

Green reflections on the budget proposals – what's in there for climate and nature?

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Given the key role Greens played in [last year's budget shenanigans](#), it's no surprise that political groups are making the right noises when it comes to spending on climate and nature this budget round. But don't be taken in by the headlines – whilst overtures to climate and nature spending are welcome, do the numbers behind the group proposals really add up?

Labour

To their downfall, last year Labour forewent all spending on climate and nature in their budget, abandoning manifesto commitments and ignoring warnings from officers about the devastating impact this would have on progress the Council is making to tackling the climate and nature emergencies. Having learned their lesson the hard way, this year is better – and it's fair to say that Greens have had much better engagement with the Council administration throughout the budget process too (not least because of the existence of the very climate team that we secured last year being able to support with this).

As a headline, the Labour budget contains funding to retain

key posts working on projects in nature and biodiversity, and investment to create some new ones too. Labour is the only group (as well as the Greens) to retain posts which are coming to an end due to grant funding finishing. Labour also proposes investment to create a new Service Engineer post to reflect changes to Council practices in the Parks service to improve biodiversity, and a specialist officer working on sustainable urban drainage projects in schools. From Year two of their budget, Labour includes funding for an additional Planning officer whose remit would be to focus on biodiversity.

In the climate space more broadly, the Labour budget also contains funding to retain the Community Climate Forum Coordinator and Colleague Travel Worker posts – again, the only group to do this (alongside the Greens). These are two key roles working on climate projects within the Council which would be lost without money set aside in the budget for them.

Outwith investment in staffing, the Labour budget contains funding for general nature projects, specialist equipment for biodiversity and multi-year funding for flood prevention work. Although it's good to see this in the budget, it's also fair to say that the level of investment here is smaller than in some of the other budgets put forward.

What's more, whilst all of this investment is welcome, there is a clear gap in Labour's budget around resources for tree-planting and maintenance – which is chronically underfunded and under-supported in the Council – and any investment in active travel or retrofitting/clean energy, despite these being the two biggest contributors to climate emissions in the city. Disappointingly, for the second year in a row, the Labour proposal also fails to include a climate impact statement outlining how their spending proposals impact on the city's climate ambitions.

[Read the Labour budget proposal here](#)

SNP

The SNP budget has a large amount of capital investment in climate related projects. They propose £1m to transition the Council's heavy vehicle fleet to low carbon alternatives and £250,000 for electric vehicle chargers to support this transition too. The SNP also include £2.5m for the retrofitting of school buildings, bringing energy bills down and improving the quality of the estate for pupils and staff. The level of funding committed to these projects alone is significantly greater than commitments made by Labour. Given that the way we heat our buildings and the way we get around are the two biggest contributors to carbon emissions in the city, all of this spending is welcome.

The SNP also propose investment in the Million Tree City project which is lacking in Labour's budget, and they match Labour on funding for flood prevention and intervention. Like Labour, the SNP proposal also includes a number of smaller spends to reduce emissions in Parks and Greenspace by funding low carbon park maintenance equipment, low carbon power outlets in parks (removing the need for diesel generators), mechanical weeding equipment (to phase out the use of the pesticide glyphosate) and cargo bikes for Parks staff to shuttle equipment round. Whilst this is all impressive, it is worth noting that these smaller spends are for projects which are already earmarked for external funding which the Council has secured. These will (hopefully!) be agreed at the next Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work committee at the end of the month, so there is some "creative" accounting going on here.

Outwith spending, the SNP budget proposes a series of charges/measures to raise income and incentivise "greener" behaviours – for example, increased parking charges, an on-street levy for SUVs and an increased charge for cruise ships docking in the city. Again, this is welcome.

However, despite the heavy investment in capital spending, the

SNP proposal has no revenue spending, or investment in staffing to support these projects. This means that a number of key roles in the Council on climate and biodiversity would be lost, and there would be no additional capacity built into these key areas of the Council going forward. This is a significant concern as failure to build additional capacity in Council staffing now will severely limit the ability of officers to bring forward future projects on climate and nature at the scale and pace which is needed. Finally, whilst the SNP proposal does include a nod towards a climate impact statement at the end of their budget proposal, this is one small sentence and not a worked through analysis of the budget proposal at large.

