

A Friends of the Earth Scotland Manifesto for Local Authorities



Who are Friends of the Earth Scotland?

Friends of the Earth Scotland exists to campaign, with partners here and across the globe, for a just transition to a sustainable society.

We work in Scotland for socially just solutions to environmental problems. We campaign to end environmental degradation and to create a green economy and a society which cherishes and protects the natural world. We think globally and act locally, enabling people to take individual and collective action.

We are Scotland's leading environmental campaigning organisation, an independent Scottish charity with a network of thousands of supporters and active local groups across Scotland. We are part of the largest grassroots environmental network in the world, uniting over 2 million supporters, 75 national member groups, and some 5,000 local activist groups – covering six continents.

Friends of the Earth Scotland's vision is of a world where everyone can enjoy a healthy environment without exceeding their fair share of the planet's resources, now and in the future.

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Local Authority Elections 2022

The 2022 Scottish Local Authority Elections are being contested against the backdrop of a climate and nature emergency. On top of the vital day-to-day services they control, councillors can take significant action to tackle the climate crisis. The councillors elected across Scotland in May will be in their position for five of the eight years left in this vital decade for urgent and transformative action to avert climate breakdown. Since the 2016 Local Authority Elections we have seen the effects of climate change already ravaging the world. We have also seen the world come together in our own Dear Green Place, Glasgow to attempt to address this emergency.

Unfortunately the outcomes of COP26 at Glasgow were not anywhere near commensurate with the reality of the crisis. However, all is not lost. **Many of the actions needed to respond to the climate emergency are in the hands of national and local governments.**

Despite not holding all the levers or powers needed to tackle this crisis local authorities can play a crucial role. Whether it's through how we travel in our communities, the way our waste is managed, how we heat our homes, climate friendly planning and energy policy, and supporting a wellbeing economy, there are significant opportunities for local authorities to demonstrate the ambition and urgency necessary.

This manifesto sets out some of the priorities for action that parties should champion in their manifestos, and the policies that should be taken to deliver them.

The policy areas examined are:



Economy

A Wellbeing
Economy

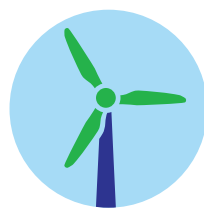
Circular
Economy



Divestment



A Just Transition



Energy

Net Zero
vs Real Zero

Public Energy

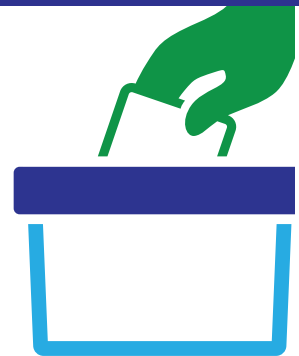
Housing
& Heating



Transport



Planning



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Economy

A Wellbeing Economy



The climate crisis is fuelled by a market-driven economy. As long as we continue with an economic model that places profit above all else we will continue to destroy the climate and we will continue to live with suffering at home and abroad. Friends of the Earth Scotland supports the principles of a wellbeing economy that places social and environmental goals at the centre of how we value our economy and society.

Scotland needs a bold re-design of our economy to deliver collective wellbeing within planetary boundaries. We must acknowledge that the purpose of the economy is to achieve goals which are not framed in economic terms like GDP, instead prioritising wellbeing for all within environmental limits.

This transformation will require setting and achieving specific objectives like decarbonisation, social equality and reducing our use of raw materials. Local authorities should take a whole-economy approach, ensuring there is consistency across all departments and responsibilities, not just the bits labelled 'environment' – the transformation needs to be fully embedded in economic strategy and policy.

To realise this change, local authorities should:

- > Ensure investment decisions are guided by the need for collective wellbeing and tackling the climate crisis, rather than market forces alone.
- > Assess all economic decision-making for their impacts on climate change, nature and equity with the voices of local people central to ensure benefits are widespread.
- > Look beyond GDP metrics when assessing and making decisions, prioritising the impact on the wellbeing of the public and the climate.





Economy

A Circular Economy

Creating a circular economy in Scotland is essential to meeting our climate targets. We must make more effort to reduce, reuse and recycle the materials which enter our economy. Limiting our consumption of material is beneficial for biodiversity and reducing pollution, as well as climate change. It will reduce the burden on other countries where materials are sourced – often through damaging and exploitive extraction activities like mining.

