

Citizens' Engagement and Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028

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1. Introduction

Nottingham's Carbon Neutral 2028 Plan

Climate change has become a social issue of great concern globally (Dziminska et al., 2021; Hornsey, 2021; Alberro, 2020). Such changes in global temperatures are part of the wider environmental crisis that has seen mass social action take place across the world in recent years (Arya and Henn, 2021; Pickard et al., 2020).

In addressing these global issues at a local level, Nottingham has been reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions for well over a decade. However, Nottingham City Council (NCC) recognises that large scale changes still need to be made - globally, nationally and locally - in order to address these potentially devastating consequences for humanity.

This report outlines research funded by Nottingham Trent University (NTU). It was carried out as part of a collaborative project between a team of researchers at NTU and officers from NCC. The research is part of a co-designed impact-led project aimed at contributing to the shaping of *Nottingham's Carbon Neutral 2028 Charter* and its associated [Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028 Action Plan](#) (CN28) which is led by NCC. This particular report presents an analysis of the findings from the first stage of this research project, and aims to increase public engagement with CN28, by:

- (1) investigating public awareness of CN28;
- (2) testing ideas designed to change residents' environmental behaviours to more closely align with CN28.

This report outlines findings gleaned from research carried out with Nottingham residents in May 2021 and presents recommendations for NCC in terms of how to move forward with their plans for further public engagement on CN28 as outlined in the CN28 action plan.

2. Methods

2.1 Recruitment

Recruitment of Nottingham residents was carried out by NCC's Engagement and Participation team working with their division of Carbon Reduction, Energy and

Sustainability. Most residents heard about the opportunity from the following recruitment channels:

- NCC's *My Nottingham* Newsletter which is emailed out to residents
- Eventbrite
- Social media channels e.g., Facebook, Twitter
- Local activist groups
- Word of mouth

As this research project was carried out during the 2021 COVID-19 pandemic, there were restrictions around the ways in which recruitment could be carried out. Under normal circumstances recruitment would also have been carried out face-to-face at local community groups and spaces and places where residents who might not be able to engage with online platforms could also hear about the opportunity. In future, next phases of the research could involve further engagement with community groups not engaged online as well as those who have a pre-existing interest in local environmental issues.

2.2 Data collection

The methods for this research project involved qualitative fieldwork in the form of focus groups. A specialist research assistant with experience in conducting research into people's environmental attitudes and behaviours ran the focus groups. The focus groups were conducted using an online video conferencing platform (Microsoft Teams) in line with ethical considerations due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its related social distancing restrictions. Participants were asked to complete consent forms and were given detailed information about the project ahead of the focus groups.

Participants were able to engage in discussions in a variety of ways. Most participants had their cameras and microphones turned on and others engaged via the online chat function. This meant that participants were able to engage in ways that suited their needs the most. Once the focus groups were completed, the saved chat and recorded discussions were transcribed, and the video files subsequently deleted. The data were analysed, and findings are outlined below.

2.3 Participant breakdown

The focus group participants were all Nottingham residents. They came from a wide range of backgrounds and from various sectors such as education, research, health policy and business. Amongst the attendees, there were retired community members who had lived in Nottingham for decades as well as younger residents – some of whom were newcomers to the city. Whilst the age and ethnicity profiles of the research participants were relatively broad, it should be noted that the voices of some were under-represented - particularly those from lower socio-economic groups. On the whole, most residents who attended the focus groups had a pre-existing interest in environmental issues, and in some cases were already taking conscious steps to engage in environmentally sustainable behaviours - either individually or as members of groups.

Overall, 31 people attended four focus groups. The demographic breakdown of the residents who attended the focus groups was:

Gender

- 16 male residents
- 15 female residents

Age

- 5 – 65+
- 9 – 55-64
- 3 – 45-54
- 7 – 35-44
- 7 – 25-34

Ethnicity

- 20 -White British
- 6 - White Other
- 4 - Asian/Asian British
- 1 - Mixed

Postcode (NG)¹

- 1 - NG1 (Nottingham city centre)

¹ Participants were recruited from a wide variety of Nottingham postcode areas, reflecting a broad socio-demographic mix, and including inner-city and outer-city areas.

