summer
- Incentives for landlords to make rental properties greener
- Landlords should be monitored on green initiatives
- Heating systems (in rentals) outdated
- Wolverhampton is quite good generally

What, if anything, do you notice about the environment day to day? / Are there things you especially value or things that get you down?

- Cars in the cycle path
- People don't take pride in the environment-fly tipping and rubbish on the streets
- Crime a drug use in children's play spaces
- Feels unsafe
- Air pollution
- Sky was blue during covid
- Extreme weather patterns

- Putting bags in the car to reuse when shopping
- Moving to online shopping to reduce car use
- Walking more
- Growing own food

02. Scene Setting - Reactions to the speakers

Summary of initial reactions to the speakers and the information shared:

Panel members talked about having a lack of trust towards those in power, including: that decision making tends to be profit driven; and that changes in political leadership every four years means that decisions aren't made through enough of a long-term lens; and that those in power need to take responsibility for the problem. Others were positive that the public can have an impact on decision making through, for example, boycotting certain products that are not environmentally responsible.

Many participants said they hadn't been aware of the scale of the UK's contribution to global climate emissions and some wondered if we could learn from other countries that don't emit as much.

In terms of introducing green initiatives, participants stressed the importance of considering individual and public needs and that any changes should consider affordability and accessibility. There was a general consensus that there is a need for more public education, information sharing and discussion on climate issues and initiatives.
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Answered in the session:
- Would like more information on the displacement of women and why they are disproportionately affected.
- Look at places in the world with less emissions - why? What do they do differently?

Individual level:
- What can we really do on a personal level?

Emissions:
- **General**
  - What are this year's emissions?
  - How do we know that our interventions will have a significant impact?
  - Can emissions be converted into anything useful?
- **UK Specific:**

- - 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 UK is the 5th biggest emitter - it's a small county. Is that figure going to change?
  - **Comparison between countries:**
    - How can we (proportionally) compare country to country?
    - Given the rise in carbon dioxide due to industrialisation what are the statistics now – separately from other countries or per capita?
    - What are the lower emitters doing differently?

Green Alternatives:
- Electric bikes? – disabled people who need to drive – what's their 'green' alternative?
- Are you aiming for a car free Birmingham?
- How close are we to 50% by 2030? – Active transport

Housing:
- Is it just social housing?
- How do you pick 1.1 million homes?
- How will people who own their homes be entitled to support?

The Council:
- Who's In charge of saying how they spend money at Council?

Main points participants took away from the presentation and the points of discussion that were raised:

Thoughts on the responsibility of business:
- Supermarkets meet up to monopolise the market price e.g. milk market pressures on dairy farmers
- Communication and money prevent adopting good models from abroad e.g. Sky digs up the road and then refill, then BT come and do the same
- Companies claim responsibility but it is lies, they just swap production from Bangladesh to the Philippines,
- Restrict imports

Thoughts on people in power:
- Money is power and influencers don't care
- We need people in power to lead by example
- People at the top are concerned about their reputation so boycotting products will make a difference
- Media is not supportive of green initiatives
- No political will to make good policy
- A lot of people in charge deny climate change and that influences ordinary people's perceptions
- These ideas need to be taken out of the hands of 4 year politicians

- Wars have an impact on environment-global issues

- Our production of weapons to sell have a negative impact

Thoughts on the capitalism / industrialism:
- Capitalism versus conscience

- Capitalism funds us all (until capitalism grows a conscience, decisions will be price-driven)
- Opinion: The rich don't care a lot about practising what they preach
- Opinion : Get rid of capitalism - but any replacement will still lead to corruption
- Seems like the UK started it - in relation to the industrial revolution
- Greed
- Profit driven

Need for more information / education:
- People need more education and to be better informed
- More information should be brought to the forefront so that people understand what is happening
- At school, climate change was only taught in science or geography
- Some felt educated by some of the facts they were seeing

Thoughts on culture:
- Concerns about Birmingham gentrification, more poor out for rich to make money
- The second speaker was very culture focused. Some found this presentation a bit frustrating. (Indication that some found it unrelatable to the West Midlands)

