

Cardiff Civic Society Our vision for Cardiff





Cardiff Civic Society

Cardiff Civic Society campaigns for the protection and enhancement of our urban green spaces and our built heritage, as well as fighting against inappropriate development that impacts negatively on the city's liveability.

The Society believes that to create a flourishing city, fit for the 21st century, we need to do more than simply conserve what is already here – we need to be a positive force for improvement.

We work hard to make Cardiff a more sustainable, fair and people friendly city by lobbying Cardiff Council and Welsh Government on issues such as -

- planning
- affordable housing
- reversal of biodiversity loss
- climate change
- conservation of heritage buildings
- community assets, including green spaces and mature green/blue infrastructure
- transport and clean air

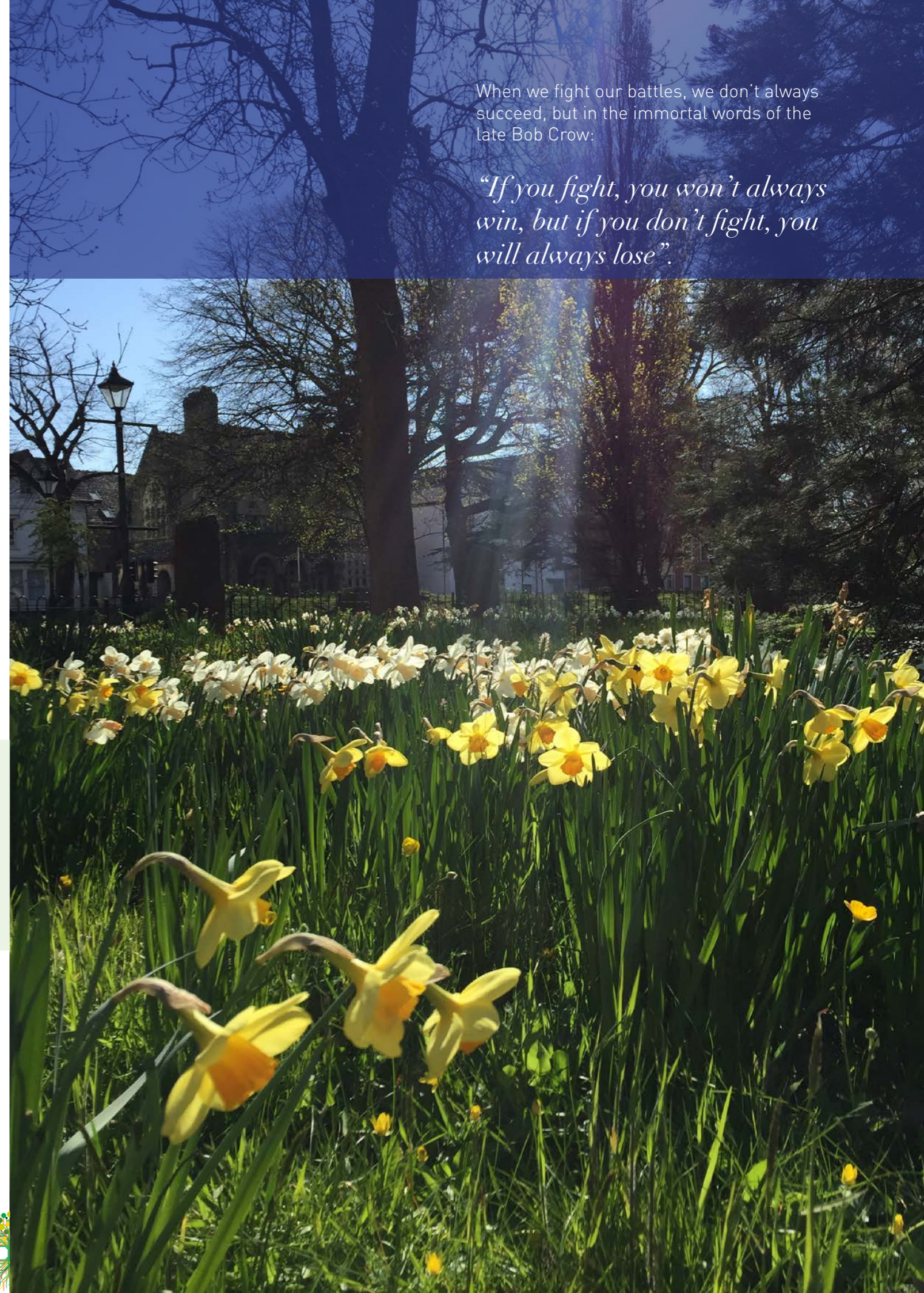
This is underpinned by a commitment to social justice and the desire to achieve a proper partnership between the council and its citizens.



