



the people's plan

The West Midlands People's Plan Manifesto



Jobs

“I often find I have to tell people what Birmingham’s really like. Yes, we’ve still got our problems – but what city doesn’t – and there’s so much going on here!”

There are many world-class companies offering great jobs in the West Midlands. The region has become the manufacturing centre of the United Kingdom – it is the only place in the country that exports more to China than it imports.

However, while it is strong in advanced manufacturing, the West Midlands has fewer people in high-wage professional and technical roles, and fewer people in the key sectors like digital and financial services. This means people in the West Midlands are earning wages that are only just average for the country as a whole when they could be doing so much better. The West Midlands also has too few people actually in work to begin with – in fact it has one of the lowest employment rates in the country.

If more good jobs are going to be created, then the West Midlands needs to:

- Build on its strengths and attract more good companies and more investment into the region;
- Make it easier to start and grow a business, for example, by making it easier to develop brownfield sites; and
- Ensure people have the right skills and qualifications to do demanding and well-paid work.

To help businesses get up and off the ground, business rates should be cut for small firms. Many small businesses pay thousands of pounds in rates for little in return for themselves or the wider economy. A cut in their business rate bills would allow them to invest further and – crucially – to offer more jobs. All of this will make new life for new industry across the West Midlands. Industry could also be boosted through a West Midlands ‘free trade zone’ or an ‘Inventors Programme’ to support small businesses that work in digital technology and hardware.

Existing industries should also be encouraged and expanded and tourism is a prime example. With a rich heritage, including great industrialist-philanthropists like Cadbury to household names like Jaguar, there is an excellent opportunity to promote the West Midlands as a tourist centre outside of London. By promoting the region, nationally and internationally, and showcasing what the West Midlands has to offer, tourism in the region could be increased exponentially, increasing jobs in all of the sectors associated with it, like hospitality and transport.

Young, dynamic and creative: the future of the West Midlands

We are one of the youngest and most diverse regions in Europe which offers us limitless opportunities. We are the home to one of Europe's largest digital and creative clusters with Greater Birmingham recognised as the most entrepreneurial city outside London with over 32,000 new startups registered in the past 2 years.

Our creative industries will contribute to further development over the next 20 only if we capitalise on our unique selling points. To do this we need bold leadership that is not afraid to try out new ideas and back entrepreneurship. The Mayor needs to support the creation of integrated partnerships across the Combined Authority area pulling in public, private and education sectors to put in place an ambitious strategy to fuel the Creative Ecosystem of the region. The Creative Economy has the capability to add billions to our GVA using the innovation strengths of this sector to drive new solutions, inspire new opportunities and deliver new efficiencies.

We need a mayor who will unashamedly champion the region, create a voice for the sector so we are part of the national dialogue around the creative economy, we want to be part of the international delegations and visits and have to position ourselves to become the come to region for inspiration, innovation and advice a trusted source and one of the world's most liveable cities by 2031.

