Fossil fuel pollution has so far caused the earth to warm by roughly one degree Celsius.

This doesn’t sound like much, but this has already led to an increasing number of wildfires and extreme weather events, sea level rises due to polar ice caps melting, and huge loss of human and animal life. If we continue to burn fossil fuels, as well as destroy natural carbon absorbing mechanisms like forests and bogs, the earth will warm by at least another three degrees in the next few decades, causing irreparable damage to the earth and perhaps even the extinction of the human race.

To save the earth and all of its species, including humans, we must as quickly as possible reduce our emissions to net zero, which is to say make our emissions and our carbon absorbing mechanisms balance out. The United Nations has set out a plan to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees, a level that will still cause widespread natural destruction and social chaos. Global human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide would need to be reduced by about 45% by 2030, the UN recommends, reaching ‘net zero’ by 2050. The Labour and Green Parties in the UK have advocated for an even faster reduction, committing to net zero by the end of this decade in their respective most recent election manifests.
Even net zero by 2050 would require unprecedented transitions in the way that we generate and use energy, the UN points out. The Green New Deal is an attempt to meet this challenge in a holistic way, shifting our economies away from fossil fuels and extractive free–market capitalism to green energy production and carbon absorption via a new, people–and–planet–first industrial revolution. While most governments now see the need to shift away from dirty energy and polluting practices, and multinational corporations also see a competitive advantage in being ‘first-movers’ in the new green economy, the Green New Deal places social justice at the centre of this transformation.

Modelled on the American New Deal in the early 20th century, the Green New Deal seeks to redistribute this new green wealth to the workers and communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as well as using this opportunity to redress the economic and social inequality produced by extractive, free market capitalism. Policy suggestions from the Green New Deal include:

- Creating thousands of new, decent jobs, not only in ‘green’ energy sectors, but also in construction, manufacturing, waste management, technological innovation, land use management and other sectors.
- Helping households and the economy save money by insulating millions of people’s homes and bringing the latest micro energy generation, saving and storage technologies within everyone’s grasp.
- Housing people affordably through the construction of millions of new zero–carbon homes, including 3.1 million new homes for social rent.
- Benefiting households and the economy, easing congestion and slashing transport emissions by developing local and regional integrated public transport networks.

Key to all versions of the Green New Deal is a recognition that the Green Industrial Revolution must come from the ‘bottom up’ as much as from the ‘top down’, and that post–industrial cities and towns like Coventry provide an excellent base for this revolution.

**Coventry’s working class has had to consistently re–purpose its immense practical knowledge, skill and intelligence to meet the challenge of boom and bust capitalism.**

From the booming textiles industry in the 16th century to the second car manufacturing boom after the Second World War, Coventry’s workers and communities have shown incredible resilience and ingenuity in reinventing the city’s productive base. We want to put this collective resilience and intelligence to work in creating social and sustainable wealth for the people in Coventry, not profit for corporations. To this end, we had our first public workshop in October, during which 50 or so participants organised themselves into working groups centred on key areas of the Green New Deal:

- Jobs, education and training
- Food and the biological environment
- Transport
- Energy
- Air quality and pollution
- Waste, consumption and recycling
- Housing
Some of these groups have met, and are mapping what is already happening in Coventry, and finding out how we can help bring this activity together and give it political power. We hope that out of the meeting on 14 March, people will join some of these groups or create new ones so we can amplify this work and create a social movement in the city and a People’s Green New Deal for Coventry.

We recognise that people, organisations and local representatives are already doing lots of brilliant things to fight climate change and decarbonise the local economy. As already stated, we do not wish to replicate or dilute the work that is already happening, we want to amplify and focus this work through collaboration. But we do need to act fast and decisively. Everywhere we go, activists and organisations tell us there is no coordination, and that those working at the grassroots level are in many cases not included in the policy work that is then disseminated through consultations.

**We believe that consultation is not enough. When policies go out for consultation, this is often already too late.**

We want to bring together the people, organisations and activists that have the practical and expert knowledge and community support and influence to be part of the policy making process from the start, to make sure policies begin with social need and use. We also want to create a strong, participatory democracy in the city that can hold our elected representatives to account and can make sure that we have suppliers and businesses in the city that put people and environment before profit.

On the 14 March, we began thinking about the values and principles that should ground a People’s Green New Deal in Coventry, as well as what practical steps our working groups will take in moving this project forward in the coming weeks. We decided to create a ‘vision statement’ or charter that would guide our subsequent work in creating our People’s Green New Deal for Coventry, along the lines suggested by our two brilliant speakers, Hilary Wainwright and Richard Lee. This charter will be drafted by the Coventry Green New Deal steering committee and sent to all participants of the 14 March and to all those who couldn’t make it due to the coronavirus or have previously signed up to the Coventry Green New Deal mailing list.