In recent years we have fought more than 35 campaigns.

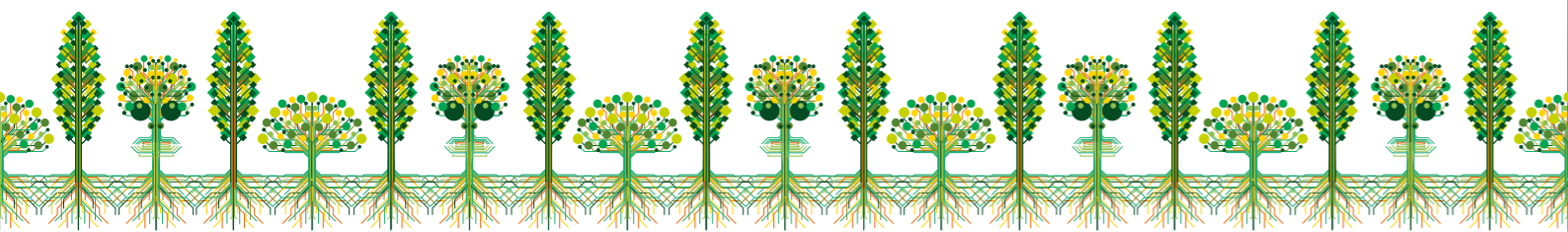
We are always happy to help communities faced with the might of developers, and have compiled a planning guide to help them with this.

We have put this document together in the context of the 2022 local election. The themes are drawn from our work/campaigns and the issues that Cardiff citizens raise with us.

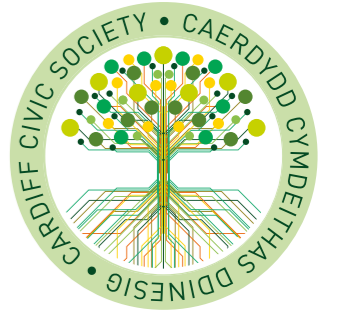


When we fight our battles, we don't always succeed, but in the immortal words of the late Bob Crow:

“If you fight, you won't always win, but if you don't fight, you will always lose”.



Cardiff Civic Society believes that a truly modern city, one that is fit for future challenges, must put the needs of its citizens and the planet first, embodying values such as social justice, equality, placing communities at the heart of decision making, as well as addressing climate change and biodiversity loss.



A Vision for Cardiff

Cardiff Civic Society believes that a truly modern city, one that is fit for future challenges, must put the needs of its citizens and the planet first, embodying values such as social justice, equality, placing communities at the heart of decision making, as well as addressing climate change and biodiversity loss.

In our view, Cardiff's civic leadership has permitted development that is often of poor design; fails to interact with adjoining neighbourhoods; and lacks sufficient and appropriate public open and green space. Developments that are neither liveable or sociable, sustainable or adaptable. In the pursuit of growth, the city has destroyed many of its assets, both natural and historic, and has failed to bring an end to inequality and deprivation. Experience during COVID has shown the extent of different dimensions of inequality in our city, including racial inequality.