Thoughts on energy use/emissions / climate change:
- Lights at night – there are lots of offices with lights on at night when they are not being used
- No point in having an electric car as getting power from power plant down the road
- A lot of the problem is out of our reach
- We haven't built enough alternative infrastructure – there are no alternatives at a mass scale
- Making changes locally won't make a difference until everyone is involved
- When taking holidays into account, it's cheaper to travel overseas by air etc. Holidays in the UK are not affordable
- 60% claim electric cars target. There aren't enough charging ports to support this.
- Need to focus on climate change, rather than sustainability
- Need for cleaner energy sources
- Climate change leading to increased use of energy, neg. Impact on environment
- Comparison between countries
    - Our interventions led to climate change, we can make interventions to have a positive impact
    - Our impact - We are doing things that are supposed to have a positive impact, like planting more trees, whilst also cutting down rainforests
    - Guilt - we emit loads
    - We aren't actually the 5th largest emitter – need better evidence/data
    - Outsourcing to China for cheap labour increases China's emissions record. The UK exporting their CO2 emissions to power countries is wrong.
    - Consider other economies and their examples
    - Sweden – better infrastructure for better greener infrastructure – better prison system too

Affordability and financial support is important:
- Alternatives need to be more affordable
- The cost to change to electric cars is too dear
- Greener options are more expensive and not as accessible by everyone
- Lower income families need more support to make homes efficient

03. Discovery Session

- Participants enjoyed the discovery session, found it very enlightening and eye-opening
- Surprised by: beef emissions being dominated by methane compared to the low impact of transport; and amount of water needed to produce 1 T-shirt.

04. Co-Benefits & Disbenefits

What could the positive and negative impacts be of different actions ot otackcle the climate and environmental crisis?

Summary - Co-Benefits & Disbenefits

Participants expressed again the importance in considering the public's thoughts, feelings and individual needs when implementing green initiatives and that citizens panels could be a way to enable this. For example, considering mental health needs, disabilities and affordability. Participants considering the benefits and disbenefits on new homes also referred back to the need for more education and information on these issues, and for more Citizens Panel's to be in place to facilitate this.

Participant consideration of trade-offs began to come through in this session, such as:

- An increase in investment in one area may decrease investment in other areas.
- The potential for an increase in jobs and skill set was seen as a positive thing, however concern was expressed over potential job losses in other industries.
- The green initiatives discussed may lead to higher upfront costs, leading to higher taxes and could also have longer term maintenance costs. However, these initiatives could also lead to longer term cost and energy savings, as well as health benefits and community building.

Scenario 1: Energy Efficiency of Homes

ACTION 1: Demand that housing developers improve the energy efficiency of all new homes being built:

Pros
- Cutting down on emissions to heat the house – improving health and wellbeing
- Creates more local jobs

- Prioritises local people

Cons
- Insulation materials increase carbon-footprint
- Negative public reactions – fear of change
- Need to extend local infrastructure to compensate for the growth in new builds, e.g. new buildings need services (shops/medical, community spaces and services etc), infrastructure (roads, public transport etc). So these need to be considered
- Too much red-tape
- People have more immediate priorities like paying bills
- Politicians are afraid of public reactions, so don't support these initiatives
- There's a class divide

ACTION 2: Provide financial support and incentives for people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes so that those on the lowest incomes are not left behind

Pros
- Encourages more people to do it
- It's longer term – so it means lower outgoings and more disposable income
- Health and Wellbeing

Cons
- Need for clarity when advertising
- Not means tested

General comments about greener new homes:
- Need more citizens panels to help inform people
- Most people aren't educated on general life/home skills so don't know how to make homes greener etc
- The media portrays green initiatives negatively

Facilitator Comment: This was an excellent exercise on the tensions that a local authority faces. It would have been better placed with some context as it's a valuable exercise.