By keeping materials circulating in our economy for longer, the amount of waste that litters our streets and countryside, pollutes our waters and injures our wildlife will be reduced. It will also help end the environmental injustice of exporting waste products to other nations.

Moves from the Scottish Government, such as the upcoming Bottle Deposit Return Scheme are welcome steps towards a circular economy. However there are actions that can be taken by local authorities too. The first step is to measure the scale of the problem – local authorities should include waste emissions and Scope 3 emissions in their Public Bodies Climate Change Duties annual reports and the results should inform areas for prioritisation.

In addition to this high level reporting, Councils can take a more detailed review of their waste impacts using the Zero Waste Scotland Carbon Metric tool. This should inform any planned recycling improvements, particularly in relation to any application to the Zero Waste Scotland Recycling Improvement Fund. Textiles and food waste service improvements are likely to be important using such criteria.

Local authorities should adopt circular waste policies in local planning and waste management plans which focus on prevention, reuse and recycling, rather than disposal. This could include a commitment to introducing and supporting local reuse opportunities, such as refill stations and tool libraries. Public procurement should be linked to businesses that practice a circular economy model. Local authorities should consider how to adopt sustainable procurement practices across their remit, from social care to transport.

Friends of the Earth Scotland supports an exit strategy to incineration. Incineration stands in the way of creating a circular economy in Scotland. Local authorities are a vital stakeholder in the future of Scotland's waste management system. Local authorities should support the extension of the current moratorium into a ban on new incinerators across Scotland, as is currently planned in Wales. Friends of the Earth Scotland also calls on local authorities to plan for a phase out of existing incinerators with a date set in the near future.

A tax on incineration will mean an unnecessary cost will be passed on to local authorities. Instead, local authorities should support a ban on burning plastics. This would be quicker and more effective to implement. It would align with other policies, such as the Deposit Return Scheme and extended producer responsibility, creating an integrated system which minimises the use of plastic at every opportunity.

Where incineration contracts already exist, local authorities should commit to working with the Scottish Government to create a realistic and rapid pathway to limiting the role of incineration as much as possible, as quickly as possible, including an immediate ban on incinerators burning plastics.

Divestment from Fossil Fuels



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Local authorities across Scotland have £1.2 billion invested in fossil fuel companies through their pension schemes. Globally, fossil fuel companies are responsible for major human rights violations and the burning of fossil fuels is the main driver of the climate crisis.

Councils should make a public commitment to divest from fossil fuels and in their place increase investment in things that benefit communities, like social housing and renewable energy.

Councils may invest their pension funds in social housing, such as Glasgow’s Commonwealth Games village part-owned by the Strathclyde Pension Fund, or wind energy, like the Harburnhead wind farm, owned by the Falkirk and Lothian pension funds.

Local government pension funds like Islington in London, Cardiff and New York have begun divesting from fossil fuels as part of their efforts to steward pension funds and tackle the climate crisis. These local government pension funds are just some of the 1500 institutions around the world that have committed to divesting \$39.88 trillion. Scottish councils must follow suit and adopt an ethical approach to pension funds that does not continue to fuel the climate crisis.

For decades pension funds invested in fossil fuels due to their belief that it was the best way to maximise profits and returns for their pension holders. However new analysis has revealed that investment in fossil fuels is an increasingly risky bet. £194 million was wiped off Scottish council pension funds due to their oil and gas investments crashing over the past three years. Furthermore, a 2021 study by Carbon Tracker found that globally investors have lost US\$123 billion by betting on fossil fuel stocks in the last ten years while renewable energy investments gained US\$77 billion.

Friends of the Earth Scotland calls on all candidates to sign up to Divest Scotland’s Local Authorities Divestment Pledge:

“If elected, I pledge to support the council divesting its pension fund from fossil fuels and investing in renewables and the local economy over an appropriate time-scale. I promise to do everything in my power to make sure this happens within the first year of my term in office.”

To do so candidates should contact: mclarke@foe.scot or sclark@foe.scot

A Just Transition



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As all local authorities seek to reduce their emissions, ensuring a just transition for workers and communities is vital. A just transition, where risks from moving away from fossil fuels are managed and potential benefits captured, must involve local people in the decision-making process about how their area will look in the future.

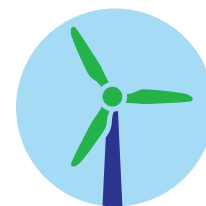
In delivering climate policies or other infrastructure projects, people should be given power to shape the direction and purpose of new investment and projects. In determining climate policies, just transition planning requires considerations of existing high-carbon employment, future employment opportunities and skills required, as well as how the transition can reduce existing social inequalities.

