



Power in the City

Transcript E05: From 9 - 5?

PART 1

Intro

Britt: Hi, and welcome to Power in the City. This is a podcast about the everyday and on the ground ways that people are responding to the climate emergency.

[electro ambient sounds based on work noises]

Mix of voices from the episode:

I got really lucky, you know, I managed to get a job straight out of uni, which was amazing. And then obviously it's something that helps the environment as well, which is kind of like a bonus.

So what is a green job? That's a very good question. I think it's anybody who is delivering something that delivers an environmental improvement.

I think young people are keen to sort of make a difference as well.

Brick laying, carpentry, stone masonry has been around for thousands of years. That's why they call them biblical skills.

I have to say, we have a really happy workforce. We really work as a team.

Hannah: The first season is based in Oldham and has five episodes. My name is Hannah.

Britt: And I'm Britt. - Hannah, do you actually know that Oldham is not a city?

Main episode

Alex: Hi Britt

Britt: Hi Alex.

Alex: So here we are again, and this time I get to be the host.

Britt: Yeah. How did you get promoted this quickly?

Alex: I don't know. I'm charting a meteoric rise here on the Power in the City podcast clearly. I feel quite honoured though. So welcome everyone to Power in the City. And what are you bringing us today, Britt?

Britt: So we've been talking about zero and low carbon activities, you know, all over this Podcast season, stuff that we already do like in our homes and in travel, but we haven't actually talked about work.

Alex: Oh, yeah, of course. Really important.

Britt: You know, I read that in the UK we spend an average of 25% of our waking hours at work.

Alex: Oh man. That is depressing,

Britt: Isn't it? Yeah. Well, I thought that definitely makes it an important activity in terms of zero carbon to look into. And then we also read and hear so much about green jobs at the moment. So I thought, let's look into this. You know, what exactly is a green job? Like, how do we get them? What motivates people who do work like that? What might be the conditions we want to create so that lots of people can benefit from these opportunities? And I have to admit, that this subject has become so interesting and we went down so many loops and rabbit holes and had so many brilliant interviews that I ended up actually making this last episode of our Oldham season into two parts.

Alex: Oh wow. Back to back bonanza.

Britt: Yes. But let's start at the beginning. As always, we, uh, started by talking with people on the ground in and around Oldham and in this case people who work.

Mumin: I think when I first got the job, my dad held a party for me. One was purely because obviously I finally got a job straight out of uni. You know, it was, it was a really big thing and it's like my first proper official job apart from like Maccies,

McDonald's and like restaurant waiting. And I think they were really proud of me and I'm grateful for it.

Alex: Hey, that's Mumin, isn't it?

Britt: Yeah, it is. So, Mumin works with us, so with Alex and me at Carbon Co-Op.

Mumin: Hi, I'm Mumin. I'm 21 and I'm based in Oldham. I am a software engineer working at Carbon Co-Op and I'm working on our open energy systems.

Britt: Mumin works on our nerd team.

Mumin: I think my main passion is just computers. I've always worked around computers. I've done computer things since I was probably about 10, 11 ish. Like I was just, as soon as I touched a piece, like my first computer, I just knew it was what I wanted to do.

Britt: See, I told you, nerd team. Mumin even built his own computer at home from scratch.

Mumin: So I finished school doing like literally every computer subject I could, computer science, design, technology, engineering, and IT. And then I went into college doing maths and science, because at that time I wasn't completely sure if I was actually going to be doing it as a profession. Like I didn't know exactly which way I wanted to go.

It was either, uh, programming or mechanical engineering. So I just wanted to give myself something to, you know, lean back on, support myself a tiny bit. So for college I went to Oldham sixth form, where I did A level maths with Btech science. Um, and then I went to Manchester Metropolitan to do software engineering for three years.

Britt: Mumin found the job with us pretty much straight out of uni. He applied and to his delight, he got an interview and the job.

Alex: And that's when his dad held him a party.

Britt: Yeah, it's lovely, isn't it? Um, Mumin says he likes working with us, but then of course he has to say that to me... but it sounded quite genuine.

Mumin: It's an amazing team. If I ever get stuck, I need some help, everyone's there to support me. I really like it.

Alex: What does he work on?

Britt: Yeah. What does he work on? No, I actually know that. So from my understanding, he writes the software for an online tool that we will offer, which allows people to work out what they have saved with energy efficiency measures in their house.