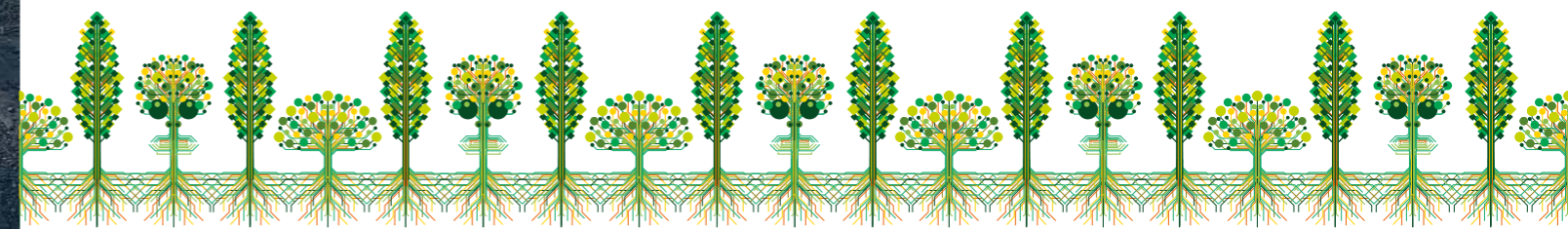
Cardiff Civic Society would like Cardiff to be a city where:

- the planning system works for citizens, rather than for developers
- climate change and biodiversity loss are taken seriously and acted upon accordingly
- the "15 minute city" concept is adopted and used to frame the city's growth
- affordable homes and decent jobs are available for all
- citizens are actively encouraged to participate in decisions about our city
- the pursuit of social and environmental justice is at the heart of decision-making and action

Projects based on similar principles have been put into practice in San Francisco, Bogota, Copenhagen, London, Calgary and Bristol.

There is no reason why Cardiff, the capital of Wales, cannot follow their example.

Creating a people-centred, sustainable, city demands a radical change of heart. But it has to happen if we are to create a future we all can and want to live in.





Planning

In our view, Cardiff Council has a reactive approach to planning, rather than setting the agenda and providing the leadership and guidance that is required. This has led to many poor planning decisions – e.g. destruction of well-loved buildings, erection of tower blocks, an over-provision of purpose-built student accommodation, poorly connected out of town developments, etc.

We appreciate that Cardiff Council has been weakened by austerity. But to counteract this, the council needs to 'work smarter'.

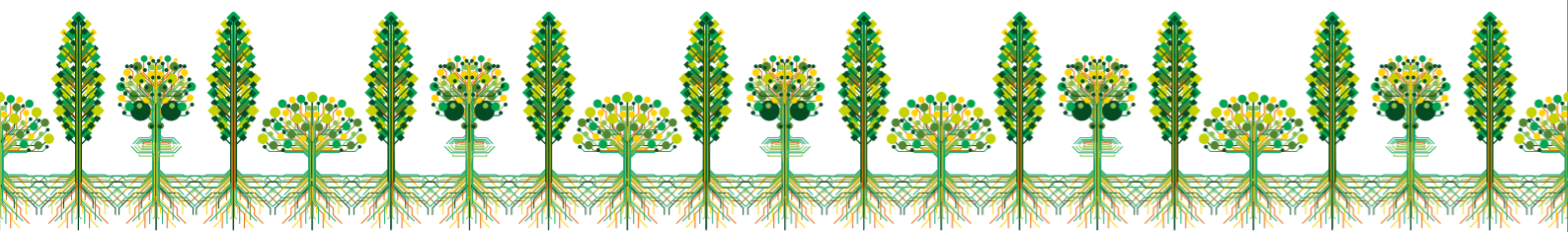
Cardiff Council must address the following:

- Sign up to the Placemaking Wales Charter, which is backed by the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) A good example of placemaking being put into practice is the Grange Pavilion - <http://dcfw.org/charter-anniversary-blog-post-benham-architects-discuss-placemaking-and-the-grange-pavillion/>
- Change the planning mindset from consultation to involvement and then to co-production, engaging people in plan design. Communities need to be involved from the outset in shaping major

proposals, rather than being presented with a plan that has all but been agreed, and in which major changes will not be considered

- Recognise that effective placemaking is bottom-up from residents as well as top-down by planners.
- Ensure that the city is child friendly (<https://childfriendlycities.org/>) and also works for older people.
- Convene Citizens Assemblies to consider both Strategic (regional) and Local Development Plans.
- Insist that new build has a lengthy anticipated life. The length will vary depending on the type of development.
- Improve early visibility of major development proposals and allow residents more time to respond.