It is essential that our shift away from fossil fuels embeds workers and communities at the heart of decision-making in their areas, creating trust in the process and ensuring future projects are aligned with the needs and aspirations of local people. This cannot happen if the voices of industry representatives are allowed to dominate future policy making. This has been the case recently in Aberdeen where the local councils support for the Energy Transition Zone in Torry has faced widespread criticism from local residents who would lose their only local greenspace to the project. Torry residents are campaigning to prevent the site going ahead on St. Fittick's Park and instead to use available brownfield sites or existing industrial units nearby. Local people should have been included in the decision-making process far more, however business representatives from business group Opportunity North East were given the power to shape and push the proposal. Other local authorities across Scotland must not make the same mistakes.

Meanwhile we must recognise that the just transition is about more than high carbon jobs. We must reimagine the way we view and value work while supporting the cities and regions that will be most affected by the shift away from fossil fuels across Scotland. This means supporting high streets, community groups and removing inequalities across these communities. We call on local authorities to recognise a holistic approach to the just transition and work with the Scottish Government to classify care work, education and other roles as inherently green jobs. These sectors support the principles of the just transition, and improvements must be made to their pay, benefits and working conditions.



Energy



Many of the powers in relation to energy and oil and gas usage are held at Holyrood. Local authorities have limited powers in this area. Despite this there are numerous actions in relation to energy that local authorities can take to tackle the climate crisis.

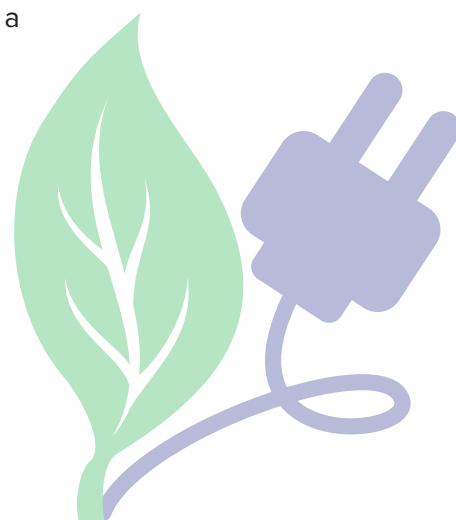
Such as:

- Requiring renewable energy such as solar, thermal, PV and heat pumps to be mandatory in local authority and private building developments.
- Supporting and promoting district heating, mapping out and developing district heating – so it comes from zero carbon sources.
- Switching street lighting to well-designed and well-directed LED lighting. LED lights are energy efficient and with appropriate dimming can help save energy and reduce light pollution. Solihull council in England currently has plans to replace all their 24,000 street lights with LED lights which is estimated to cut their energy costs in half and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 43%.
- Local authorities should take action to reduce their own emissions directly through energy efficiency on their own estate and adding renewable energy to their buildings. Local authorities should also aim to drive reductions in their areas through better public planning, public transport and local development.

Net Zero Vs Real Zero

It is important that local authorities acknowledge the difference between 'real zero' and 'net zero'. Net zero is about 'balancing' or cancelling out any carbon we produce. Real zero means taking responsibility for the greenhouse emissions you create and reducing these as much as possible. For example, choosing wind power to create electricity, rather than fossil fuels. 'Net zero' relies on offsetting and far off, fantasy techno-fixes. Offsetting is a risky distraction that fails to properly tackle the climate crisis locally and limits development globally. Offsetting schemes have been beset with scandals, and it is incredibly difficult to prove that they even work. By paying for projects to happen in other countries, often developing nations, offsetting schemes are often accused of being a new form of colonialism. This is because offsetting allows industrialised countries and big polluters to continue using the little remaining atmospheric space available, denying developing countries the right to use this to develop and bring their populations out of poverty. Offsetting schemes are also associated with serious human rights abuses of forest dwelling and Indigenous peoples.

Local authorities must not use 'offsetting' to achieve net-zero and should instead look to achieving 'real zero'.





Energy

Public Energy

We must transform our approach to energy production in order to make the energy system fairer and more democratic while tackling the climate emergency. By prioritising decent green jobs and affordable energy, public ownership in the energy sector can drive new renewable generation, cut bills, promote domestic supply chains and democratise the network.