- 6 - NG2 (Nottingham city centre, Colwick Park, Sneinton, The Meadows, West Bridgford)
- 2 - NG3 (Carlton, Sneinton, St Ann's, Mapperley)
- 1 - NG4 (Gedling Village, Netherfield, Carlton, Colwick)
- 8 - NG5 (Sherwood, Arnold, Bestwood, Carrington, Top Valley, Rise Park)
- 5 - NG7 (New Basford, Forest Fields, Hyson Green, Radford, Lenton)
- 4 - NG8 (Aspley, Wollaton, Whitemoor, Bilborough, Strelley)
- 2 - NG9 (Beeston, Stapleford, Lenton Abbey, Chilwell, Trowell, Bramcote)
- 1 - NG11 (Clifton, Ruddington, Gotham, Kingston on Soar)
- 1 - NG14 (Calverton, Lowdham, Burton Joyce, Gunthorpe)

Education

- 5 were in full time education (higher education)

Employment status

- Most residents were in full-time or part time employment
- 2 residents were self-employed
- 1 resident was unemployed
- 6 residents were retired

2.4 Participants' reasons for taking part

Findings from the focus group discussions revealed that:

- there was a strong sense that residents wanted to contribute locally to the issue of climate change;
- there was a sense of community amongst residents, including those who were either newcomers to, or had grown up or spent decades in, Nottingham;
- residents tended to want to support the ambitious targets for CN28;
- there was a general interest in environmental issues and the majority of residents indicated that they would like to learn more about how to support local climate issues and to be a part of CN28;
- residents tended to want to share their knowledge and experience in the plans for CN28, both from a personal and professional position;
- overall, residents wanted to have their voices heard with respect to CN28.

3. Findings

3.1 Concern about climate change

Residents experienced a range of concerns about climate change at local, national and global levels. The following summarise the various concerns and issues that they raised:

- generally, residents raised concerns over how animals and wildlife are being affected by climate change;
- some residents pointed to the issue of avarice and profiteering as a barrier to addressing the climate crisis;
- a small number of residents vocalised that people in society at large are unaware of climate change issues and needed to be engaged more actively by the government;
- some residents spoke about their fears and “dread” concerning the consequences of climate change, such as coastal erosion and extreme weather. There was a strong sense that the climate emergency should be viewed as a threat to both human and non-human life (e.g. floods destroying homes as well as natural habitats);
- some residents spoke about the lack of information available to wider society - particularly from the media - regarding the effects of climate change;
- residents tended to have concerns with respect to what they considered as insufficient levels of individual environmental behaviour changes, particularly around recycling and meat consumption;
- residents generally considered that there was a need for NCC to create more incentives for individual environmental behaviour changes;
- residents often raised concerns about air pollution caused by transport levels;
- a small number of the participants raised concerns about the lack of focus on policy making at both local and national levels to tackle climate change;
- many residents spoke about their concerns for future generations globally and how climate change will impact their lives;
- there was a general sense of frustration amongst residents that there is a lack of urgency and insufficient action taken by the UK Government on climate change;
- overall, residents were concerned about the global impact of climate change, and that it was not only a local matter;
- a small number of residents felt that there needed to be more understanding and recognition across society that the climate crisis was not only a white middle class issue.

3.2 Taking action on climate change

All the residents were already taking conscious actions to support reducing their carbon footprint. The following list provides an overview of the array of activities that residents participate in individually and collectively to take action on climate change.

- Re-using and recycling plastic
- Not buying from supermarkets where possible
- Removing the plastic packaging from food at the supermarket till and leaving it at the till
- Composting and rewilding/gardening/growing fruit and veg
- Making their gardens more wildlife friendly
- Planting trees
- Reducing meat consumption or going vegetarian or vegan
- Using public transport as much as, or where, possible
- Cycling and walking where possible
- Desire to use electric cars
- Up-cycling and recycling
- Repairing household items rather than buying new
- Donating to environmental causes
- Some residents spoke about their membership of, and /or participation in, environmental groups such as Greenpeace
- Often residents would use the focus group space to share information about activities, organisations, and ways in which to engage in individual and collective actions locally to tackle climate change issues.
- Residents tended to express frustration at businesses and in particular supermarkets for not creating better ways for consumers to make ethical choices, such as getting money back for returning packing instore.
- Residents tended to want to see supermarkets act more ethically and use less plastic packaging.
- Residents tended to emphasise the key barriers to action on climate change as individuals, especially the affordability of many environmentally sustainable goods and services.
- Often residents who were unable to engage in ethical consumerism would recognise that there were socio-economic barriers to their choices. An example of this was buying electric cars.
- There was a general sense that residents wanted to see more punitive measures and better enforcement of laws against environmental pollution for individuals and businesses.

