

Steady State Manchester

Shifting the debate in 2021

It's been quite a year so far...it's safe to say the pandemic has unfolded far worse than most people imagined, across the board.

What is emerging is a dire picture of more and more people on the edge, with livelihoods and well being threatened in a variety of different ways.

Meanwhile the challenges of climate change and the shorter range problems as a result of Brexit, along with this government's mismanagement and corruption, only intensify the challenges in our context. In addition to care workers and the shameful failure to protect those in care homes, a recent [ONS report](#) highlighted that death rates amongst people of working age are higher in certain occupations and sectors, including those precarious jobs in 'elementary processing' (aka un-unionized factory workers).

And this is happening at the same time as the reprehensible [proposed cuts to Universal Credit](#), despite there having been a 90% increase in Universal credit applications since March 2020. These cuts would undermine income security for many, including the precariat even further. Indeed, the government appears ready to return to austerity. Looking ahead, the strong likelihood of further cuts to local authority budgets will mean making best use of local resources, for example by encouraging local spending and circulation, capturing and [building community wealth](#), and the evolution of local and sector-specific green deals (Burton, 2020).

The UK Government is pursuing its 'clean growth' strategy (with meagre funding - see the [funding announcement](#)), despite remaining committed to the growth paradigm, and clearly oblivious to the contradiction with the climate emergency and the UK's legislated carbon budgets.

Instead, there needs to be a massive injection of support for actions that will begin to address the urgent priorities. Catalysing an ecologically literate and socially just Green New Deal ([something we've explored previously](#)), retrofitting homes and communities, and moving toward a 20-minute neighbourhoods model are all concrete steps that can be taken. While this will certainly need national government support, Greater Manchester can exercise leadership and look to other places for inspiration at a sub-national level, such as [Amsterdam's](#) city level realisation of the 'doughnut' economic model. Our [Viable Greater Manchester](#) report contains a lot more policy ideas.

However, the recession that we are already in, and which will be deep and continuing, will make government funding (nationally and locally) scarce. And vaunted "solutions" such as Modern (or magical) Money Theory are unlikely to provide a resolution in the longer term (Roberts, 2019), although temporary deficit financing and increased fiscal space will be necessary (Stirling et al., 2019).

It is not only the pandemic that has illuminated the urgency of action. The recent [flooding across the North West](#) is a clear example of the type of extreme weather that will only be made worse as our climate continues to destabilise. This one case highlights both the potential for jobs in environmental and flood management, but also the need to future-proof housing management – something that needs consideration (along with things like green space protection and...) in the again-delayed Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, as well as the Local Plans from the GM local authorities.

Both the pandemic and climate change highlight the role of inequalities and injustices, whether this be regarding income and wealth, ethnicity, housing precarity, gender, age or disability. Justice has to be central. Not only justice, locally and nationally but internationally. Whilst the UK is one of the greatest historical contributors to climate change, some of the poorest countries, like, for example, [Chad](#), are the first to feel the brunt, with environmental degradation advancing at a pace with the knock on effect of severe hardship.

At the same time, in a recent [WHO survey](#) asking about citizens' concern about the climate emergency, one of the top countries was the UK, with 80% thinking that we are in a climate emergency. The prominence this crisis in people's minds is heartening, especially as the UK looks to hosting COP26 towards the end of the year. However, it is debatable whether the implications are well understood. Our mode of living, with its high and increasing levels of material and energy usage, is incompatible with climate and environmental safety as well as global justice.

With the above (and other) issues in mind, we are excited to be hosting an event for our members on **21 April at 7:30pm**.

At this event, what we're calling 'Shifting the debate,' we are asking you not only to reflect on where things are, but also to dare to look ahead and share where things *should* be, and how we might start to get there, with a particular emphasis on focussing and communicating our distinct message. Your ideas and views will inform our work in the year ahead. Hope to see you soon!

Bibliography

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