- Increase transparency around planning applications, lifting the veil of 'commercial confidence'.
- Give greater powers to community councils in the planning process, and support the creation of a community council in every ward.
- End the practice whereby developers can decrease the amount of s.106 funding it contributes, after submitting a planning application, but before planning permission is granted, on the grounds of financial unviability.
- Provide a clear definition of 'affordable housing' and set a minimum proportion that must be achieved, including homes for larger families and people with disabilities. Developers must be made to adhere to these requirements.
- Directly elect chairs of local planning committees to increase their independence from the ruling party and hence enhance accountability to voters (a change that will require legislation from Welsh Government),
- Give residents the right to appeal planning decisions (Welsh Government needs to create legislation to allow this).





Built Environment

There are a number of issues with the built environment which we believe need to be addressed -

Design that future generations can be proud of

It is clear - with the occasional notable exception - that few recent edifices in Cardiff will stand the test of time - e.g. student tower blocks. Developments within the city are piecemeal and lack cohesion. The city is primarily Victorian and Edwardian, yet little emphasis is placed on maintaining that heritage and its context. Many new buildings have a much shorter anticipated life (sometimes as little as 50 years) than their predecessors. The quality of new homes can be poor and needs to improve, e.g. improving energy efficiency. Creating a city that people want to live in is a vital component in a thriving economy and contributes to citizens' health and well-being.

Cardiff is seeing a decline in footfall in the city centre, both in terms of retail and office working. The council has failed to grasp the fallout from the pandemic, and has made no attempt to alter its plans for the capital accordingly.

Architect practices such as Gehl, are world leaders in people-centred urban design. Gehl's motto is: First life, then spaces, then buildings. Their principles need to be applied to the design of buildings and urban spaces in Cardiff.

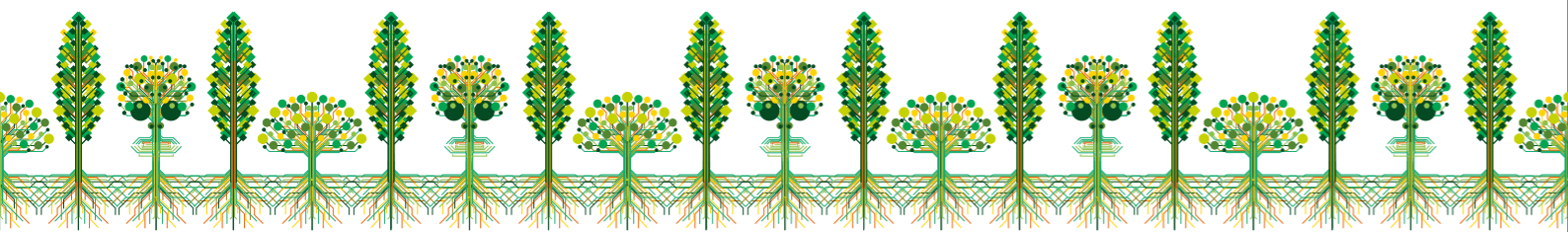
Climate change also means that new builds must be designed to mitigate the effects of high temperatures and sudden changes in temperature.

New build housing must be of good quality, form part of a 15 minute neighbourhood and provide space for homeworking.



Cardiff Council needs to

- acknowledge the city's Victorian and Edwardian heritage and ensure that this is fully considered when planning decisions are being taken
- insist upon best practice in developments - e.g. design (e.g. Welsh Government's Quality Requirements for Housing Associations and Local Government - <https://gov.wales/development-quality-requirements-housing-associations-and-local-authorities-2021>), energy efficiency, cladding, ability to withstand climate change induced higher temperatures, flooding, etc
- use the 15-minute city concept to frame the development of the city - where all the essentials of life are within easy reach, such as access to employment, shops, green space, health, education, leisure, public transport, etc.
- recognise that areas of the capital such as the centre and the Bay, are not simply places where people go to work, or to visit for a day, but are places where people have their homes. The same 15-minute city requirements therefore apply.