Mumin: So it can be just savings after you do retrofit or it could just be savings in general. So you could say like last year I basically had every plug on for the entirety of the year. This year I only turned it on when I needed to. And you can essentially just compare how much you saved over those years.

Britt: Mumin says that he's quite pleased that the software he's working on helps people to save money and save carbon. He wasn't necessarily looking for a green job, but it does make him feel good to be involved in making a positive change for people and the environment.

Mumin: I got really lucky, you know, I managed to get a job straight out of uni, which was amazing, and then obviously something that helps the environment as well, which is kind of like a bonus. Especially like as a Muslim, you know, we try to like, we try to help as much as we can, so being able to do this is really nice to me.

Britt: What are you thinking, Alex?

Alex: I was thinking about what Mumin says about how the helping the environment bit of his job is like a bonus. What do you think is his main motivation?

Britt: I got the impression that apart from obviously, you know, the need to make a living it's about doing something he enjoys and is good at. So when I was asking him about advice he could give his peers, he says this:

Mumin: Find what you enjoy and just work towards it.

Britt: So, you know, I also got the impression that he is quite motivated by learning new stuff and being invited to come up with ideas. So I guess that's about innovation and space to be creative.

But of course, pay also really matters. And I think the problem companies like ours still have is that we struggle to retain workers like Mumin because the main aim of our organisation is not to maximise profit, it's supporting as many people as possible to save carbon emissions.

So we take business decisions in line with that aim. Like for example, we make the software we produce or Mumin produces in this case, open source, which means free to use and adapt - rather than selling it. And that in turn means that we can then not compete with the kind of salaries that other companies offer people with Mumin's particular skill set.

Alex: Can we compete in other ways?

Britt: Yeah, I think we can maybe. You know, climate change is like a massive all encompassing problem and we start to physically understand the effects. I think this might lead to some sort of an excitement really, that people feel because they might be able to contribute to creating solutions for that.

And you know, like Carbon Co-op was maybe seen as a bunch of crusty activists 10 years ago. Meanwhile, Mumin actually used the words “cool startup” in our chat.

Alex: Oh, really? Yeah, well, I think it's great to have carbon coop on my CV personally.

Mike: Yeah. I think the real sad thing for me is that I'm coming to the age to retire, so some of the most exciting bits of the industry I will miss. But, um, I think we've left a good legacy for people to build on the network now and to move that challenge forward.

Britt: This is Mike. He has been working in the electricity distribution industry for over 30 years. He works for Electricity Northwest and I'm speaking to him and his colleague Helen.

Helen: Do you want to go first, Mike.

Mike: Ladies first.. .

Helen: Hi, my name's Helen Seagrave. I'm the Community Energy Manager for Electricity North West, and I've worked here for five years.

Mike: Good morning. My name is Mike Taylor, Head of Customer Engagement for Electricity North West, and I have worked here 20 years on the second of December.

Alex: Wow. 20 years with the same company.

Britt: Yes. And his entire working life in the same sector. I asked Helen to explain in a nutshell what Electricity North West does.

Helen: So Electricity North West is responsible for delivering electricity from the national grid to people's homes and businesses. So we own and operate all of the energy assets that are required to do that. So the wires, the substations. Uh, it's our job to make sure people's power supplies are maintained and if there is a power cut to, um, deal with it. But also if you want to connect to a new kind of low carbon technology, like a solar panel or a heat pump or an electric vehicle charging point, you need to talk to us cause you need to connect to our network.

Britt: So, uh, Electricity North West operates regionally.

Helen: We cover Cambria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester. We go a little bit into North Yorkshire, Darbyshire and Cheshire. So it's largely the northwest region.

Britt: Um, sorry, but I need to get a bit techy on you for a moment. Cause I think it's really amazing what, um, ENW does actually.

So they make sure that our lights are on, which is a really difficult thing to do. Um, you know, you have to predict when people use electricity, like the five o'clock kettle or the cattle at halftime, like in an all important footy game. And then, um, they balance that with what is generated because you have to keep the electricity flowing through the system at the same pressure or it cuts out.

This is not an easy job. And of course, that's not just about our lights. You know, it's about computer systems, hospital operations, databases, industry, trains, you name it. So I went to the control room once and it's just really cool.

Alex: Yeah, it's such a massive task. How many people work at ENW?

About 2000. Um, nearly all of them local jobs, they've got good conditions as well. They are a real living wage employer and train people as apprentices in-house, I think 20 or 30 per year.