Despite limited finances at a local authority level, there are positive examples in Scotland of local authorities who are creating a path towards greater public energy. In North Ayrshire, plans are in place to build three wind turbines and three photovoltaic solar farms. Once operational, these council-owned renewable energy sites are expected to generate 277% of the energy used by the Council while providing a surplus of £25m to be reinvested into the local area. This approach demonstrates the opportunity for local authorities to lead on new renewable energy generation in a way that retains economic benefits while cutting reliance on fossil fuels.

Housing & Heating

Heating and hot water in Scotland account for roughly 15% of all of Scotland's emissions. Emissions from housing and heating must be reduced if we are to meet our climate targets. However, as with the principles of a just transition, these emissions reductions must not harm those on low incomes or leave anyone behind. People in Scotland deserve warm homes that do not cost a fortune to run.

Where there are existing local incineration plants, plans to develop local heat networks should be paid for by the operators who promised to deliver them, not through public funding. The limited environmental benefits of such retro-fitting projects make them unsuitable candidates for public funds earmarked for climate mitigation.

Where such heat networks are planned, such as the Shawfair development in Midlothian, contractual obligations for households to pay for the heating network and how their bills could change in the future should be clear and transparent. Information should be provided on how heating will be provided to households connected to the heat network after the incineration plant stops operating.

To help tackle the climate crisis councils can:

- Enforce minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector. By enforcing energy efficiency across rental properties we can lower emissions while ensuring that peoples' homes are warm.
- Commit to greater energy efficiency of council property stock. Local Authorities are Scotland's largest single landlords. By improving energy efficiency and investing in housing stock local authorities can tackle emissions and ensure their properties are fit for years to come.
- Use their powers to ensure that any new developments are energy efficient and can be heated with renewable energy.
- Support households involved in district heating schemes to obtain clear and transparent contracts for supply and payment of heat.
- Introduce a moratorium on approvals of gas infrastructure in new housing schemes

Transport



Transport is Scotland's biggest source of climate emissions. We will be unable to meet our 75% reduction target without big changes to our transport system. Private car usage is a major driver of the climate crisis. Local authorities have significant powers and options to impact transport and there are numerous policies they could take forward that would help tackle the climate crisis.

Such as:

- The creation of comprehensive segregated cycle-lane networks across the whole local authority area.
- Using new powers in the Transport Act to take control of their local bus networks. For example through franchising and municipal ownership.
- A commitment to reduce traffic, including a robust planning system. For example, no more drive-thru coffee shops and limiting development without adequate public transportation links.
- Committing to the creation of new and expanded low emissions zones across their local authority areas.
- Support the introduction of 20mph speed limits across residential areas in Scotland.
- Introducing a workplace parking levy. Workplace parking levies have a track record of delivering significant changes to travel habits, bringing much needed investment to transport infrastructure, and creating healthier places to live and work. Nottingham's levy is one notable success. A WWF report found that in its first three years, the levy raised £25.3 million of revenue, all of which has funded improvements in the city's transport infrastructure, whilst contributing to a 33% fall in carbon emissions, and a modal shift which has seen public transport use rise to over 40%.

Planning



Planning issues have run throughout this manifesto, many of the policies outlined above can and should be achieved through the planning system. Local authorities have the ability to control planning in their area and should use planning to enforce environmental standards and protect greenspaces.

On top of the policies already outlined, Friends of the Earth Scotland believes local authorities should consider the following principles when considering planning and planning applications.

- Deepening democratic control over the ways places and communities change by ensuring greater public input into planning decisions.
- Fostering and valuing the contributions of citizen action and engagement, ensuring that people are listened to and not left feeling alienated and confused by allowing equal right of appeal and support for individuals' contributions and objections.
- Tackling the pressing crises of climate change and biodiversity through the various methods outlined in this document.
- Promote environmentally just outcomes.
- Put the needs of Scotland's diverse citizenship above private profits.
- Value and enhance the quality of the built and natural environment.
- Provide healthy and safe places for people to live.
- Introduce a moratorium on approvals of gas infrastructure in new housing schemes



Conclusion

This manifesto is a non-exhaustive list of some of the policies and priorities Friends of the Earth Scotland would like political parties to consider in their local authority manifestos and their elected councillors to take forward following the Local Authority election.

The longer we delay taking bold and radical action to address the climate crisis the worse it gets. All manifestos at every level of government must consider the twin climate and nature crises and how we can best tackle them.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues further or have any questions please contact:

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