Housing provision

There is a shortage of homes in Cardiff, and unless more are built or created that will continue, even if population growth slows. Cardiff contains much of the worst housing in Wales, yet is amongst the most expensive places to live, with homelessness a continuing problem. There is a shortage of affordable housing. More social housing needs to be built in the right locations. Cardiff has over 7000 empty/underused properties and despite funding being made available by Welsh Government to address this, the numbers continue to increase.



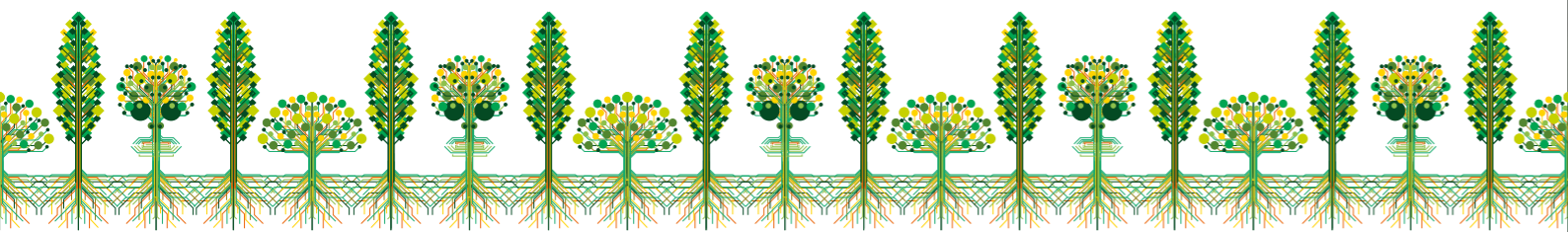
We need more homes. Some ways that Cardiff Council could provide these without building more include:

- prioritise measures to bring empty houses and other vacant/underused properties into use as homes
- maintenance and retrofitting to extend the useful lives of existing homes
- conversion of redundant commercial buildings (or spaces within these) to homes
- measures to deter properties being used as second homes or 'city pads' -e.g. council tax premiums
- lobbying Welsh Government to require change of use planning applications for homes used mainly as AirBnB or similar
- developing policies to encourage and support downsizing to free up family homes
- encouraging the setting up of community land trusts (community land trusts are set up and run by ordinary people to develop and manage homes as well as other assets. CLTs act as long-term stewards of housing, ensuring that it remains genuinely affordable, based on what people actually earn in their area, not just for now but for every future occupier.)

See also the section on planning for issues re. the provision of new affordable homes. In a growing city, there will still be a residual need for some new building on greenfield sites, although lower expected population growth should reduce the demand for this.

Cardiff Council must:

- only consider greenfield sites for development when other options have been exhausted. We are now at a point where we cannot afford to lose more green land.
- prioritise brownfield sites, but only where:
 - the brownfield site has little biodiversity or potential amenity value
 - brownfield land can be provided from other uses, such as out/edge-of-town parking
 - there is a regional plan to open up more brownfield candidates for housing sites
 - there is (or will be) improved connectivity and local infrastructure for brownfield candidate sites
- use the regulatory, tax and compulsory purchase powers that it already has to pursue this goal, and lobby Welsh Government for legislative change, where necessary.





Heritage buildings

The council shows little interest in protecting the city's heritage. Over the years many local landmarks have fallen foul of the wrecking ball. Others have survived as a ghost of their former selves. Guildford Crescent, once a vibrant hub of independent bars and other businesses is now simply a façade, to be overshadowed by another developer-led tower block. Even the Grade II star listed Coal Exchange, a building of national significance, has been allowed to languish in a sorry state of disrepair.