Mike: We've got it all from joiners, painters, labourers, tech drawing people, uh, surveyors, horticulturalists, arborists, lawyers, finance people.

Uh, and then we've got technical skilled people that do specific roles on the network and such, so fitters, jointers, linesmen, engineers that actually switch on and switch off the system. Cause you can imagine electrical systems have to have a safe working practice. So a lot of training involved to be able to operate the network.

Britt: Helen adds all the people that work in customer service as well.

Helen: So making sure people are informed of work on the lines and protected during power cuts. And then there's the jobs like what Mike and I do, which is talking to more sort of either communities or businesses or sort of more specialised customers about the projects that they want to do that involve connecting to our network.

Alex: So would you say these are all green jobs?

Britt: That's actually a very interesting question. Um, we haven't really touched on definitions of, um, green jobs yet. So here is Helen's.

Helen: So what is a green job? That's a very good question. I think it's anybody who is delivering something that delivers an environmental improvement or a benefit.

So it could be installing renewable energy, it could be working on the electricity grid if it's trying to help renewable energy get connected. It could be anything to do with working in the wastewater treatment sector, for example, but also, um, in the finance sector if you're trying to invest your money in, um, non fossil fuel businesses.

So anything that's involved with trying to do something in a more environmentally friendly way.

Alex: Ah, okay. So in a way, jobs at Electricity North West are changing to become green over time as they're enabling the move from fossil fuel to renewables.

Britt: Yeah. And decarbonizing the grid, as they call that move also comes with decentralising the grid.

So that means we generate energy in more and smaller generators all the way to solar in your house, for example, or storing at a local level, like even, you know, your electric vehicle battery can become a storage. Um, and again, with that kind of move, um, come lots of interesting new technologies also in how we might be able to maybe trade energy at a local level.

So if you're interested in this kind of stuff, listen back to our episode three on solar. So distribution companies play a massive role in making these kinds of things possible. They're in charge of maintaining and updating the infrastructure, and of course, balancing demand and supply, which with renewables is a little more challenging, and they take care of every new connection to the grid.

So you can imagine that the more complex the system gets, the more challenging it gets for the distributor.

Helen: I think it's an exciting time to start working in the electricity industry because it's so critical to meeting our climate change targets in the UK that electricity stops producing carbon emissions, but also it helps transport to, uh, produce less emissions by powering electric vehicles and hopefully reduces emissions from people's homes by powering electric heating and heat pumps.

So it's a really exciting time to come and start working in the electricity industry because it's more complicated now, and we need lots of developments and innovations to make the electricity grid function in the new way.

Britt: And Helen's job, uh, is a completely new green job, which ENW created quite recently.

Helen: My role was a new role created five years ago based on the demand from, um, communities in the region who were asking colleagues lots of questions that they didn't necessarily have the time or the knowledge to answer. So my role was created to help speak to community energy groups in the region and work out as a business how we could best support them.

So I would say it's definitely a green job created because of decarbonisation and the trying to reach our climate change targets as a business. We've got a very clear commitment to lead the North West to zero carbon.

Britt: And, as you know as well, the support that ENW has been giving community energy groups in the region has been outstanding. We can say that from our own experience. They offer project funding, technical support, knowledge sharing workshops and many, many other things. Helen also leads on the carbon literacy training within their own company.

Helen: Uh, we have delivered carbon literacy training to all of our leadership team, and we're going to roll it out to a lot of the rest of the business over the next five years.

And it's very much a commitment that everybody in the business needs to get behind. And a lot of the people that I speak to once they've been through the carbon literacy training and they really understand the problem and feel really empowered to do something about it, are very excited about working in the net zero space..

Alex: Sounds like a really good job to get into for young people too.

Britt: Yeah. Um, and so I was really surprised to hear from Mike and Helen that they're struggling with attracting talent. Mike thinks it's partly because one, not so

many people know this work even exists because when it runs well, it's invisible, right? So it's a bit like, you know, the swan with the paddling feet. And the other part is that, um, I think it didn't really change, um, that much since its inception, so there's just not very much innovation and excitement.

Alex: Until recently that is.

Britt: Exactly, and that's what Mike talks about when he says he's kind of sad to retire. He says he has seen more change in the industry in the last five years than in the 30 odd years before that put together. And the challenges of the last years have brought this system much more to the forefront of public consciousness and lots of social and technical innovation is needed to decarbonise the system in a way that all customers benefit.