Participants cited several factors that had encouraged them to change their behaviours and to act on climate change.

- Some of the residents pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic and its related restrictions having instigated some of their behavioural changes. Examples of this have been growing food at home and using less public transport.
- Residents tended to point to information that they had come across and which had prompted their behavioural changes, including via the media, or by doing their own research online or through their places of work.
- Often residents mentioned discussions with family, friends and colleagues which had served as drivers to make changes and to act on climate change issues.
- Residents tended to speak about documentaries that they had watched or books that they had read which had made an impact on their behaviour.

3.3 National and local solutions to the climate change

3.3.1 Who is responsible?

Residents spoke about a range of topics linked to solutions to climate change. The discussion started firstly by exploring whose responsibility it is to act on climate change. The conversation then moved on to look at the role of national and then local government as well as Nottingham's plans to become carbon neutral by 2028.

- On the whole residents felt that it was everyone's responsibility to engage in the solutions towards climate change.
- However, many acknowledged that there are groups who are more responsible and have more power to enact such solutions.
- Often, residents felt that despite the culpability of the fossil fuel industry and of past and present governments globally in causing climate change, it was up to everyone to contribute to the solutions.
- Generally, residents felt that individuals had a big part to play addressing climate change issues.
- Other residents felt that individuals would not be able to make large-scale changes without appropriate policies and initiatives led by governments and corporations.
- Often, residents pointed to the inequalities that exist in creating the conditions for people to engage in actions to find solutions to climate change.

- Some residents commented on the detrimental effect of the media on sharing information about climate change and the impact this has on action by groups, individuals, and government.
- Residents tended to recognise that solutions needed to take into consideration the more vulnerable members of society.

3.3.2 UK Government policies to tackle climate change

Generally, the focus group participants were not confident in the way in which government policies are geared towards tackling climate change. There was a sense amongst many residents that much more needs to be done to make positive change through national policies and central UK Government. At times there was a lack of certainty around what the UK Government is doing to tackle climate change.

- Some residents pointed to the responsibility that central UK Government need to take in tackling climate change.
- Often residents pointed to the lack of trust in UK Government policies to address climate change.
- Residents tended to want to see more consistent UK Government policy-making that supports the actions of individuals.
- Some residents recognised that the UK Government's efforts to solve climate change were linked with market forces and that there is a relationship between individuals, companies, and the government. A small number pointed to neoliberal policy-making that created barriers to government being able to make positive changes to tackle climate change.
- Residents had mixed views about the role of central UK Government in local political activities in Nottingham. Often, they wanted NCC to have more autonomy over the decisions made for local people on issues concerning climate change.
- Many residents were sceptical of the UK Government plans to tackle climate change - with some pointing to the restrictions on local policy making by central government.
- Residents tended to feel that the central UK Government could do much more to tackle climate change, exemplified by how far-reaching policies were put in place during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic.
- A small number of residents shared a more policy-focused perspective on the solutions being discussed. Like others, they felt that the marginalisation of vulnerable populations - locally, nationally and globally - work against the advancement of solutions to the climate crisis.
- A small number of residents wanted to see the UK Government do more to protect trees and natural habitats.

3.3.3 Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028

On the whole residents did not feel that they could speak with confidence about CN28. There was a lack of knowledge on the plans, yet many who attended the focus groups expressed a strong desire to find out more and importantly, to be kept *involved*² in the plans going forward.

- Many residents felt that CN28 was very ambitious and despite some scepticism felt that the plans were positive.
- Generally, residents did not feel like they knew enough about CN28.
- There seemed to be a sense from residents that there was some tokenistic consultation on CN28 and that this needed to be improved.
- Many residents wanted to see more consultation and information shared with the community about the plans and that this information needed to be made available in more accessible formats (including offline, such as hardcopy information in the post as well as online in the form of e-newsletters) and also provided in different languages.
- The sense from residents overall was that they wanted to move beyond consultation and that the NCC should actively include residents in the decision-making process.
- There was a strong desire from residents that the council engage with the local community as an 'asset' that would benefit the further development of the CN28 delivery plans.
- Some residents felt that NCC needed to engage more with the community to ensure that lesser heard voices (such as young people, older citizens and also 'excluded groups') were included in CN28 consultations.
- There seemed to be a very positive view of engaging residents as volunteers in the plans for CN28.
- Some recognised the influence that employers have in Nottingham to engage in climate change solutions and suggested that more businesses be involved in the delivery of CN28.
- Some felt that NCC did not have enough assets or experience to ensure that CN28 was a success. There were at times suggestions from residents that the council engage more deeply with the universities and existing community groups to develop a more collective effort.