Anita Bhalla OBE

Chair of Performances Birmingham Ltd
and Birmingham Creative City Partnership

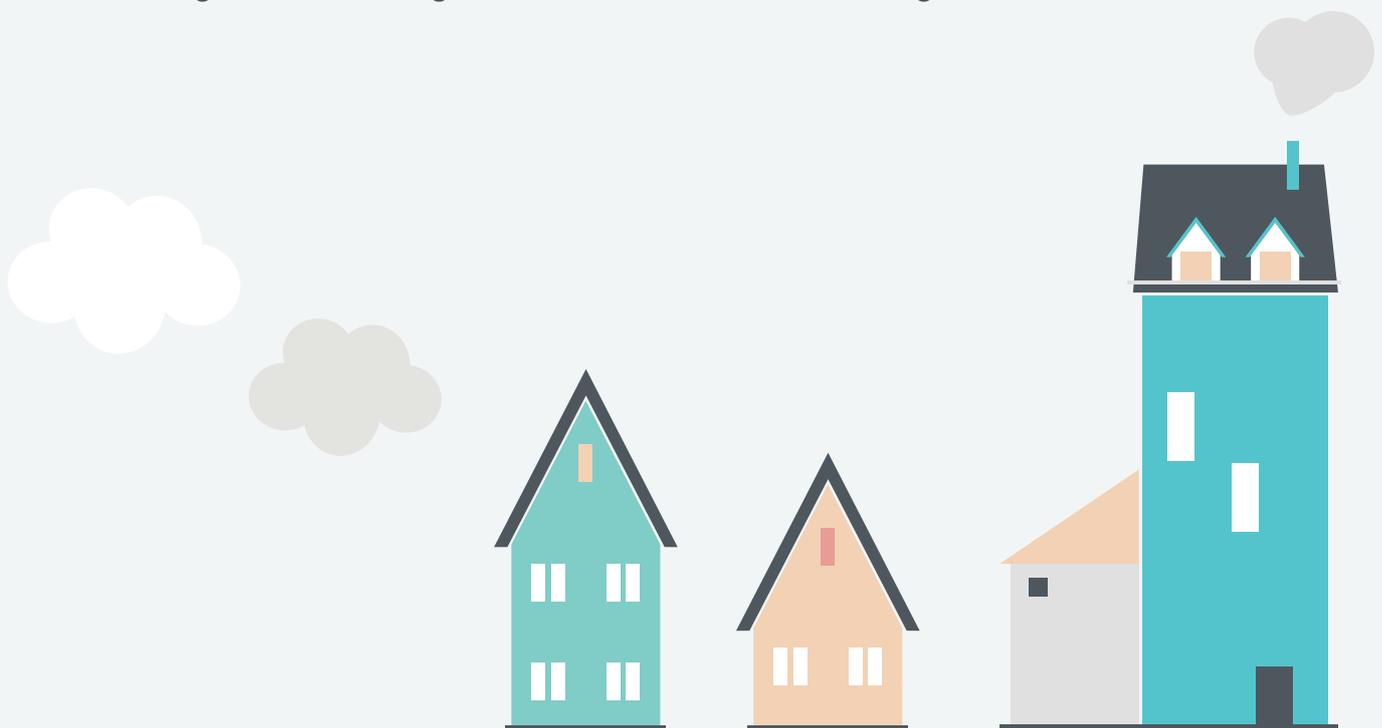


Housing

More and more people in the West Midlands – especially younger first-time buyers – are being priced out of owning their own homes. Over the last 20 years, the average cost of a home in the West Midlands has more than tripled from under £50,000 to over £150,000 – and incomes have nowhere near kept pace.

Meanwhile more and more people rent in the private sector, where average costs are now over £600 per month for a two bedroom property in the West Midlands. Many are caught between expensive rents and the struggle to save for a mortgage. There is an urgent need for more homes for the people of the West Midlands to rent and buy, homes that are better quality, more environmentally friendly and energy efficient:

- New homes should be built in mixed sustainable communities, with combinations of low rent, social and privately-owned properties that are suitable for a range of needs – not just typical three-bed houses;
- All new homes should be built to the ‘passive house’ standard to reduce energy costs for occupants and limit their impact on the environment;
- Existing housing should be upgraded to the same standard; and
- New communities should include quality green spaces, with the green belt managed as a valuable asset for the region.



Transport

“We need to have the same view of public transport that Londoners have – that it’s the easiest way to get around.”

The West Midlands is at the heart of the United Kingdom, with 90 per cent of all UK businesses located within four hours’ travel. But the region’s transport infrastructure is under huge pressure. Connections between cars, buses and local rail are improving but too many people still feel that it is too hard and too expensive to use public transport to get around the West Midlands.



Road

The road network in and around Birmingham and across the West Midlands is regularly congested. This is true of major roads like the M6 and M42, as well as the ‘pinch points’ in towns and cities where rush hour traffic grinds to a halt every day. Congestion needs to be reduced and can be by:

- Making sure traffic can move more easily – there needs to be better, more effective planning, for example, about where bus stops and bus lanes are placed so they don’t block other road users or so that traffic lights control rather than hinder traffic; and
- reducing the number of cars on the road – a West Midlands congestion charge could be introduced, or restricted parking around schools at the start and end of the day, but the most positive step that could and should be taken is making public transport more appealing.