And it will be a great place for people who like to be creative and innovative

Alex: And maybe also do their bit for the planet.

Britt: Helen and Mike seem to think so from their experience with apprentices.

Mike: I think, um, young people are keen to sort of make a difference as well. You know, how can they help in that arena? I think, um, as an organisation we need to try and grasp that as well.

Alex: That's so interesting.

Britt: I asked Helen what motivates her, and she says this:

Helen: So I need to feel like I'm doing my bit for reducing carbon emissions, adapting to climate change, whatever it is we do. Cause otherwise the problem's just too much of a worry.

But also, I like helping people and those people that just need a little bit of support to shine. So before I joined Electricity North West, I worked helping small and medium size enterprises and businesses across the North West get into the new renewable energy supply chains, and now it's working with communities.

The communities that we work with have got the ambition and the ideas to achieve, they just need a bit of our technical knowledge and know-how and industry understanding and a bit of help linking with each other so they can learn from each other to achieve their ambitions. I love my job because I get to help people and I feel like I'm doing something useful on a daily basis.

Mike: And work with me.

Helen: Yeah. And I get to work with Mike

Britt: So, um, next I thought we could look at the construction world jobs and particularly at the jobs in retrofit and maintenance. Um, it connects quite well, I think, to the last episode you made. So, um, how many new jobs did you say needed to be created in that area alone in the UK?

Alex: It's somewhere in the region of 467,000 jobs, including hundreds of thousands of jobs in trade oriented work like carpentry, plastering, joinery, things like that.

Melissa (in interview): Um, and I was told that things like bricklaying and plastering and painting, carpentry are referred to as biblical skills. And I should ask you why!

Mark: Um, because they've been around for thousands of years. Well, it's the original work, isn't it? Brick laying, carpentry, stone masonry has been around for thousands of years. That's why they call them biblical skills.

Britt: So Melissa's having a chat here, um, with Mark and Orianne, who you met in the last episode already. Mark is the site manager and Orianne is an assistant site manager who's currently learning the retrofit trade specifically. So Alex, retrofit, what is it in a nutshell? I think, um, you quite loved the definition Mark gave you last time.

Alex: I did. It was brilliant. So in a nutshell, it means to fit something in retrospect new to an existing thing. So bringing it up to scratch, that could apply to anything like a car. But in this context, it applies to a house being refurbished.

Britt: Brilliant. And I think I learned in the last episode that retrofit is a very sensitive job that needs workers to know what they're doing and work under conditions that allow them to provide maximum quality because as Mark says:

Mark: You know, it only takes one little mistake and it can snowball into sort of a big problem.

Alex: And that big problem affects somebody's home and wellbeing, and that's a massive responsibility.

Aileen: I founded B4Box, uh, 13, 14 years ago, and it was to address the skills shortages in the construction industry, which are particularly in the multi-skilled arena.

Britt: This is Aileen who founded B4Box, which is the construction company that Mark and Orianne work for, and by multi-skilled she means construction workers with multiple skills, meaning they can do most of the jobs in a refurbishment, so the brick laying, the plastering, the carpentry, and also then the decorating, for example. So it means less subcontracting, and it also has an effect on quality because there's no risk of confusion in the handover from job to job.

B4Box have their own in-house college and since 2008, they've taken on 1,400 apprentices. They are paid at least the living wage and learn partly in the classroom and partly on the job. B4box employs four teachers who are also skilled construction workers, many who actually learned there themselves and then went on to do the qualification. This is Aileen again.

Aileen: So we teach people in groups of five or six every week a skill, an element of a skill in the classroom. The person who teaches that person the element of a skill then goes out with them that day or the day after, and does that on site. So at the moment, we have 12 teams out in Manchester today doing that.

Britt: So the teachers can fix any mistakes apprentices make on the job right away. And the apprentice gets to actually learn by doing in a safe environment, which for refurbishment in particular is really important because every house, as we learned in the last episode, ages differently. And also, of course, every person learns differently.

Mark and Orlande: Some people you can tell, some people you have to show, but they, they all pick it up. Yeah. And some people you have to just let them do it, you know, figure it out on their own, because if you're there micromanaging them, it's just you end up doing it. Yeah. And just leave them, leave them to mess up. And then once they've messed up, they won't do that again.

Britt: And, um, Mark says you never stop learning anyway. And that's what he loves about working at B4Box, that he's continuously challenged and supported, uh, in trying something new.

