Tackling the Climate Emergency in Leicester

Summary of Public Consultation Findings

November 2023 - January 2024

Introduction

In 2019 the council declared a climate emergency. This was in response to the growing threat of climate change and the opportunity to improve life for people in the city by taking action to tackle it. We held a 'climate emergency conversation' to hear the views of the public and launched our first Climate Emergency Action Plan in 2020. We finished delivering that plan in 2023, having helped hundreds of households save energy, improved bus services, introduced electric buses, run environmental education activities for thousands of school pupils and much more.

In 2023 we published draft proposals for our second action plan and launched further public consultation through an online survey to inform its content and ongoing development. This report summarises what we asked, what people told us and what we're doing to respond.

We're grateful to everyone who took part in the survey. We have listened to those views and made changes to the draft plan, which are outlined in this report. We will continue to use the survey findings as we look to develop further actions which respond to what people told us.

How we consulted

The online consultation was open to individuals and organisations for a 12-week period from 7th November 2023 to 28th January 2024. The survey had two parts to it. One asked people about the draft action plan and the other asked about steps people and organisations had taken, or might consider taking, to help tackle climate change. People could choose to complete one or both parts of the survey. The table below shows how many filled out each part.

Total number of respondents		903
Individuals	Total number of individuals responding	850
	Completed survey on Draft Action Plan	515
	Completed survey on climate action	546
Organisations	Total number of organisations responding	53
	Completed survey on Draft Action Plan	30
	Completed survey on climate action	30

Where does climate change sit in people's priorities?

To help set the context for the rest of the survey responses, we first asked everyone to pick their top three priorities from a list of issues facing the city. This revealed that the cost of living and jobs are in the top three concerns for most people. However, the climate emergency is the top priority for a significant number too.

Figure 1: Responses to the question "What for you are the most important priorities for Leicester at the moment? Please pick your top three priorities."
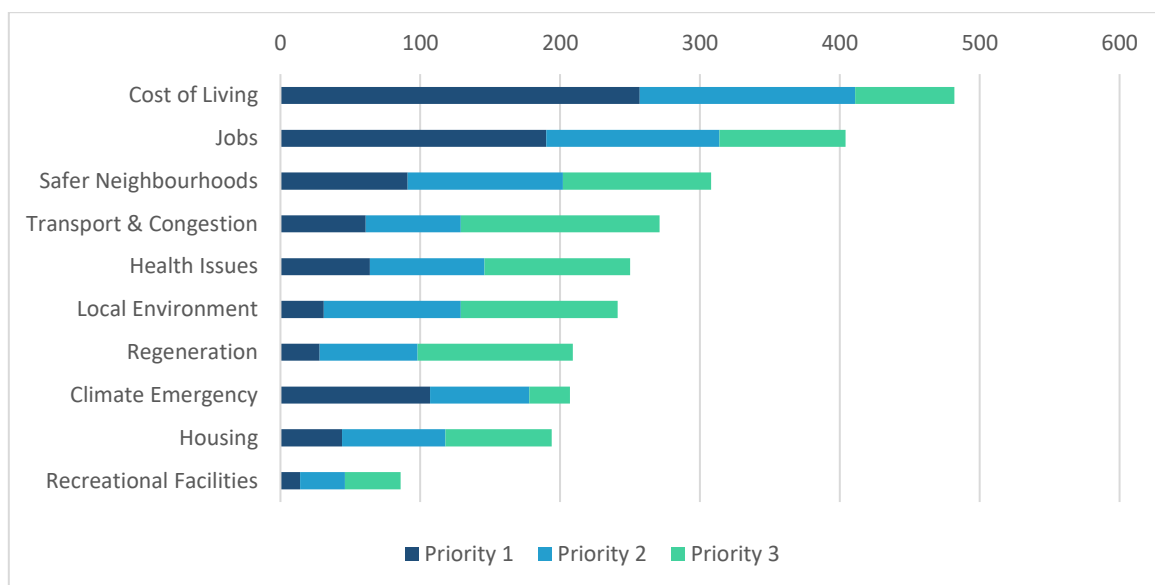
What people told us about the Draft Action Plan

### The issue of environmental charging of motorists

It is important to say at the outset that the survey results about the action plan were affected significantly by a single issue: concern about the possibility of the council introducing a Workplace Parking Levy or some form of road user charging. To be clear, we have no plans to introduce a Workplace Parking Levy or road user charging and there was never any intent in the plan to do so. This follows a public consultation during our previous action plan, which rejected proposals for a Workplace Parking Levy. To avoid any further misunderstanding, we have amended the action wording to remove any reference to a Workplace Parking Levy or road user charging.