² Many of the focus group participants wanted to be not only informed, but also involved and included; this desire went beyond only wanting to be kept in the loop about CN28.

- Some residents emphasised that CN28 should not result in any deepening of existing inequalities between communities in Nottingham. One example given was that future green transport routes should benefit everyone – highlighting a concern that existing cycle routes tended to be located in more affluent community areas of Nottingham.
- Some residents suggested that NCC should offer residents incentives to make their homes more energy efficient to support CN28.
- A small number of residents asked whether or not NCC had divested any fossil fuel investments and if they would be willing to do so, particularly in relation to pension funds.
- There was a general sense from residents that despite the welcome and ambitious plans for CN28, NCC needed to ensure they had sustainable financial strategies. Robin Hood Energy was raised as an example that had not succeeded in its plans.
- Residents often felt that CN28 would not be achievable without the support of central government.

3.3.4 How NCC can make a difference

- Residents tended to want to see more holistic and joined up thinking by NCC.
- On the whole residents wanted to see local education policy that offered greater focus to the environment - both in schools and in the community.
- Residents tended to want to see NCC engage more with schools to get children and young people involved in recycling, environmentally friendly activities and awareness-raising.
- Based on experience as educators, some of the focus group participants suggested that one way the council could improve recycling in Nottingham would be through education in schools.
- Residents tended to want to see NCC take more of a leadership role in recycling, including a greater level of effort by the council to support recycling by residents, particularly organic and food waste. Another recycling idea proposed was to place more recycling bins along the river.
- A small number of the focus group participants felt that NCC had put well-meaning policies in place but in what was perceived as a somewhat disjointed manner. One example was in terms of issues around cycle lanes and public transportation. Some residents wanted to see NCC do more to make better roads for cyclists and improved pavements for people to use.
- Residents generally wanted to see NCC create initiatives such as recycling, cycle paths and transport links that were beneficial for Nottingham as a whole and not just for select areas.

- Some residents wanted to see more punitive measures put in place by the council for those individuals and businesses who did not recycle.
- Generally, residents wanted to see NCC support local businesses with the infrastructure to operate in more environmentally friendly ways.
- Often residents spoke about NCC incentivising action by businesses and private companies, such as setting challenges to become greener and to consume less.
- Overall, residents felt that NCC should do more to create green spaces for the wider community.
- Some residents commented that there are inequalities highlighted by the pandemic in Nottingham such as access to greenspaces.
- There was a general consensus that Nottingham would benefit from more green spaces and for greater use of this by local people. Many residents made a strong case for transforming the former Broadmarsh shopping centre into a green space and did not want to see the location used for additional shops and businesses. A related idea that generated support from some focus group participants was to enable access to public space in the city centre to grow food (eg., gardening clubs, greater use of 'empty' school fields for children to grow food).
- Generally, residents wanted to see better waste collection. There was support amongst residents to have more bins available throughout Nottingham and in particular recycling bins to tackle littering and waste.
- A suggestion by one resident was to provide better services to dispose of large items to discourage fly tipping.
- Some residents wanted to see more action by NCC on biomass (renewable organic material that comes from plants and animals).
- Overall, participants wanted to continue the conversation. Many asked if the focus groups could be longer in future and if opportunities could also be made so that they would have a chance to share their views again.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this research highlight that those Nottingham residents who took part in the focus groups are highly motivated to help contribute to positive changes to Nottingham's carbon neutral ambitions, both individually and collectively. Residents tended to see social and environmental issues that they discussed as being of paramount importance, and there was a demonstratable appetite to take part in CN28.

It was made clear by participants in all of the focus groups that they did not feel that an hour was enough time for the discussions. Many commented that they would have

liked to have been involved in a much longer programme of research where they could have engaged more fully in dialogue as part of CN28.