We also resolved to hold the first Climate Assembly in Coventry within the next 12 months, circumstances permitting. This would bring together our elected representatives, as well as the Coventry City Council staff responsible for drafting and implementing the city’s climate policies; representatives from Coventry Green New Deal and its working groups, and anyone else that has something to say on issues such as the progress or lack of progress of decarbonisation in the city and the quality of democratic participation in the way this process in managed. These Climate Assemblies can also be the forums in which we start to create our own People’s Green New Deal for Coventry and use this to campaign on and exert a political influence on Council policy.

Unfortunately, our fantastic new socialist MP, Zarah Sultana, could not be at the 14 March meeting. Zarah has been taking Parliament by storm, smashing conventions and representing strongly the interests of her Coventry South constituents. Zarah is also a very strong advocate for the Green New Deal, having been a founding member of Birmingham Labour for Green New
Deal and continuing to be a relentless campaigner for climate action since being elected MP. We expect Zarah to continue to support our projects and be closely involved in their development over the next months and years.

**We believe a Green Industrial Revolution should come from below as much as from above.**

So we had two ‘experts’ on popular planning—although both chastised me for calling them such, pointing out correctly that experts on popular planning is a contradiction in terms—to help us think about how this would actually work as part of a People’s Green New Deal in Coventry.

Richard Lee is co-ordinator of London-based popular planning organisation [Just Space](https://www.justspace.org/). Since 2014, Just Space have been working on their [Community-led Alternative London Plan](https://www.justspace.org/work/alternative-london-plan), bringing together 62 groups and organisations to put forward a set of policy ideas that aim to reclaim the rights to the city for the people and communities of London.

It was also a great honour to welcome Hilary Wainwright back to Coventry. Currently co-editor of left-wing magazine Red Pepper and research director of the New Politics Project at the Transnational Institute, Hilary has been involved in numerous popular planning initiatives in her fascinating career.

In the 1970s, she worked with the shop stewards at Lucas Aerospace on their [Alternative Plan for Socially Useful Production](https://www.thenational.org.uk/articles/alternative-plan-socially-useful-production), a pioneering initiative to defend jobs by proposing alternative, socially-useful and in many cases green applications of the company’s technology and the skills and knowledge of workers and their communities. In the 1980s, Hilary worked in the Greater London Council’s Popular Planning Unit, where she was involved in creating the [People’s Plan for the Royal Docks](https://www.thenational.org.uk/articles/peoples-plan-royal-docks), an astonishing document that looked at how the docks could be repurposed by the community to create jobs and boost the economy while providing urgently needed local resources. Most recently, she has worked with Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell on their plans for worker ownership and industrial democracy, drawing on this experience and knowledge.

We hope that you find this report useful, and if you couldn’t make it due to the current health crisis, a useful representation of what happened on the day. We have also created a number of video clips of speakers’ presentations and a couple of interviews with participants after the event. These will be posted on Facebook over the coming days, to provide continuity in what will be a difficult time for political activism and organising, and all the videos are available on our new YouTube channel: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5zytXHfupafcP1QweuVMGA/](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5zytXHfupafcP1QweuVMGA/)

Please also follow us on Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/CoventryGND/](https://www.facebook.com/CoventryGND/)

Twitter: @CoventryGND

and watch out for our new Charter and details of forthcoming events.

If you would like to join our mailing list or get involved in the Coventry GND steering group, email: [coventrygreennewdeal@gmail.com](mailto:coventrygreennewdeal@gmail.com)

Stay well, and look forward to seeing you all at the next Coventry Green New Deal event.

**David Ridley**

*Chair, Coventry Green New Deal*
The Coventry Green New Deal’s Chris Jones summarising the speaker presentations as meeting chair.

Earlsdon Ward Labour and Co-operative Party Councillor and Coventry GND steering group member Kindy Sandhu discussing policy ideas.

Climate Change Solutions’ Managing Director Tony McNally debating green housing policy with local activists.
“We can only save the planet if we say no, if we refuse to be part of a system that is causing such a crisis for humanity and the planet.

Refusal is about all of us recognising that we reproduce the system that is producing this climate crisis, we have a choice of refusing or being complicit.

The current coronavirus health crisis illustrates what a real climate emergency could be like.

Covid-19 has made everyone feel responsible, thinking twice about what they do, whether a journey necessary.

It has imbued us with a critical approach to our daily life.

What if we really declared a climate emergency and applied that not just to what local and national government should do, but also to how we consume, thinking about every part of daily life and how we are reproducing this high carbon economy?

This would force us to also look at the production system that has built-in obsolesces, and an insurance system that also does not want you to repair things.

But refusal also requires thinking about alternatives.

We need to collaborate to not just defend ourselves but also to generate alternatives that are not being generated by the existing power relations.

