

Edinburgh to become carbon neutral – in 15 years time

Ambitious carbon neutral 2030 target agreed

The capital will aim to become carbon neutral by 2030 after council leaders set one of the most ambitious targets globally – 15 years earlier than the Scottish Government's ambition.

Edinburgh will work towards eliminating carbon emissions by 2030 – but Green politicians blasted a 2037 date for the pledge to become fully binding.

The city centre transformation and low emission zone proposals, which were revealed last week, are set to be key to driving carbon usage down in the city. But officers admitted they would need to “interrogate the whole picture” of the council's policies to be successful.

Local supply chains are expected to be redeveloped for “construction and refurbishment in low carbon design” while a “circular economy” could be created – focusing on local production, low waste and increased recycling. More renewable energy will be generated locally.

Earlier this month, The Scottish Government outlined a legally binding target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 at the latest – with Scotland becoming carbon neutral by 2040. Glasgow has pledged to become the first carbon neutral city in the UK, but has not yet set out a specific target date.

Council leader, Cllr Adam McVey said: “We are quite clear the 2030 target should be the target for this organisation and this city – but with a hard limit of 2037.

“I think it's important that this organisation responds to the

challenges we all recognise they are incredibly serious. I think it's important that we as a city take our responsibility seriously."

Carbon emissions have reduced in Edinburgh by 33 per cent since 2005 and the Council is on course to meet the 2020 target of a 42 per cent reduction.

Campaigners from Transition Edinburgh, appealed to the council's corporate policy and strategy committee to "go further and faster" to eliminate carbon from the Capital.

A spokesperson added: "We need to prioritise environmental and climate actions to safeguard future generations. Net-zero is affordable and we can do it a lot faster than the rest of the UK.

"I think it's a mistake to say it will cost too much. We are saying a different way of doing business and allocating your resources."

But Conservative group leader, Cllr Iain Whyte, criticised the lack of detail in the strategy as to how the city will become carbon neutral by 2030.

He said: "It's all very well setting aspirations but we need to follow through.

"If we are going to change what we do in terms of CO2 reduction then we have to take people with us. We have to use technology in a way that allows them to take part in that without disrupting their daily lives. I want those practical solutions to come forward.

"If we are to lead, we have to lead with practical ways that the public can understand."

Green councillors said the focus should now be on actions to reduce carbon use – but called for the binding target date to be brought forward to 2030.

Green Cllr Chas Booth said: "The climate emergency demands urgent action from us. It demands that we are serious about going further and faster in reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

“I think it’s absolutely clear that 2030 is the crunch time – that’s the key date and that’s what we should be aiming for as our target for achieving a zero carbon city in Edinburgh.

“What is missing is not the technology, what is missing is the political will.”

The council’s director of place, Paul Lawrence, hinted that down the line the council will face “tough choices” including replacing conventional gas boilers in properties with carbon neutral alternatives.

He said: “We are looking at factoring in boilers and other carbon efficiencies within the medium-term housing revenue account.

“Yes we are still using conventional boilers, but it will be a tough choice and we will have to bring those forward and will have to make those choices through this process.”

How will Edinburgh become carbon neutral?

No specific costed measures have been tabled yet – but the pledge to become carbon neutral by 2030 and binding by 2037 will require “difficult choices”.

Plans to transform how people move around the city centre in a 10-year strategy will help reduce the Capital’s carbon footprint -by making it more difficult to access the city centre by car and give priority to cyclists, pedestrians and those using public transport.

The Low Emission Zone (LEZ) will also halt polluting cars from entering the city centre – while buses and lorries that fail to meet standards will be restricted from entering the wider city. Freight hubs could also be set up outside the city – allowing for low carbon alternatives to bring goods into the Capital.

There will be an increase in council and city generation of renewable energy including the “use of council land and property for micro-generation, support local groups to develop renewables projects and encourage innovation in adopting new technologies”.

Waste services are also set for an overhaul. The council hopes to develop a new “energy recovery facility” to manage non-recyclable waste. This would generate energy and replace landfill as a method for disposing of waste. Low or zero carbon heating solutions will need to be found to eventually replace gas boilers such as Passivhaus systems which use high insulation and a heat recovery system, meaning no central heating is required.

Planning rules would have to be redrawn to put emphasis on achieving zero carbon – and it is likely that district heating schemes for housing developments or similar methods will be taken up.



Edinburgh City Chambers