However, the concern appears to have led to many people citing opposition to environmental charging of motorists as their reason for not supporting some or all of the aims and objectives, often irrespective of whether those had anything to do with transport. In other words, some people may have used the survey as an opportunity to make a protest about the idea of motorist charging and this reduced levels of agreement with all the aims and objectives of the plan. This needs to be borne in mind when reading the findings below.

Views on the aims and objectives

People were shown a summary of the proposed aims and objectives for the plan and asked whether they agreed with them. The graph below shows views on the five aims.

Figure 2: Responses to the question "Do you agree with the proposed aim?"
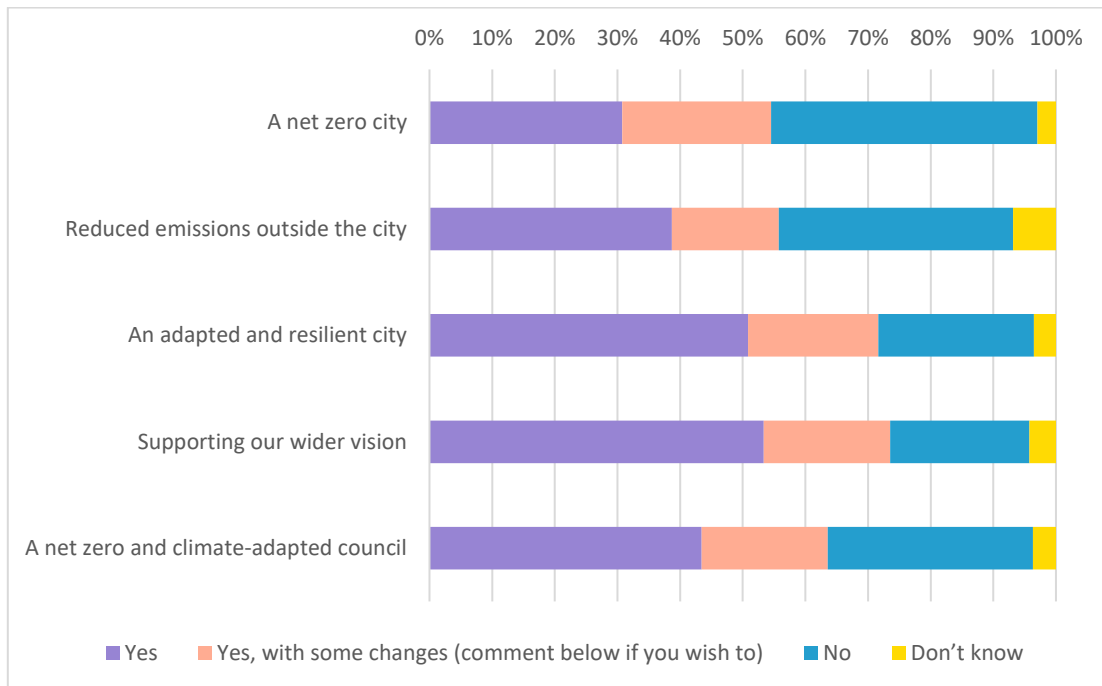
People were also given the opportunity to provide further comments, to suggest potential changes or raise any concerns about each aim.

Overall, and despite the impact of the motorist charging concerns on people's responses, the majority agreed with each of the proposed aims – either in their current form or with some changes. There was lower agreement with the net zero aim and the aim of trying to reduce emissions caused outside the city. Written comments suggest that, aside from motorist charging concerns, worries about the cost more generally to individuals was the main concern reducing levels of agreement.

We then asked whether people agreed with the proposed objectives. These set out more about how we are proposing to achieve the aims. People's responses gave us an insight into the areas of greatest agreement and those with more disagreement or concern. The main points from the responses to these questions were:

- All of the objectives had a majority of people in agreement, either with the wording as proposed or subject to some changes to respond to concerns.
- There was strong agreement with making buildings more energy efficient (85%), increasing local renewable energy (81%) and improving the electricity grid (71%). There was less agreement with introducing heat pumps (58%), increasing walking, cycling and public transport (53%), and moving to electric cars and vans (51%) – although still a majority in support. Written comments showed that the cost to individuals was again the main concern. Reliability of public transport, effectiveness of heat pumps and charging of electric vehicles were also raised.
- The majority (77%) supported the council looking at developing larger scale renewables, with some seeing it as a high priority and others less of priority.