The research project had a good level of take-up by residents from across different areas of Nottingham and that there was a good mix of participants in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. However, it should be noted that there was a lack of representation from residents from lower positions of socio-economic status; most residents who took part were either in full-time or part-time employment, and many had a pre-existing interest in climate change issues.

With regards to ways in which further research could be carried out, we recommend that NCC explore the following:

- to help facilitate greater participation of residents from mixed backgrounds of education, employment and socio-economic advantage in future research;
- to develop links with minority groups in Nottingham who may not have pre-existing involvement in climate change issues, with a particular focus on ethnic minorities;
- to engage young people below the age of 18 in research to ensure that youth voice is part of future CN28 delivery plans;
- to run longer sessions in future to allow residents to engage in more in-depth discussions;
- to create a strategy to keep residents involved in discussion with NCC and each other beyond the research. This could be an email group, or even a social media page where different opportunities and activities could be shared by both NCC and residents.

The findings from the research indicate that the residents who took part had a range of ideas, skills and experiences to contribute to the development of CN28. The following recommendations are based on the contributions from participating residents, and offer suggestions for (i) how residents' views can be factored into CN28, and (ii) what NCC can do to further tackle climate change issues locally:

1. to invest resources into greater sharing of information about CN28 with local residents, and in a wider variety of formats, including e-newsletters, hardcopy information via post as well as in different languages;
2. at a '*strategic*' level, to move beyond consultation so that local citizens are involved in a more central way in the decision-making processes for CN28, possibly by developing a local residents' steering group;

3. at an '*operational*' level, to consider developing a programme for 'resident volunteers' to take part in the development of CN28 as well as other local activities to combat the climate emergency;
4. to support schools to develop educational programmes for children and young people about local climate change issues.

Although this was a small-scale research project, discussions with residents have highlighted scope for additional research and for more practical community engagement projects to move towards a CN28 that is collaborative and brings the skills, experience, and passion of residents into the frame. This will help to ensure that the CN28 greater reflects the communities they serve.

5. Research at Nottingham Trent University

This research represents the first stage of an ongoing project into local citizens' engagement with [Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028](#), directed by [Professor Matt Henn](#) with the support of Dena Arya. The project links with the Nottingham Trent University School of Social Sciences' *Promoting Social and Democratic Inclusion and Transformation* research theme and with NTU's *Sustainable Futures* research theme. The project complements the research team's ongoing research relationship with Nottingham City Council via the [Intergenerational Partnerships](#) which considers citizens' engagement with local democracy.

To find out more about this project and related research, please contact Professor Matt Henn (email: matt.henn@ntu.ac.uk).

6. Appendix

6.1 Focus Group Schedule

INTRO

1. What made you decided to take part in this research?

CONCERN ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

2. For you what words or feelings come to mind when you think about the environment?
3. Which of the environmental issues that we have spoken about so far are you most concerned about?

TAKING ACTION ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

4. Do you already do, or have you ever done anything to support the environment, either as part of a group or on your own?
 - 4.a) What is it that you already do to support the environment?
 4. b) Are there things you do in your local area to support the environment?
5. What has led you to change your behaviours to act in a more environmentally friendly way?
 - A) A well-known personality - e.g. Sir David Attenborough's TV series, or Greta Thunberg's activism
 - B) Something I read
 - C) discussions with friends/family/my children/grandchildren
 - D) Discussions at school or workplace
 - E) Information/publicity from Nottingham City Council
 - F) Something else

SOLUTIONS

6. Whose responsibility do you think it is to find solutions to local and global environmental issues?
7. What do you think of the UK Government's efforts to solve climate change?
8. What kinds of policies do you think should be in place to deal with environmental issues in the UK?
9. What about Nottingham as a city and the local area that you live in: What kinds of measures should be in place here to deal with environmental issues?
 9. a) Do you know about Nottingham City Council's efforts to e.g. go carbon neutral by 2028?
 9. b) What have you heard about it?
 - 9.c) What do you think about it?
 - 9.d) What could the council do in your local area to make a difference?

OUTRO / DEBRIEF

10. Is there anything you think about regarding the environment and Nottingham as a carbon-neutral city that we did not talk about today?
11. Are there any questions you think we should be asking other people that you were not asked as part of this discussion?
12. Do you have any feedback for us that we could do differently?

7. References

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