Scenario 2: Action to reduce emissions through planting trees and restoring landscapes

Action 1: Encourage and help communities to plant trees and re-wild areas of green space around urban and residential areas

Pros
- New animals
- Suggestion to give free trees via suppliers, for the community to plant
- Encourages the community needs to come together formally - with will
- A suggestion to have communal gardening equipment

- Raises awareness - e.g. the Woodland Trust projects fundraising for the future
- Coventry Temple Society plant 500 trees per year
- Public support to raise awareness and educate people
- Coventry in Bloom - the community plants 500 trees a year
- Bournville Village Trust – one fruit tree in every home

  → do you need an organisation with knowledge to lead these initiatives, or the community to lead them?

Cons
- Funding needs effort
- Motivation
    o You need the will to do something
    o You need the time to do something. E.g. after a day of work, the ublic might say, why is it down to me?
- Disagreements
- Politics
- Needs driving forward
- There's infrastructure to maintain
- Possible animals attracted i.e. spiders, frogs etc

Scenario 3: Homes

Pros

Action 1

- Energy efficient homes at inception
- Increased used of solar energy
- Installation of election car chargers

Action 2

- More insulation & less pollution has positive health & wellbeing impacts
- Lower bills, further helping lower income families
- Shutters and blinds to retain heat as well as keep homes cool
- More people living in efficient homes
- Less reliance on fossil fuels

Action 3

- Potential to create new jobs - good for the economy
- Improving skills and existing traders and builders

Cons

Action 1

- Cost of new homes higher due to tech innovation
- What about people with older homes?

Action 2

- Investment in this area will take ££ away from other essential public services
- Need more affordable solar panels
- Higher taxes to pay for tech innovations
- Fewer jobs for those in energy industries

Action 3

- Sending time on training might lead to 'cowboy' traders
- Experiences workers chosen over potential new workers

Scenario 4: Reduce Emissions

Action 1

Pros
- Fitter people, healthier
- Less emissions
- Positive impact on NHS (budget)
- Connection with others
- Mental and social wellbeing

Cons
- Someone with anxiety and depression, public transport has a negative impact
- People with disabilities have more challenges, reduced quality of life
- Public transport is unreliable
- The transport system isn't fit for everyone (disability)
- Too expensive - if you want everyone to use it, it should be cheap - £1.00, like european initiatives
- Should have electric school buses to avoid peaks of rush hour traffic and pollution

05. The Regional Picture

Summary - The Regional Picture

What do you like about the West Midlands?
Participants expressed that they like the diversity and culture, the amenities, the geography and location, the community spirit and the parks and green spaces of the West Midlands.

What would you change?
Participants would improve public services like transport, traffic management and waste management. They would change funding to be better allocated, and would like better education on green initiatives, more jobs to be available, more youth services and activities to be in place, and increased safety.

The people
- Salt of the earth people
- People speak their mind. What you see is what you get

The diversity, across the board - e.g.
- Culture
- People
- The difference from area to area and outlying areas
- Range of accents
- Musical diversity

The Amenities
- Comforts
- New look city centre
- Affordable housing
- The city of culture

Cultural dynamism
- Vibrant and artistic and cultural life - brings a lot of revenue
- Cities of culture not just Birmingham

Community Spirit
- Feels local/ community – much more than big cities

Geography / location
- Not as crowded as London
- Centre of England
- Easy to get around
- Central – good hub
- Easy to travel by rail
- Links to the NHS

Green spaces and parks
- 15 minutes to countryside/green areas

What would you change?

Green initiatives
- Education on green initiatives
- More inclusion programmes to help with going green
- Get people to talk about the ways in which actions to reduce our emissions can have trade-offs.
- Cheap clean energy – nuclear plant
- Would like more data on current projects
- Supply all houses with electric chargers and cheap energy
- Create electric school buses that cost £1 transportation

Safety
- Make safer areas and reduce crime

Waste management
- Lots of fly tipping and litter
- Fly tipping and rubbish around Villa Park Stadium (fridges left out on the street)
- Clean sewerage - It's pollution rivers

Transport / traffic management
- Public transport should be better x 2 - can wait for a bus for an hour
- Better traffic management x 2
- Trains to/from birmingham are overcrowded
    - Too much traffic
    - The number 11 bus route has been cut into four parts, why?
    - Less smelly / polluting buses
    - Extend the metro to wider Birmingham

