City Manifesto 2015

friends of the earth Brighton & Hove
Brighton & Hove Friends of the Earth’s City Manifesto 2015

Brighton & Hove Friends of the Earth has produced this manifesto to encourage political parties to think about the long term impact of their policies and for the urgent need to address some serious issues, not just for the environment but for social and economic reasons too. The benefits of some actions are not always immediately obvious or can sometimes be dismissed with little thought or consideration.

This manifesto breaks down action under four headings: Biosphere, Housing, Transport and Waste and Resources. Action under these headings is not a luxury but essential to tackle the cost of living crisis, social inequality and environmental degradation. Taking action would boost residents’ quality of life, support the local economy, while reducing the long term costs of services but especially costs imposed upon the NHS.

As a priority, any new administration needs to prioritise:

1. Tackling air pollution and breaches of legal limits
2. Reducing the city’s carbon emissions to meet targets, which are currently being missed
3. Improve waste reduction and recycling
4. Deliver the Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Biosphere

The natural environment is not a luxury but a necessity that underpins everyone in society. We rely on clean air to breathe, water to drink and wash and the land and sea to provide food as well as the recreational opportunities. When we ignore our ‘biosphere’ we suffer the consequences, quite often having to pay to clear up the mess that’s been created. For example, air pollution is estimated to lead to the premature deaths of at least 115 people every year in the city and has a big impact on many other vulnerable people. There is a financial cost to the NHS too. We are also paying Southern Water to remove the pollution from our water supplies something that could be avoided in the longer term if we stopped putting so many chemicals on our land.
Air pollution
- Take urgent action to reduce air pollution by reducing traffic in the city centre (see transport section)
- Address the issues at the Clock Tower (the worst polluted area in the city)
- Explore opportunities for reducing the impact of freight vehicles such as establishing an urban consolidation centre and using low emission delivery vehicles within the city

Reducing carbon
- Address city’s failure to meet its carbon reduction targets by prioritising insulating homes on a large scale
- Support community renewables
- Promote and plan for district heating
- Roll out more solar panels on schools and council buildings and promote to other bodies too

Education & Research
- Increase awareness and understanding of the natural environment by continuing to support environmental education
- Support and work with the universities to become world leaders in environmental research and understanding on the back of the successful Biosphere bid
- Raise awareness of local producers and sustainable farming practices, including fishing and the benefits for the local economy and the environment

Local Economy
- Promote and purchase local goods and services, particularly those that have a lower environmental footprint and from companies that pay the living wage
- Promote and purchase Fairtrade products

New development
- Promote green roofs and walls
- Promote food growing
- Promote more car-free developments within the city centre

Biodiversity
- Deliver the Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- Plant more street trees – not a luxury but help clean up the air and offer shade in the summer to help maintain a more liveable environment as we get hotter summers
- Offer more and better support for the many volunteers who help maintain the city’s green spaces
Housing

Housing is a big issue for the city, as indeed it is for the whole of the UK, but especially the south east. It is unlikely that we can ever meet all our ‘need’ especially while London fails to provide enough housing. Nevertheless, great effort needs to be taken to do as much as possible and without causing irreversible damage. Therefore, we need to get more out of our brownfield sites, but care must be taken not to do this at the expense of losing employment land. It would be quite easy to build more housing on all our industrial estates, but we would then be left without land for jobs fuelling commuting out of the city.

Within the city

- Rather than look to the urban fringe, greater focus is needed to fit more housing into the city on brownfield land
- Explore opportunities to make better use of low density residential areas - this would also have added benefit of providing greater economic support for local shops and making services more viable in those communities

Toads Hole Valley

- Take a stronger line to maximise housing on the site while respecting the setting of the South Downs National Park
- Promote an exemplar or ground-breaking development which places the city on the map as a leader in the UK for sustainable development
- Ensure that a viable community is created within the site by developing a mix of housing types for all ages while also enhancing local amenities

Local affordable housing

- Where public land is deemed appropriate to develop, the priority should be to develop community led affordable housing rather than commercial development
Transport

Action is needed to better link up planning and transport to reduce the impact of cars on the city, to reduce air pollution and to reduce carbon emissions. It is also needed to encourage more people to walk and cycle which, apart from helping to reduce air pollution, helps improve physical and mental well-being which then has beneficial knock on impacts on the NHS and can help reduce the prevalence of obesity, diabetes and many other diseases. Recognition is also needed for how important buses are for the local economy. They are a more efficient way of moving large numbers of people around the city using far less road space per person than those travelling by private car.

