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A green jobs revolution must go beyond construction and manufacturing

West of England metro mayor candidates are talking big on low-carbon employment in the Bristol region. Meeting the challenge of net-zero will mean not just meeting campaign promises but considering fairness, inclusion and how all our jobs can become greener

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Before the pandemic, in the wake of powerful street protests, an outpouring of climate concern washed over Bristol and the West of England. Bristol City Council's declaration of a climate emergency then spurred many of its peers into similar announcements.

At a national level, reaching 'net zero' by 2050 (or sooner) is the goal. Driven by initiatives like the Climate Assembly UK, and amplified by coverage even from previously sceptical media outlets, climate policies are finally part of our national conversation.

Tellingly, politicians across the political spectrum are tripping over themselves to talk up the potential of 'green jobs'. As 2020 came to a close, Boris Johnson announced a 10-point plan

for a 'green revolution', central to which was the promise of 250,000 such jobs to 'level up' and 'build back better' after Covid-19.

The prime minister's rhetoric has been echoed locally, with the current West of England Combined Authority (WECA) mayor, Conservative Tim Bowles, enthusing about the region's potential as a hub for low-carbon jobs. Bristol City Council have also made green jobs a part of the One City Climate Strategy.

But making good on the talk means unprecedented investment, and a transformation of every sector in the country in a matter of decades.

Bristol's sustainability strategy estimates that between 75,000 and 100,000 additional working hours could be required if the city is to become carbon neutral by 2030. A Local Government As-

sociation analysis suggests more than 25,000 low-carbon roles could be created in the WECA region during the same time period. That's a lot of jobs.

In the upcoming elections, candidates who are vying for the position of WECA metro mayor will have a lot of control over employment, training and industrial strategy in the region. So how are low-carbon jobs and a green recovery manifesting in the promises being made by candidates on the campaign trail?

Low-carbon promises

Samuel Williams is the Conservatives' prospective metro mayor, having pulled out as Bristol's mayoral candidate in late 2020. "It is important we invest in low-carbon construction for

new buildings and retrofit current properties," he told the Cable. "I will prioritise the regeneration of brownfield sites, making the most of our underused spaces."

The focus on buildings, old and new, makes sense – the UK's building stock accounts for nearly a fifth of its greenhouse gas emissions. Dan Norris, Labour's WECA candidate and an ex-environment minister, also highlights the importance of buildings, adding that "tackling climate change requires a proper strategy".

"That's why I'll rapidly establish a Green Recovery Fund, which will create 23,000 new jobs," he says. "I want to see serious investment in home retrofitting, tree-planting, flood and drought defences, and renewable energy."

This ambitious list reflects the breadth and scale of change required, but jobs won't simply appear without the right training, something ex-Bristol West MP and Liberal Democrat metro mayor hopeful Stephen Williams is focused on. "I will work with further education colleges and apprentice training firms to ensure we are training people in the green jobs of the future, and I plan to set up [a] West of England Centre for Green Technology Excellence."

Reflecting the shifting national discourse, the candidates' ambitious promises are encouraging, if changes can be made swiftly (2030 is only nine years away).



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