Funding
- Rich/poor divide
- More funding to come in to develop/improve the area
- Need to ensure money's spent in the right areas
- Homeowners have to pay for solar panels - not everyone can afford this

Need more youth services / activities
- Needs more activities for young people x 2 (get bored)
- Need more free activities for children, especially during the school holidays
- Lack of activities for people with disabilities
- Have more free activities for children and low cost in Coventry
- Lack of venues for cultural events-sports, entertainment
- Not many attractive places to visit
- Hard socially if you don't make friends in school or university

Environment
- The green spaces should be better looked after and easier to access
- Cleaner streets

Employment
- Lack of jobs

M6
- 'De-smart' the M6

Public services
- Better health services
- More police on the street - why is there not a Minister for crime?

Leadership

- Change to better leadership x 2
- Get rid of corrupt officials

06. Reflections

Summary - Reflections

Participants again referred back to a recommendation to look at and learn from what works elsewhere. Some participants seemed to express a lack of trust in authority as before, and were concerned as to whether the recommendations from the Citizens Panel will be followed through.

In terms of content, some participants felt the day was too information-heavy and that the content could have had more structure; some by contrast felt it was quite a slow start. Panel members expressed that they felt the process was demographically representative and that there was a good reflection of people from different backgrounds in the room.

Some said they felt a sense of hope, that their awareness was raised and that they would like to know more on the subject area.

Do you have any outstanding questions about the process?

1. How can you assure that this isn't a tick box exercise?
2. Will the same people in the group stay together in future sessions?
3. If we have further thoughts after the session how should we get in touch?
4. We only have dates for this year, what happens next year?
5. What is the defined process of the assemblies?
6. What other decision events are our opinions part of (relating to the authority board)?
7. I work within the community. Is there scope to gather their views and bring them to sessions?

Do you have any reflections about today?

Pros:
- There were a good selection of people with varying experience
- The discussions were very eye-opening and it was good to look at things from other perspectives
- It was slow but positive
- How the WMCA work is good - it's relatable
- Have learnt a lot
- Feels like a good democratic process
- Feel hope for the future
- It stood out that somebody is thinking about the future of nature and our environment
- Awareness raised

Cons / Suggestions:

- There's no obligation from WMCA to do what we say
- Give the room a chance – some of the panel in the room were overly assertive
- Interesting but heavy, too much for one session
- Maybe good to have a bit of structure with sticking to the topic – people were straying off topic

Do you want to know anything specific about air quality?

- Would like to know more about how air quality effects human and animal health
- Regulation of vehicle emissions – see smoky vans when cycling
- Air quality test boxes - are there plans for them to be in urban/quieter areas?
- What incentives are there for reducing reliance on cars?
- More information about reduced speed on motor ways to improve air quality
- What is 'carbon capture'?

What do you hope the panel can achieve?

- How do we make them (councils/initiatives) accountable and how do we measure it in line with SMART concepts

07. Discussion - Questions and Thoughts

Summary - Reflections on the panel discussion

There seems to be a sense of frustration over the time it takes for change to happen and that these discussions aren't new. As previously in the day, panel members talked about: lacking trust in leaders to tackle the problem; the need to properly fund change; and potential cost implications for individuals which concerned them.

Questions asked throughout the day

1. What is the budget / how much are we spending on the green agenda / this programme?
2. What power/influence does the combined authority have over local councils?
3. Any thoughts about taking the buses back into public ownership/management?
4. The Midlands itself - struggles with how it's / how it needs to reinvent itself. How can we unlock the West Midlands real potential?
5. Is it free reign to spend that money, or is it dependent on whether the government in power changes?
6. Can we not be faster? We've been debating the climate issue for 30 years.

Find out more about our work: www.involve.org.uk/our-work/

Our values

- **Collaboration** – because change comes when broad coalitions of people work towards a common vision.
- **Equality** – because everyone in society has an equal right to be listened to and participate in decisions that affect their lives. No one should be held back by societal divisions or prejudice.
- **Purpose** – because participation must have an impact. We reject tokenistic or ineffectual engagement.