- There was strong support (82%) for tackling waste. Some wanted to have food waste separately collected, which might indicate that not everyone is aware that food waste from the black wheelie bins is already separated for composting at the Ball Mill where the black bin waste is processed.
- There was also majority agreement with helping consumers (66%) and businesses (72%) to reduce the carbon footprint of what they buy, and the council doing the same – although there were a few concerns about the cost implications.
- All three objectives for climate adaptation were strongly supported (71-82%), particularly the use of 'nature-based solutions' such as trees, green roofs and green open spaces to prevent flooding and reduce overheating.

People were also invited to suggest their own ideas. Of those who did make suggestions, the most common were around measures to protect green spaces and plant more trees, as well as increasing the installation of renewables and helping people with the costs of taking action.
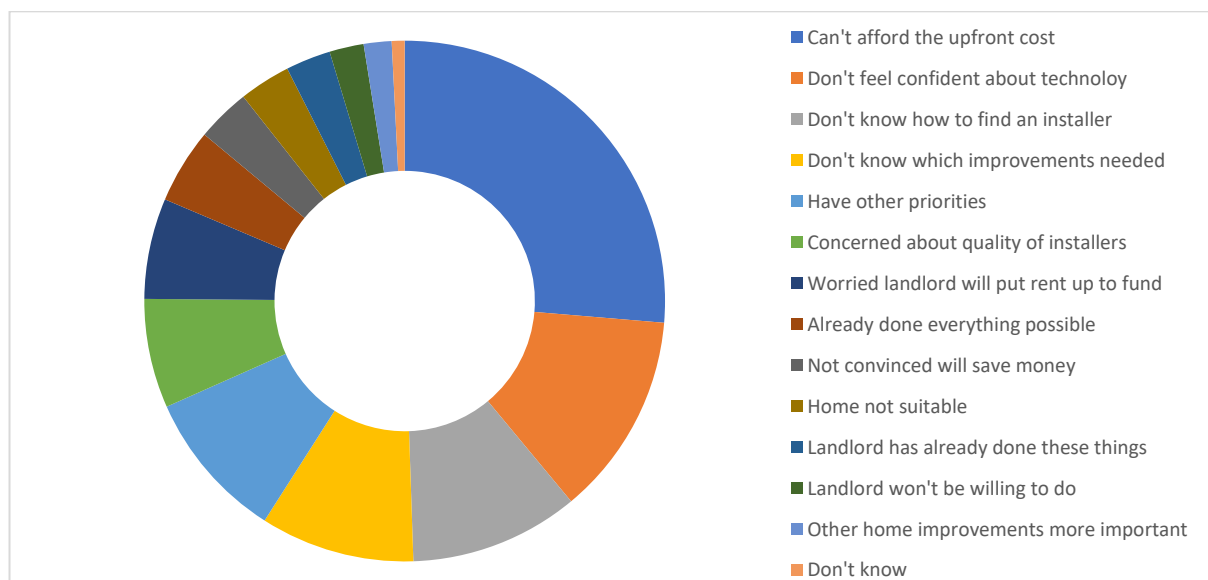
What people told us about 'doing their bit'

Home action

Most people had already taken steps to save energy and reduce carbon emissions at home, with LED lighting, double-glazing, heating controls, loft insulation and smart meters already in place in most homes. Renewable energy measures and alternatives to gas boilers are much less common however, with around a third either having or considering solar PVs and less than 20% having a heat pump or considering installing one.

The top reasons for introducing improvements were making homes warmer and more comfortable or reducing energy bills. Climate change and a healthier home were primary reasons for many too. As the chart below illustrates, the upfront cost and lack of confidence in, or knowledge of the technology and how to arrange installation were key reasons for not acting.