Mark: What I like about B4Box is I do like the learning aspects. Like they challenge me, you know, they push me. They want me to go in different directions. They want me to learn different things. That's what I like the most. I like the support. You know, you never stood still. You're always progressing. You know, they never just want to put you somewhere and leave you there. I didn't know anything about retrofit and I'm still learning. Um, but it's good. It's something challenging and yeah, it pushes you.

Britt: When I ask Mark and Orianne about other things they value about their work, they say this:

Mark and Orlanne: Oh, it's a community company. So, um, well, you started, started off in Salford and you're a Salford lad. And I'm from around here and it's sort of helping. Like I know most of the people when we go on to these jobs, I know 'em, so they're like: "All right?" And I'm like: "All right." So it's sort of like builds your standing in the community, which is nice.

Britt: This is about trust and accountability in relation to the customers.

Mark and Orlanne: You know, if you look at just the community you're in, it's important for the economy of that community.

Yeah. Like 80% of the employees that work for us are Stockport residents, you know? Yeah. They're beneficiaries from the work that we do. Yeah. And we, um, you know, we keep, so we tend to use all our suppliers, Stockport suppliers, so, you know, it keeps the money within that pool where we are working, we tend to keep it there.

Britt: And that's about local economy, Um, something we have mentioned in past episodes quite a bit, and we'll also talk about in the next part of this episode. There's a real opportunity that the energy transition can create local jobs and strengthen local supply chains.

Aileen: I have to say we have a really happy workforce. We really work as a team cause it's almost like people can't believe that they will be fully paid during an apprenticeship. And every time we have an opportunity for one of those, we have 50 plus applicants. So we get some people who they're, they're just so grateful to be having real work with real training and real pay, that they work really hard actually to make it work for them.

Britt: Unfortunately, fully paid apprenticeships are not the norm in the construction industry today. And even when you come out of college, you can often end up working as a self-employed gig worker.

Alex: But why is that?

Britt: Um, I asked someone about that. His name is Tom Jarman. He works in the construction world. He actually used to work on the client site, mostly for social housing and local authority, most of his working life. And now he actually advises those same clients, um, on how they can do their bit to reach their decarbonisation targets.

Tom J: One of the biggest problems is that, um, the construction sector itself can be quite dysfunctional. So if you are in the supply chain, your experience of the construction chain is in many cases not going to be very positive.

Britt: Tom says that most of the supply chain are what's called small to medium size enterprises or SMEs. They employ less than 250 people, but in reality, most are micro SMEs, so more likely to be like 10 people or less.

Tom J: And most of them won't deal directly with clients. They will deal with a main contractor that will be dealing with clients. And so by the time you get to the SME level, construction is quite an insecure place to work. There aren't particularly good margins, and a margin is just how much money you make at the end of every year to sustain yourself.

But a margin is also important because the margin, the profit is what you also decide what to do with. Are you going to put that into training your people? You're gonna put it into training yourself? Are you going to put it into new, better equipment? So in a low margin industry, there's always an element of people struggling to survive, and because they're struggling to survive, they can't think ahead. It's much more difficult to develop a business. It's relatively easy to survive, but you don't think in terms of how your business grows.

Britt: Tom says that a lot of responsibility actually lies with the clients. His experience is particularly with local authorities and social housing companies, but the principle he explains below, would fit any bigger client, really.

Tom J: The fact is that most clients buy construction services at the lowest cost, and their key criteria is is it compliant rather than what sort of quality of service are we getting. In terms of how you do things differently, I mean the chief problem is that unless clients do things differently, the supply chain are not going to expand. They're not going to invest in skills and training, and they're not going to invest in people, and they're certainly not going to invest in innovation.

Alex: That makes a lot of sense and it's a sad state of affairs.

Britt: Yeah. Tom also points out that, um, you know, there are organisations doing things differently. Um, so they build strong long-term partnerships with the companies that they buy services from, for example. Um, or they might make sure that those companies also put really good conditions for the subcontractors in place. So it's not all doom and gloom. But, um, the industry definitely needs more long-term thinking and clear national leadership, so there's confidence in a secure pipeline of work. So companies and individuals know that they can invest in training.

Tom L: This is where I did my college education for four years. Uh, another reason why I work here, to be fair, uh, again, it's about me putting back into the local and obviously investing in the youth and the people coming through this industry.