A radical change of policy is needed to save Cardiff from becoming another faceless landscape. Cardiff Council needs to

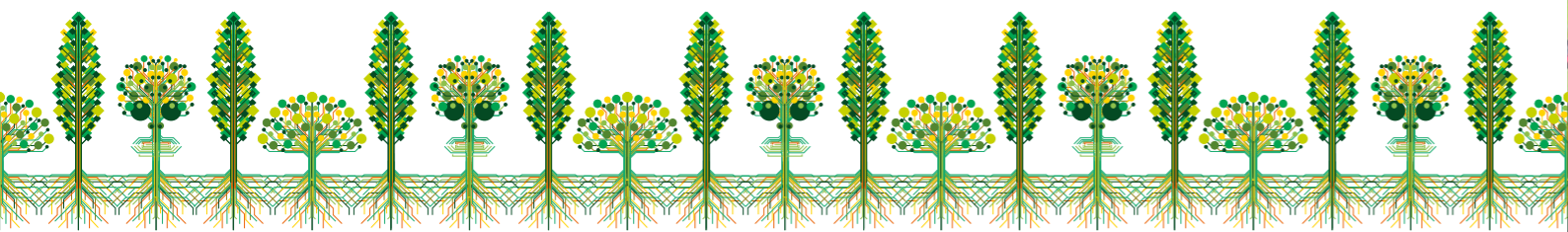
- work with communities to help them save locally loved landmarks that add character and interest to the neighbourhood.
- engage with CADW – they need to be more open to providing protection for buildings of value to communities.
- use the regulatory powers it has, such as local listing and restricting permitted development rights to make the demolition of much loved buildings more difficult.

Other issues - Transport

Cardiff's transport system is characterised by too much private car use and too little public transport and active travel. This causes congestion, air pollution and contributes to climate change.

Cardiff Council needs to:

- prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport over private car use
- stop developments that increase car dependency and use, and promote those with good provision of local services and public/active transport
- stop building cycleways through green space and parks. Cycleways need to be built on roads
- trial making buses free on weekends, school holidays, etc
- prioritise pedestrians and cyclists at traffic lights
- increase parking charges and residents' parking permits



The Natural Environment

Biodiversity

Alongside the climate emergency, we are also faced with a biodiversity crisis, driven by habitat loss, and the use of herbicides and pesticides. The council's One Planet Cardiff document states that 165 species are at risk of extinction in Cardiff. The UK, and with it Wales, is recognised as one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.

People cannot survive without nature: it provides us with the air we breathe and the food we eat. Nature is our life support system, and we are at risk of losing it unless immediate action is taken.



The Council needs to:

- Protect existing habitat, including its Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs). This means monitoring these sites and managing them to preserve their biodiversity.
- Insist that all developments fully compensate any biodiversity loss, as required by Planning Policy Wales
- Significantly strengthen its Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Guidance, especially the Technical Guidance Notes on Trees, Biodiversity and Green Spaces
- Establish mosaics of nature-friendly areas, along with natural dispersal corridors. We need hedges, ponds, wild flower meadows, unimproved grassland, understory, thickets of nettles and brambles in parks and other public space.
- Raise public awareness of the importance of biodiversity – e.g. what people can do in their gardens/neighbourhoods to improve it.
- Develop a better understanding of what constitutes “habitat” - e.g. brownfield sites, often dismissed as wasteland, can be immensely rich in biodiversity.
- Stop using herbicides and pesticides on council managed land.



The WHO states:

Urban green spaces, such as parks, playgrounds, and residential greenery, can promote mental and physical health, and reduce morbidity and mortality in urban residents by providing psychological relaxation and stress alleviation, stimulating social cohesion, supporting physical activity, and reducing exposure to air pollutants, noise and excessive heat.

Public green space

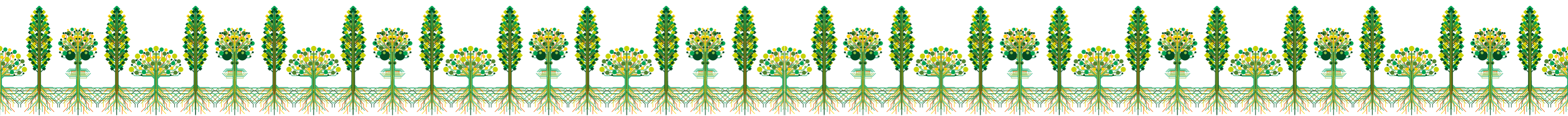
While Cardiff is often described as a ‘green city’ this is something of a myth. Cardiff has only 8 per cent publicly available green space. This compares with:

London	18%
Edinburgh	17%
Birmingham	15.58%
Nottingham	15.34%
Glasgow	13.49%
Cardiff	8%

The benefits to public health and well-being provided by access to green space are well documented. Comprehensive studies demonstrate that those who have access to green space are less likely to suffer from anxiety, stress and depression.