Figure 3: Reasons for not introducing energy saving measures at home

Legend:
- Can't afford the upfront cost
- Don't feel confident about technoloy
- Don't know how to find an installer
- Don't know which improvements needed
- Have other priorities
- Concerned about quality of installers
- Worried landlord will put rent up to fund
- Already done everything possible
- Not convinced will save money
- Home not suitable
- Landlord has already done these things
- Landlord won't be willing to do
- Other home improvements more important
- Don't know

Transport action

We asked about steps people had taken in their travel which could reduce their emissions. Around half told us they had used local facilities, walked instead of driving or used online services to avoid travelling. About a third had used other options such as trains or buses. Cycling, car sharing, park and ride or using an electric or hybrid vehicle were less common, and many said they were unlikely to do these things.

The main reasons for acting were improving personal health and tackling climate change, while reasons for not acting are summarised below.

Figure 4: Barriers to take-up of walking and cycling, bus travel and electric vehicles

	Top barrier	Other significant barriers
Walking and cycling	Journeys too long	Personal safety fears, risk of accidents, friends/family reliant for lifts, no access to a cycle, walking/cycling too slow.
Bus travel	Cost of fares	Friends/family reliant for lifts, disabled access, reliability, routes, times.
Electric vehicles	Purchase cost	Battery range, chargers (availability, speed), environmental impact of batteries, lack of second hand EVs.

Waste and consumer action

Participants were asked to select their priorities from a range of options for helping them reduce the climate impact of their waste and consumption. Collection of a wider range of materials in the kerbside recycling service was the most popular by a large margin, followed by improved support for both repairing and reusing items.

What organisations told us about taking action

The 30 organisations responding to the survey covered a wide range from small businesses and voluntary organisations to schools, universities, large businesses and public sector organisations. Overall, their responses confirmed that:

- Many are already being affected by climate change or expect to be affected in the near future. This includes the effects of storms or flooding, heatwaves or water shortages as well as customers' or funders' expectations to see action taken.
- Similarly, many are already taking action or are very likely to do so. This includes introducing a climate policy, implementing an action plan or assessing the risks it poses for their organisation.
- Most had taken steps to save energy and reduce carbon emissions from running their building. The up-front cost was the biggest barrier to doing more, followed by difficulty getting their landlord's approval.
- Slightly fewer had taken or were likely to take steps to reduce the carbon emissions from travel although IT was helping reduce travel for most. The costs of electric vehicles and EV chargers are seen as the biggest barrier, followed by lack of space and difficulty getting landlord approval.

How we are responding to the consultation results

Motorist environmental charging

The survey showed the prospect of charging to be a concern for many, and we have clarified earlier in this report, and in the action plan document itself, that we have no plans for a Workplace Parking Levy or road user charging.

People's immediate concerns and priorities

While climate change is the top priority for a significant number of people responding to the survey, the cost-of-living, jobs and other issues are top priorities for the majority. So, to command strong support, our plan needs to offer help with these other issues too.

Fortunately, action to tackle climate change can often help with issues such as energy and travel costs, a healthy living environment and so on. We have amended the plan to make clearer our intention to achieve these 'co-benefits' alongside reducing emissions. This includes a commitment to include actions which maximise the co-benefits and to measure and report on the co-benefits we achieve as well as the carbon emissions reductions.

Costs to individuals

While there was support for reducing carbon emissions and adapting to climate change, the possible cost to individuals of making changes came through time and again as the main concern in people's written comments. Although our approach has never been to impose change, and associated costs, on people we have changed the plan to make it clearer that our approach is to support people with any changes.

Specifically, we have included "A people-centred transition" as one of our five aims for achieving a Climate Ready Leicester. In the plan we explain that this means "making any changes affordable, fair and inclusive, ensuring that decarbonisation and adaptation benefits everyone and making sure that the need for change won't put an unfair burden on anyone".

We will work tirelessly to secure any available Government and other funding to help households and businesses with the costs of improvements. The plan includes actions to help households experiencing fuel poverty and we will add more actions of this kind where we can.

Other barriers stopping people doing more

Doubts over green technologies, lack of knowledge over what to do or how to find installers came through as other barriers, along with needing landlord permission. We will look at increasing what we're doing to get clear, reliable information out to people.

Further information

Our adopted Climate Ready Leicester Action Plan will be published on the Climate emergency page of our website. We will later publish annual progress reports and updates to the plan on the same page. A report on achievements from our first action plan is available there too.

Details of the full questionnaire survey results are available on request by emailing sustainability@leicester.gov.uk