Britt: This is Tom Leahy. He's the department head of building service engineering at Oldham College.

Tom L: My background is, uh, I'm a plumber and gas engineer. I served an apprenticeship for a local authority a good few years ago. Then I got the opportunity in 2008 to move into education and to help pass on my skills and knowledge to the next generation of plumbers, gas engineers and construction operatives.

Britt: And, um, ultimately Tom came back to the college in Oldham where he did his education, and now obviously he's training at the plumbing, electrical, gas, and renewable technology departments.

Tom L: This is our renewable technology room. This is where we do all the solar thermal, uh, solar PV, rainwater harvesting, greywater reuse, all that sort of renewable technology stuff.

So this is a thing really that we're hoping over the next couple of years will really, really take off, uh, in relation to people coming in re-training.

Britt: It's really brilliant at the college. Like they have all this latest tech and stuff for people to learn with. Oldham College at the moment attracts people from all over the Greater Manchester region, especially for this, uh, adult evening provision where you can re- or upskill to learn about sustainable technology.

Alex: Oh, that sounds amazing!

Tom L: Because at the moment, like I say, not all colleges and training centres offer the full scope we offer. So we have a wide range.

Alex: I had no idea.

Britt: They also do like teaching alongside apprenticeships of course, so when you are in a company. And they also do a really early A level type program. Um, and when we ask him how they prepare people for green jobs arising in the energy transition, he tells us that they integrate sustainability in the curriculum as a whole.

Tom L: So considering sustainable materials, renewable technology, but also for example, how to produce low or no waste in the construction process itself. Um, and also understanding standards and legislation. It doesn't matter if you're a joiner, a plumber or an electrician. You need that understanding, that core understanding of sustainability.

Britt: And they also offer specialisation in how to, for example, install heat pumps or rainwater harvesting.

Tom L: So a traditional plumbing and heating apprenticeship would, at the back end of it, normally do a gas route, whereas now they have got the option to do a green technology route. They can do a rainwater harvesting unit at the end. They can do an air source or ground source one, and they can pick that renewable technology, uh, rather than traditional fossil fuels.

Britt: But while we are speaking with Tom, I also detect some frustration he feels, especially now in the cost of living crisis. Things are not moving quickly enough for him. He knows firsthand what a different technology, like rainwater harvesting, for example, or solar, would make to people's lives right now, and he feels there is not enough awareness raising and incentives to get the work going.

Tom L: It is having the knowledge, being able to install that, having the training centre there ready to be able to install these qualifications and, and get 'em all up and running. But unfortunately, like I say, the push is not there from the government side at the moment. Again, like I say, shame cause like I said, we could do a lot more and, like I say, iron out a lot of the wider environmental issues that this country's facing at the moment.

Britt: And Tom also thinks that more funding needs to be offered for re-skilling.

Tom L: I do think they need to be looking at the grants and sort of the free training courses to train people up so somebody is not gonna come off their own back and spend 800 pounds ahead of a course.

Alex: Yeah. There seems to be a lack of leadership shown through things like regulation, incentives, awareness building, and a real human potential there that we're not tapping into yet.

Britt: Yeah, absolutely. And you know, I, and I think many other people wonder if maybe this is also due to something that might be bigger than just regulation or policy. Something that might be a bit more deep seated. When I ask Aileen from B4Box about her definition of a green job, this is what she says:

Aileen: One of the things that's developed over the last few years, along with a greater understanding of the climate crisis, is a kind of devaluing of manual skills. It's shocking, really. And by which I mean care workers, nurses, and in this case construction workers, the people you actually need.

Just think about what, what, what happens if you just don't have a toilet or you don't have a shower, or you can't heat your home? Who do you wanna call? Not somebody who works in an office. You don't want somebody fixing your toilet from a zoom call, if I can state the absolute obvious.

Alongside a greater understanding of the climate catastrophe going into the public arena has also been the cost of living crisis, and alongside that has been a devaluation of manual skills. If you reverse that and think, let's do our absolute best to avert climate catastrophe, and let's do our absolute best to pay manual workers, what they deserve as the bedrock of so many things in our lives. The result would be what we are currently calling green jobs.

Britt: But green jobs, she says, is just words until we actually think who are the people who are going to be mending our homes.

Aileen: And how much do we think they're worth as a society as a whole? And how much training do they need? And here's the good news. The good news is that fully trained in that and they've got a job for life because this is going to be needed in perpetuity because houses will start breaking down again, or systems will start breaking down again. And you then need the actual practical skills.