Public transport: Better planning, better investment

Rail links within and beyond the West Midlands are not good enough, with journey times between Wolverhampton and Derby, or between Coventry and Leicester, often taking two hours or more. Metro links would ensure cities, suburbs and rural areas are better connected and bus rapid transit systems would be a great alternative to cars for shorter journeys. Both of these would reduce car use. The West Midlands could also learn from cities like Manchester and Nottingham about how they manage their public transport.

People across the West Midlands feel that public transport is too expensive and not reliable – fares continue to rise while the quality of service fails to match. They want cheaper fares and better service but it is difficult to meet both of these demands when transport infrastructure desperately needs more investment. Building more homes to attract more people to the West Midlands would encourage the necessary investment in mass transit infrastructure for both road and rail.



Cycling

Active travel is key to making sure the West Midlands looks after the health and wellbeing of its people and limits its impact on the environment. There needs to be more investment and provision to encourage cycling in and around the region. It could take years to build a decent cycle network but that should be accepted and planned for accordingly – there needs to be a long-term, strategic vision for what the West Midlands will look like for decades to come and how a cycle network could fit into that.

People often don't like cyclists – they say cyclists pay little or no attention to other road users – but cyclists as a class of road users feel that they are the least provided for when it comes to transport infrastructure. The West Midlands could learn from countries like the Netherlands and Denmark, which show there are ways to accommodate the needs of cyclists, drivers and pedestrians; a transport system with safe cycling routes

separated from other traffic that pass open canals and waterways could provide new locations for small businesses to establish themselves and thrive.

The popularity of cycling is not going to drop – more and more people, young and old, are taking up cycling. But as more and more people take to the roads on bikes there is a need to pay more attention to their safety and that of other road users. A ‘bicycle licence’ could be introduced as a way of showing which cyclists have demonstrated that they understand the rules of the road and their responsibilities to other road users.

Improving West Midlands transport: road, rail and air

One of the most pressing issues for the new metro mayor will be ensuring that there is improved connectivity across the region, whether that be rail, road or air.

HS2 is a vital component to deliver this improved connectivity and the metro mayor will be key to delivering this.

While the airport already connects 11 million passengers a year to global markets and contributes £1.1b to the Midlands Engine annually, there is an enormous opportunity for HS2 to enhance this connectivity for more people and business to more international markets.

HS2 also reduces the travel time between central London and Birmingham Airport to 38 minutes, which is closer than Luton and Stansted, the same as Gatwick, and only 15 minutes longer to Heathrow Terminal 5. This could result in an extra 750,000 additional passengers a year, providing an annual GVA boost of £52 million. Furthermore, with the South East airport capacity constrained for the next 10 to 15 years, Birmingham Airport and HS2 can help relieve this pressure.

At Birmingham Airport, we are committed to helping the economy grow and ensuring the positive impact of HS2 is fully realised. We look forward to working with the new metro mayor and other regional leaders to achieve this goal.

Paul Kehoe

Chief Executive of Birmingham Airport



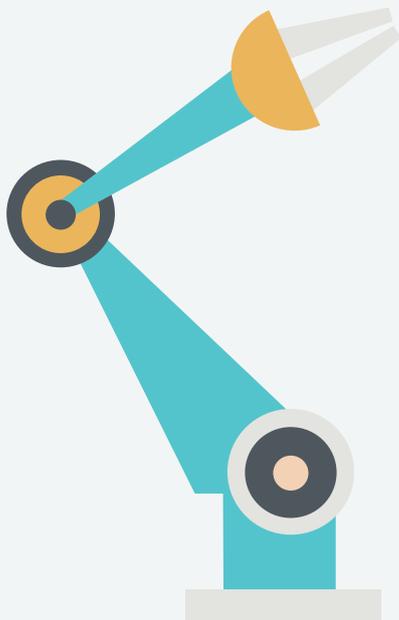
Children & education

“Skills! Skills! Skills!

If we don't have good technical skills in the area then I think it will be really hard to attract more inward investment – or help our high growth businesses grow faster without leaving the area.”