Pedestrian priority

- Take action to reduce number of vehicles driving and parking on pavements
- Reduce street clutter such as A-boards & unnecessary signage
- Give pedestrians longer to cross (where needed) and reduce waiting times before signal goes red (on Pelican / Toucan crossings).

Cycle network and danger reduction

- Develop a proper cycle network, increasing the number of connected cycle lanes and designated routes, including making more one-way streets two-way for cyclists, to allow cyclists to safely move around the whole of the city – not just a few key arteries
- Substantially increase the amount of cycle parking being installed

Bus priority and improved waiting areas

- Initiate a full review of the bus network to identify capacity constraints and delays with a view to reducing journey times to provide more reliable services and to reduce costs
- Seek radical improvement to the waiting environment for bus passengers, particularly at the busiest bus interchanges where standard bus shelters are unfit for purpose
Rail

- Support the restoration of the Lewes to Uckfield line
- Lobby for a railway service that operates 7 days a week (without continuously closing lines at weekends and on bank holidays for engineering works) to serve Brighton & Hove as a top tourist destination, not just as another commuter town

Improving links to green space and National Park

- Seek green infrastructure funding from Department for Transport/Highways England to address connectivity issues to National Park at Ditchling Road and Dyke Road in particular

Car parking

- Reduce car parking spaces in the city centre to reduce number of cars entering the city and resist calls for free car parking which will undermine bus services and increase pollution, particularly on Sundays when the economic viability of buses is weaker
- Any park & ride sites should avoid impacting upon the National Park and be matched by a commensurate reduction in car parking spaces in the city centre to reduce congestion there

Support specific infrastructure improvements

- Clock Tower – remove private vehicles to make the top of West Street like New Road and improve the environment for pedestrians while reducing delays to buses and taxis both in North St and from the station.
- Valley Gardens – this is currently like a black hole in the centre of Brighton. It is bad for pedestrians, cyclists and buses, while the open space is little used and surrounding businesses struggle in a poor environment
Waste and Resources

The city has a very poor record on recycling that stretches back for many years and is exacerbated by the 30 year contract to incinerate most of the city’s domestic waste. However, much could still be done to reduce waste, encourage greater repair and re-use and to recycle more. This could help reduce transport emissions and the destruction of habitats elsewhere in the world. It can also help reinforce the local economy. The city has internationally recognised expertise in waste prevention which the council needs to make better use of by working more in partnership to improve things.

- Work with cross sector experts in the city to attract funding to provide infrastructure and education to increase reuse and other waste prevention facilities and measures
- Encourage community led recycling and reuse programmes
- Start collecting food waste – actively seek funds to provide infrastructure for food waste collections and local processing
- Develop a plan to ban single-use plastic bags and polystyrene across the city (as done in many cities around the world). This also decreases seaside and countryside litter levels
- Increase targets and standardise recycling and food waste collections at city events and encourage reuse where possible (e.g. marathon blankets).
- Increase garden waste composting
- Introduce a unified system of on-street and seaside recycling receptacles – especially relevant for the 8 million visitors to the city who currently contribute significantly to our ‘litter’ problem because of lack of convenient, user-friendly recycling facilities
- Resolve the decades old issues that lead to industrial action by our city waste workers, thereby improving the reliability, respect and quality of household refuse and recycling collections
- Ensure trade recycling and reuse facilities and services are increased to reduce the distance traders have to travel to dispose of their waste and to increase recycling rates
- Increase the hours that recycling centres are open and standardise their opening hours across the wider area to make it easier for people to recycle.