And it's not myself personally who's devalued those skills. And I'm not sure it's anybody, it's been systemic and over time that these skills have been devalued.

I can't see a way of decarbonizing 29 million homes with smart thinking and technological thinking alone. It has to be people using their hands in situ, unless I'm highly mistaken, which I'm not. So what a joy it would be if those people then got paid well, because what it would mean is, as well as society waking up to climate catastrophe, it's waking up to what skills you would like to value in the future.

Britt: You've gone very quiet.

Alex: Yeah. It's a lot to process. She touches on so many subjects there, like valuing people's work and skills, but also really valuing the act of maintenance and care.

Britt: Hmm and equality and wellbeing. I'm really glad that she asks the question of, um, what we would like to value in the future. We mainly think of the climate catastrophe as a massive challenge. And you know, of course it is, but with crisis always comes the opportunity of changing what is not working and coming up with different approaches and I don't just mean new technologies, you know, I mean what we value and how we want to be with others, including nature. It kind of comes up in every conversation we have actually.

So the final person we will hear from today is actually somebody you proposed I should talk to, Alex.

Alex: Lucy.

Britt: Yes. Thank you so much for making that contact. So Lucy brings yet another perspective to the question of work.

Lucy: I think the issue is that we look at these things through the lens of an economic model that is broken because it fails so many people. So currently people are struggling, desperately struggling, not because they need to, but because the model that we've been working with is so damaging to the majority of people.

Britt: So what Lucy is pointing out and what also Aileen was alluding to is that maybe the problem we encounter with climate change and with social inequality and with devaluing skills has a much deeper root problem.

Lucy: My name's Lucy Burke. I do lots of different things.

Britt: Lucy's day job is as a researcher and lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University in the field of cultural disability studies and medical humanities, and she's supporting her son who is autistic and she's involved in disability activism. And Lucy is an active trade unionist.

Lucy: So I'm a national negotiator for the University and College Union, and the chair of the branch at Manchester Met.

Alex: Lucy is really engaged with climate activism in Manchester as well. I co-host a podcast with her called Green New Deal Media, and she has her fingers in lots of different pies. She's a writer, philosopher, campaigner and as you've mentioned, a negotiator, so a real champion on many fronts.

Britt: There is a link to that amazing podcast in the show notes if people are interested to listen. Um, and Lucy says that there is a crossover between all of the different kinds of work that she does.

Lucy: I think people matter. I think people in all our massive diversity, you know, and wild differences matter and I'm really interested in trying to, I suppose, change things so that everyone has access to opportunities and to things that are meaningful to us and that enable us to flourish.

And I think that's really also linked to my interest in the environment and in climate because we often think about climate change very, very negatively. And, and you know, there are really good reasons for that.

Britt: But she says that she also thinks that this massive, sticky, complex blob of a problem could maybe be an opportunity to reimagine our world into one that is based on much more even and equal allocation of resources.

Lucy: I think we need to just start to think differently and be brave enough to think differently about how we might organise things and how we might organise work and the sort of activities that we engage with.

Britt: Lucy says that the fact that people work a lot doesn't necessarily mean they are more productive and people work a lot and often still don't earn enough through that work to manage because wages are so low and that our economy is propped up by the unrecognised work of carers and informal carers.

Lucy: If people had time and space and some recompense for doing that kind of work, I think that would make a massive difference.

Britt: We judge economic success, Lucy says, by a very limited metric, the GDP. Alex, what does GDP stand for?

Alex: So, GDP is Gross Domestic Product and basically means the total value of the goods and services that we produce as a country, essentially.

Britt: Thank you. So Lucy says we could also measure success differently.

Lucy: Look, we could talk about wellbeing and flourishing and all those other things. We could have a different set of measures for what economic success looks like.

Alex: Wouldn't that be amazing? Just imagine it: In the last quarter, our economy has been growing by 25% measured by people in good health, equal opportunities in education and protection of biodiversity.

Britt: When I ask Lucy my obligatory question of what she thinks a green job is, she reels down the official description, but then she says that she thinks that that is maybe incomplete.

Lucy: I think care, um, and caring should be viewed as green jobs. I mean, I think education should be, I think there are lots of jobs that are not destructive and that are beneficial. And I think care in particular is one of those.

Britt: She says that in the future world, she imagines care and caring plays a major part.