Young people in the West Midlands have many opportunities in the modern world but they also face some big challenges. Almost one in ten children in the West Midlands is currently living in serious poverty – one of the worst rates in the country. One in three young people in the West Midlands reach the age of 19 without the qualifications they need to get a good job. And the region has one of the highest proportions of young people who leave education and become unemployed in the whole of England.

The key to creating good jobs is dependent on inward investment and the skills to deliver the high value jobs the people of the West Midlands need. Business will not invest in the region if the people living here don't have the skills they are looking for. If the young people of the West Midlands do not have good technical skills then it will be harder to attract more inward investment – or help the region's high-growth businesses grow faster without leaving the area.



Birmingham and the region's other cities need city-wide apprenticeships with careers advice on technical education for children at an early age – a university-style education is not always suitable for many young people. Train-and-pay for young workers should be seriously considered, to avoid young people taking jobs with little or no opportunity to advance and develop. Young people should be and need to be provided with the skills needed to ensure lifelong learning and taught the importance of this for maintaining independence.



The case for skills

The other evening, I came across a folder of my carefully laminated GCSE certificates, including my A in Design Technology, an A to which I subsequently discovered I owed to Lord Baker, who, as Education Secretary in the late 1980s, introduced the subject in recognition of the importance for students to have subjects that were both technical and practical. It is the GCSE for which I most enjoyed and subsequently proved the most hazardous to have achieved. I enjoyed it because I remember that things that didn't make sense in Physics and Maths when presented practically suddenly had purpose and relevance. Hazardous because from the age of 16 there has never been a household or mechanical object for which I have not had the false confidence to take apart (even where it clearly says you shouldn't) repair and occasionally put back together.

My educational attainment improved with age and my progression in learning and work took a very different path but the persistent view that I can do practical things has never left me. But therein lay the problem. When my motorbikes had carburettors and were managed by the laws of mechanics, my skill set could just about cope. As I got older, motorbikes became far more digital and the skills I have reduce me to the bare basics of changing oil and air filters. I am referring to an indulgent pastime but the point can be equally true in the world of work where the rate of technological change can leave people with skills that feel out of date, or become forgotten through lack of practice. If you want proof of that, try helping a teenager with their maths homework.

We need to be far more conscious of recognising the need for 'skills updates' throughout what will be ever longer working careers. It cannot be good enough to hope that qualifications gained up to our early twenties can carry us through until retirement. That is why many of us argue the case for lifelong learning. The challenge is that the workplace and the education system are not geared in a way that can achieve this. We need to radically reimagine work and learning; the physical design of workplaces and places of learning need to be different and far more integrated, as do learning materials and records of progression. Indeed progression would be designed into how jobs themselves are defined and rewarded. 'Skill updates' require us to see skills and education not as something that you 'get' at school, college or university and then 'take' to work but reimaged as two integrated, if not one indivisible system.

Michael Davis

UK Managing Director of Ecorys

Environment, sport & urban environment

“People across the West Midlands are tired of people – whether elected or not – paying lip service to these issues, not caring about the environment of their communities and region, or not seeing the urgency of the situation.”



The West Midlands is home to beautiful countryside, historic architecture, and a thriving visitor economy. Flagship regeneration schemes are transforming the centre of many of its cities and the region is leading the way in growing its manufacturing in a low-carbon world.

But there are still too many former industrial sites in need of redevelopment, estates and streets in need of regeneration, and town centres and shopping areas in need of renovation. Too many places feel tired and look unattractive. Improving the environment will not only make the West Midlands a more pleasant place to live – it will tell a better story about who its people are.

Some wasteland areas and brownfield sites seem to be awaiting development forever. This land could be put to better use by using it to create urban parks, particularly on contaminated sites where commercial development is not economically viable. But, at the same time, there needs to be proper protection for greenbelt land so that green spaces are available for people to enjoy. The greenbelt is also vital for wildlife; ‘green corridors’ and microscale parks across the West Midlands would allow wildlife to move between rural and urban areas and would also provide new parks and leisure spaces.

Climate Change:
cleaner, cheaper energy and better infrastructure

“This is a matter of urgency; the excuse of inadequate funds cannot stand. There needs to be action now. Climate change is very real.”

The West Midlands needs a climate change and low carbon policy built upon a broad low emission infrastructure plan that aims to build up and improve electric and low emission infrastructure for public transport and cars.