Popular planning is recognising that people are extraordinary and socialising their talents and knowledge and building power that is not just defensive.

We are all reproducing a system that is going to be disastrous for humanity.

But our skills and practical knowledge can be converted to producing a different system a system from below.”

Hilary Wainwright, speaking at the meeting on 14th March, ‘The Climate Crisis: What can we do in Coventry?’
Happy to be back in Coventry, Red Pepper editor and long-time popular planner Hilary Wainwright, in her talk, described some of the popular planning initiatives she had been involved in during her career, beginning with the 1980 ‘workers’ inquiry’, State Intervention in Industry. After the betrayal of the workers’ control movement in the early 70s, spearheaded by the late Tony Benn, by Harold Wilson’s 1974 Labour government, four trades councils, including Coventry, began a project of reflecting on why this betrayal had happened. Also involving Coventry’s Workshop group, the inquiry culminated in a National Tribunal in the House of Commons, where the four TUCs questioned MPs and ex-ministers involved in formulating and trying to implement the Labour Party’s far reaching 1973 manifesto promises of industrial democracy, including popular planning. Out of print now, the book is perhaps now more relevant than ever, in light of the Jeremy Corbyn’s difficulties in winning power for his party’s most recent attempt to democratise the economy.

Next Hilary spoke about the Lucas Plan. Recently documented in a film by local filmmaker Steve Sprung, the Lucas Plan looked at how the means of production in heavy industry could be repurposed to meet the growing need for ‘socially useful’ products, and therefore put apparently redundant jobs and unused productive capacity at the service of society. The Lucas Aerospace trade unions ‘faced a dilemma’, Hilary explained, as the occupations that had been so effective at other workplaces like the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders wouldn’t work there, because the owners would just close the factories and carry on, as they weren’t interested in those particular factories any more. Drawing on the practical, tacit knowledge – what key Lucas Plan theorist Mike Cooley called ‘things we know but cannot tell’ – of workers and their communities, the Lucas Aerospace combine proposed roughly 150 alternative, socially useful products, including many ground-breaking ideas for alternative energy: heat pumps, solar cell technology, wind turbines and hybrid fuel cell technology.

Coventry has a tradition of thinking about alternatives rooted in the city’s history labour movement and community organising – Hilary Wainwright

Hilary’s final example of popular planning came from The People’s Plan for the Royal Docks. In response to government plans to build a short take-off and landing airport for London businessmen, the community in Newham Docklands, with the support of Ken Livingstone’s Greater London Council, put together an alternative plan for the area that would save jobs and improve facilities and services. Hilary worked with local activists who had organised against STOLport to find out what people wanted and needed from regeneration. going for example to Bingo nights and asking for five minutes to speak about the popular planning initiative. With funding from the GLC, five people from Newham were employed to work on the People’s Plan, and a People’s Planning Centre was created in the community, where members of the community came together to contribute to the People’s Plan, as well as speak to trade union reps and community associations about the issues they were facing. The incredible document – also unfortunately now out of print – was published and gave people the power and confidence to challenge a planning system that put community interests last.
Just Space is a network bringing together community groups who aren’t funded or have their own workers, and giving them ‘direct voice’. Concerned primarily with responding to Sadiq Kahn’s London Plan, Just Space is formed of three main categories of participants: radical activists coming out of the World and London Social Forum, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Friends of the Earth and the Black Londoners Forum and representatives from the London Tenants Federation (LTF).

Richard recounted that producing an alternative plan for London wasn’t an idea supported by all three categories in the beginning. Initially, the LTF was quite sceptical, and was worried that it would be a distraction and not very practical. Because Just Space is committed to consensus-based democratic decision making, this view was taken very seriously. While the debates around whether or not to engage in popular planning slowed the process down, Richard reflected that in the long term it was very helpful because it required the radical activists to engage in strong relationships with grassroots working class organisations.

What united the groups was a frustration with existing city planning systems, especially of engaging in authority-led consultations. With consultations, citizens are always responding to someone else’s agenda, being only able to tweak existing proposals. After holding its first conference, at which a vision statement was produced to guide work on a community-led plan – the group decided that calling it an ‘alternative plan’ suggested that it was never going to happen – Just Space held two further conferences at which proposals created and refined by working groups were discussed and decided upon.

“The biggest benefit of popular planning has been the building of confidence, you can call it people power if you like.

We are experts we have strong knowledge and experience which we should be proud of we shouldn’t be shy of speaking up about this.

Articulating a different way of doing things and having a set of well thought out propositions rather than just slogans I think has caught a lot of attention, for example universities, bringing more resources and more people together.

We are now seen to be serious players capable of putting forward serious proposals for the city.”

Just Space co-ordinator Richard Lee, speaking at the meeting on 14th March, ‘The Climate Crisis: What can we do in Coventry?’