Cardiff Council needs to ensure that:

- the creation of multi-functional public green space is given appropriate priority within planning (some cities, like Stoke-on-Trent, are aiming to convert parts of their centres into parks, for example)
- the idea of “pocket parks” is rolled out across the city
- large areas of concrete and tightly mown grass are minimised
- unused open space that can be transformed into publicly available green space is identified
- tree planting (the Coed Caerdydd project) is accelerated and is done in an equitable way – the south of the city has few street trees, for example and areas such as Splott suffer from poor air quality





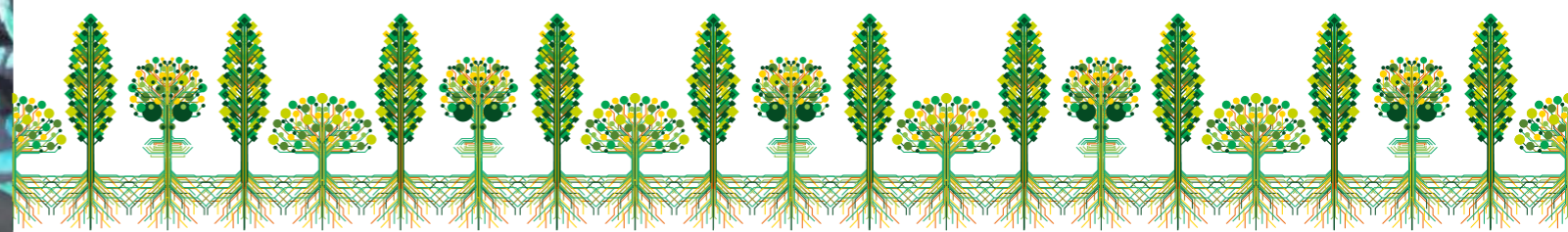
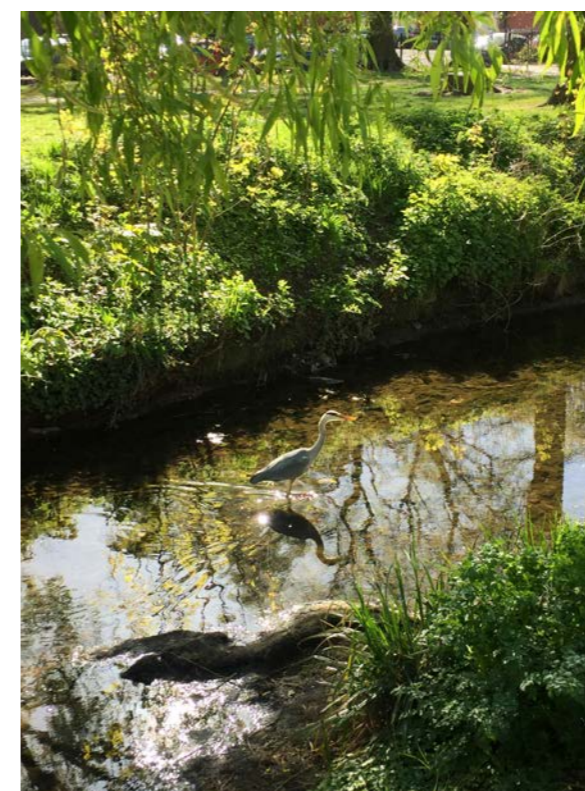
Climate change

Cardiff is highly vulnerable to flooding as the climate warms. A combination of high spring tides and flash flooding in the city's river catchments is likely to lead to severe flooding within the city, as the barrage may not be able to discharge enough water to prevent this.