- Green organisations, the energy industry and other businesses also need to work together to identify how more use can be made of cleaner, renewable energy across the West Midlands to reduce emissions;
- People in the West Midlands need energy that is cleaner but also more affordable; more information and possibly subsidies and other incentives could encourage them to save energy by, for example, better insulating homes;
- Local government should also constantly be finding ways to reduce its own greenhouse emissions, for example, by stopping the use of diesel generators in parks, which would not only reduce pollution but also make parks and outdoor spaces more pleasant;
- Recycling rates need to be dramatically improved – burning waste should no longer be an option; and
- Pollution levels across the West Midlands should also be monitored, especially around schools, nurseries, parks and playgrounds.



A West Midlands region forest

“People can’t believe how green our city is when they come! We need to get rid of the old smokestack image in people’s minds.”

The West Midlands needs to promote low impact, low carbon forms of economic activity to counterbalance high impact activity within the region so that it plays its part in creating a sustainable future. A recent ‘forest enterprise’ cost £60 million over 25 years – the equivalent of just two miles of three-lane motorway or one mile of HS2. In return, the forest attracted nearly £1 billion in inward investment, created hundreds of jobs, added value to homes and led directly to hundreds of new tourism, leisure and wood-based businesses starting up. Creating an extensive forest within the West Midlands greenbelt should therefore be a priority.

Sport: futsal is the future!

“Young people need sport and as a city we need to promote that, as well as having the infrastructure to allow people to access it.”

People need sport and the West Midlands needs to provide the infrastructure to allow them – whether young or old – to access it. Resources already available, like the Birmingham Canal Navigations, could be used to create new and bigger spaces for sport across the West Midlands to attract international sporting events of all kinds.

Futsal – an FA-approved version of association football played on a smaller field and mainly indoors – is the fastest growing indoor sport in the world. But Birmingham does not have a dedicated futsal arena. In most of Europe, the Middle East and South America, Futsal is a professional sport.



Futsal has the potential to be huge, in the same way that the popularity of 20/20 cricket has exploded and overtaken the original test game. The FA is now looking to take it to a professional level in England, which means there is a great opportunity for the West Midlands to lead the way.

Taking pride in communities

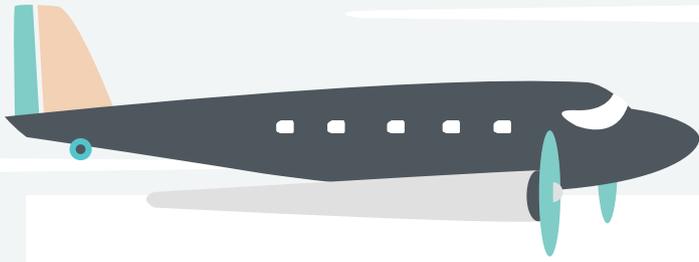
“It’s hard to have trust in local government when they can’t even look after their own buildings.”



People want cleaner streets. This means simple things, like clearing drains, providing enough bins and picking up litter from the streets of the towns and cities of the West Midlands are essential. But it also means taking proper care of government and municipal buildings and facilities. The new Mayor needs to show that they take pride in the communities they serve and that they take their responsibilities for those communities seriously. This is a case of leading by example because others can be encouraged to do the same – people need to be instilled with a sense of civic pride.

Limited budgets and reduced public sector staff mean this will not be easy. Funds could be raised through private sector partnerships to maintain local facilities important to communities, such as the Moseley Road Baths in Birmingham, and being stricter on fly tipping and littering could ensure communities remain clean and tidy.

This should also apply to recycling, where people should be charged for failing or refusing to recycle properly. But there should also be more education and information about recycling. Ultimately, this is about changing people’s behaviour and attitudes to their responsibilities within their communities and it can work – as shown by the fall in the use of plastic carrier bags following the introduction of the 5p charge.



Sustainable communities

A recent report from the World Health Organisation found that billions of people in urban communities are being exposed to lethal levels of toxic air from polluting vehicles on our streets. Pollution from diesel exhausts increase asthma and infection, whilst tiny tyre particles can penetrate deep inside the body, harming our lungs and cardiovascular system.