[Read the SNP budget proposal here](#)

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrat budget approaches spending on climate and nature differently again, with a slightly different overlap with Green proposals compared to the other groups. The Lib Dems propose significant investment in the forestry team and tree planting which is very welcome, as well as investment in food growing and allotments – the only other group to do this alongside the Greens. None of this is surprising as they have been advocates for the benefits of nature for people and the environment over recent years.

The Lib Dems also propose specific investment in the Council's Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) project office, increasing staffing capacity in order to deliver more retrofitting and energy efficiency projects for domestic and commercial properties, as well as the development of heat networks. This is a serious oversight of other group proposals (with the exception of the Greens), so it is good to see this come forward. Like others, the Lib Dems also propose specific investment in flood prevention and mechanical equipment to phase out the use of the glyphosate in the city.

Despite these investments, like the SNP (and unlike Labour), the Lib Dems fail to retain investment in staff support for Community Climate Action, in active travel and in broad work on biodiversity. Again, failure to invest in these posts means a loss in capacity in the Council to deliver projects for climate and nature which is an alarming oversight in the context of a climate and nature emergency.

Pleasingly, the Liberal Democrat budget does include a comprehensive climate impact statement.

[Read the Liberal Democrat budget proposal here](#)

Conservatives

Unsurprisingly, the Conservative budget proposes no spending for climate or nature.

[Read the Conservative budget proposal here](#)

And finally, the Greens

In short, take the good bits from everyone else's proposals, include them all and add even more investment on top! Of course, my opinion is a biased one, but the Green proposal includes significantly more investment than other groups on climate and nature.

Our proposals contain funding to secure all existing key posts in climate and nature in the Council, as well as additional budget to create new posts in biodiversity, above and beyond even those extra posts proposed in the Labour budget. We also invest £2.9m of funding in nature projects for just this year (nearly three times as much as Labour's equivalent investment) and an additional £1.3m on trees and the forestry service alone – that's almost as much investment as the SNP and Liberal Democrat proposals put together.

Like the Liberal Democrats, we propose investment in sustainable food and community growing, and we include two and a half times their proposed level of investment in the Local

Heat and Energy Efficiency strategy, putting £500k in for retrofitting, heat networks and clean energy projects across the city.

We include additional funding for Community Climate Action, reinstating the Community Climate Forum Co-ordinator post like Labour, but also adding more than £400,000 of funding to reinstate and expand the Community Climate Fund to support community groups with climate and nature projects on top of this.

On transport and sustainable travel, we include £1.85m to expedite delivery of the City Mobility Plan, including significant investment in active travel initiatives. Our budget commits to implementing the major junctions review to prioritise safety for walking, wheeling, and cycling and we also allocate £450,000 for a dropped kerb programme to make our roads and pavements safer for all. We are the only budget to prioritise £500,000 to continue provision of free tram travel for under 22-year-olds, and £1m for an additional phase of bike hangar roll out across the city to go some way to meet this unmet demand.

While not the only priority in our budget – increasing financial support for people struggling with the cost of living and investing in initiative to help make the city more accessible are also key pledges – the Green budget's inclusion of close to £11m to tackle the climate and nature emergencies sets out the scale of ambition the council needs to take our responsibilities to people and planet seriously.

[Read the Green budget proposal here](#)

What happens next?

Political groups will have a second bite of the cherry on Tuesday with the option to revise their own budget motions before the big day on Thursday. It will be interesting to see how other groups revise their proposals now they've seen what

others have to offer, and Greens are engaging constructively with every group who are open to listening.

We are confident that this year's budget will, once again, have Green fingerprints all over it – we're just hoping this won't happen in the same dramatic fashion as last year (and we're pretty sure that at least one other group in the Council is feeling the same way too...).



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