The city is also likely to suffer from higher summer temperatures.

It is essential that the council:

- works with other local authorities and Natural Resources Wales to adapt river catchments, so that rivers and streams can meander and that flood plains can be developed, wherever possible. Tree planting in river catchments is also required.
- preserves areas such as meadows that can absorb flood water without damaging properties
- ensures that new housing developments are not sited in areas which are highly likely to flood
- acknowledges the carbon emissions from the erection and demolition of buildings, as well as the operation of those buildings, and works to minimise both types of emissions
- ensures that new development is designed to deal with higher summer temperatures
- ensures that trees are planted in urban streets to provide shade and cooling
- insists that only permeable surfaces can be used in developments, to reduce rapid water run-off
- is transparent about the carbon impact of all Council policies and spending decisions





Overhauling the way Cardiff Council does business

To achieve the major changes that are needed to safeguard the city's future, we believe that the council needs to explore whether it needs to change how it works.

The 'cabinet model' (currently in place) of running the council means that the majority of decisions are taken by the council leader and the cabinet - a disproportionate amount of power lies with just a handful of councillors. To balance this, there needs to be more transparency, more engagement with citizens and more scrutiny of the cabinet's decision-making.

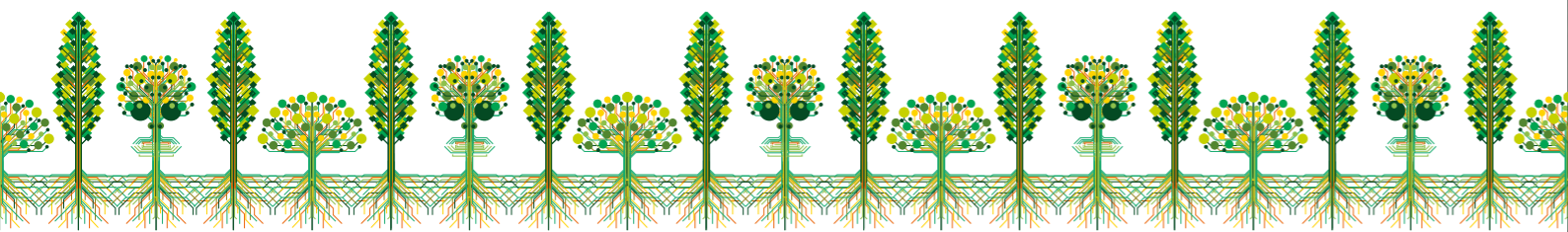
The role of the scrutiny committees within the council could also be strengthened. Despite the cross-party nature of these committees, their ability to ask difficult questions needs to be improved and the cabinet's power to ignore the committees' recommendations needs to be addressed.

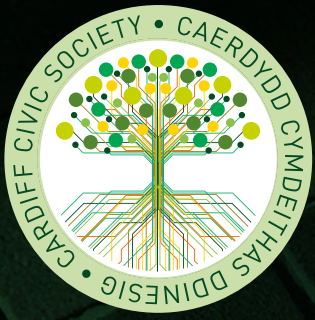
The time allocated to scrutinise key issues facing the city is a matter of grave concern. For example, only 45 minutes was allocated to issues raised by stakeholders in relation to the Replacement Local Development Plan - a document that will plot Cardiff's course, and the lives of those who live here, for the foreseeable future.

The way in which the planning system and the planning committee function needs reforming. The current system is undemocratic and lacks transparency, excluding the city's human assets - its residents - from playing a meaningful role in what happens to their city, with consequent negative impacts on citizens' quality of life.

Cardiff Council needs to

- establish a task and finish group to look at best practice in accountability, public engagement and scrutiny in council governance
- include in this review the council's scrutiny committees - e.g. how the chairs are chosen; and whether recommendations from the scrutiny committees should be binding on the council
- include a review of the planning committee - e.g. how the chair is elected
- increase transparency by routinely disclosing information that could be put in the public domain without compromising confidentiality or data protection
- consider the environmental and heritage implications of all cabinet and council proposals
- engage with citizens on at least an equal footing to that with developers





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