This is a global crisis, which requires local action. The majority of people in the West Midlands live near to high risk pollution hotspots - major transport axes such as railway stations or depots, main roads, busy junctions, airports and flight paths.

This places large numbers of our children, our senior citizens and our unwell friends and family in danger. The risks are also high for people we know who spend every day on the roadside - e.g. street cleaners, refuse workers and taxi drivers. Around 40 thousand people are dying every year and millions are at home on their sick bed or in hospital.

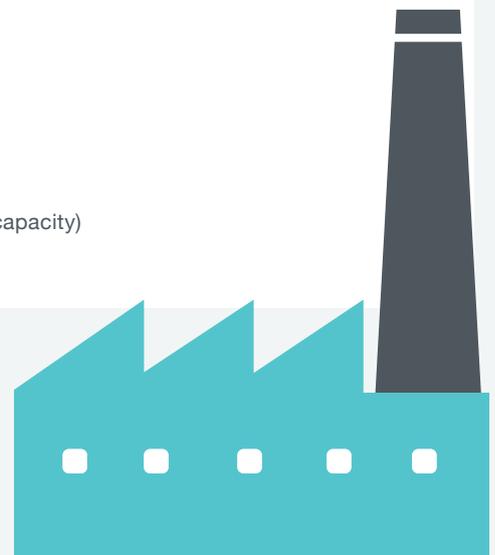
This is an entirely avoidable problem, which Government, in London, is doing nothing about. What would you do to make a positive difference and how do you think the new Metro Mayor should help - increase awareness about the dangers of air pollution; protect us by banning dirty vehicles; and/or give incentives for more people to use public transport, walk or cycle?

Perhaps, if you live in a more rural area of the West Midlands, you would prefer the Mayor to concentrate on one of the following to create a clean and sustainable West Midlands:

- repair our homes so they are dry, warm and peaceful places to live
- invest in clean parks and open spaces
- provide better recycling and waste collection
- improve our broadband services

Hugh Goulbourne

Director and General Counsel of Global Action Plan (writing in a personal capacity)



Health

More and more West Midlands residents are suffering from mental ill-health – one in four people in Birmingham develop a mental health problem over the course of a year. The increase in child and youth mental health problems should be of major concern; mental health overall needs to be an absolute priority.

- The vast majority of people with mental health problems will experience stigma so mental wellbeing training should be compulsory across the public and private sectors, particularly in schools, which would also improve the wellbeing of all involved;
- Physical and mental health should be managed together – combining health budgets with those for leisure and recreation would encourage cost-effective prevention rather than relying on expensive cures.
- There is an urgent need for investment in mental health support services throughout the communities of the West Midlands which is essential for providing support for vulnerable individuals but also to provide support, education and training to the ‘well’ population.

Fiscal policy

The devolution of powers from central government to the West Midlands makes little sense if those powers do not include meaningful control over the public finances. This also means there is the opportunity to pilot new ways of raising revenue, for example, by introducing a land value tax. Birmingham and other West Midlands cities are booming hotspots for investment in property from both home and abroad. Rents are already climbing and are set to continue to do so, particularly if HS2 goes ahead. While public services and council budgets face ongoing cuts, it is only right and fair that those who benefit from investment in prime real estate and who contribute to rising rental prices share more of their growing fortunes.

There is also the opportunity to pilot universal basic income, a new form of benefit payment that has the potential to support people out of work for a greater amount of time and could prove useful as increased automation makes large-scale unemployment more likely. Universal basic income would provide a new source of money for people to use to further their education, to retrain or to pursue other passions and interests.

With heartfelt thanks to the following for making this happen!

Anita Bhalla OBE, Richard Brooks, Amy Bruckshaw-Cross, Erik Cummins, Michael Davis, James Earley, Joe Edwards, Sarah Siena Edwards, Joe Galkowski, Hugh Goulbourne, Tom Happold, Guy Hirst, Paul Kehoe, Joe Ling, Geoff Mulgan, Joe Price, Councillor Claire Spencer, Jamie Wall, the amazing teams at Let's Dance, Nesta and Thought Works

And the people of the West Midlands.



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