Lucy: It's about understanding our obligations to each other, understanding our interdependence, enabling people to live good lives. All of that I think should be at the centre of what we're sort of really arguing for in terms of a transition to a good greener society. So I suppose those things around nurturing and mutuality and respect, which I think is so important,

Alex: Lucy isn't just talking about the profession of caring.

Britt: No, you're right. I think she's talking about the much wider activity of it or the practice, but also you know, the value and the mindset of care.

And I think she's pointing out that we need to maybe ask ourselves more what kind of a world we would like to live in and what kind of values we might therefore want to put at the centre of this transition.

Alex: This has gotten pretty deep.

Britt: Yeah, I think we should leave it there for today. This episode has a second part to it, which we hope we would love to listen to. So, um, thanks Alex.

Alex: Thank you Britt. That was really good. Cheers.

Outro

Thank you for listening. There is a second part of this episode if you want to find out a bit more.

Power in the City is produced by Carbon Coop and funded by the Electricity Northwest Powering Our Communities Fund, ICLEI Action Fund and UCL Grand Challenges.

This episode was written and produced by Britt Jurgensen and hosted by me, Alex King, local research and interviews Melissa Kelly Shore, sound design and post production by Barry Han.

You can find a list of all episode contributors and lots of additional information and links in the show notes.

PART 2

Intro

Britt: Hi, and welcome to Power in the City. This is a podcast about the everyday and on the ground ways that people are responding to the climate emergency.

[electro ambient sounds based on work noises]

Mix of voices from the episode:

As a kid I was always like pond dipping and you know, I knew all about all the Latin names of like snakes and all the rest of it. I was obsessed with it.

You know, how can we make sure that we are developing our local places to meet the challenges for the 21st century and do so in a way that really benefits everyone and hopefully reduces inequality as well.

Denny is based within Oldham. So he has lived here all his life basically. Um, and the idea came to him when, uh, he saw his neighbours putting on solar panels on the roof next door, and that's when he thought, well, can we not utilise that energy into vehicles?

Hannah: The first season is based in Oldham and has five episodes. My name is Hannah.

Britt: And I'm Britt. - Hannah, do you actually know that Oldham is not a city?

Main episode

Alex: Hi Britt

Britt: Hi Alex. So, uh, how's the host chair feeling now?

Alex: I'm getting comfy. It feels, it feels nice actually.

Britt: Don't get too comfy, because I'm going to take over at some point.

Alex: All good things come to an end. I know. Um, we're still talking about work today.

Britt: Yeah. We are still talking about work. Um, so this is a bit of a bonus, part two, episode five, or maybe the second part to that episode. And, um, you remember we were talking to people in Oldham and also beyond, you know, about about work and the sort of the kind of work that people would take in the Zero Carbon future, so green jobs. Um, and we realised that this is of course a really big topic and that there are also questions that go beyond the green job that maybe have more to do with the kind of conditions that we need to put in place for those jobs to emerge and for them to be accessible to as many people and as many communities as possible.

As well as you know, the questions of what motivates people and what we value as a society, and kind of some of those really big philosophical questions really. And, um, well as it turns out, Oldham is really quite progressive also on, um, thinking around those conditions or providing those conditions or at least attempting to provide those conditions.

So that's what we are gonna look a bit more at in this, in this episode.

Alex: Sounds good.

Britt: Yeah, and I thought, like always we'll start talking to, you know, one of those local businesses on the ground.

Adam: Welcome here to Trailar. Um, so yeah, I'm Adam Buckle-Mars, I'm the principal engineer here at Trailar. So I've been here for about three years now.

Britt: So Trailar is a bit of an Oldham success story and a poster child for the kind of new businesses in the green technology sector that Oldham Council want to see more of.

Adam: Basically, the company's been running for the last sort of eight years, originally born from within DHL. So, our co-founders, Aaron and Denny, they formed on a sort of innovations program type of thing within D L and, um, they came up

with the idea to essentially place solar panels onto vehicles to help drive down cost of fuel and reduce CO2.

Britt: Denny is from Oldham and he had worked in the transport industry and for DHL he was running the UK fleet and was in charge of like 18 and a half thousand vehicles. And I guess he wasn't maybe too happy with how unsustainable the industry still is.

Adam: Denny is based within Oldham. So he has lived here all of his life basically. Um, and the idea came to him when, uh, he saw his, um, he saw his neighbour putting on solar panels on his roof, um, on the roof next door. And that's where he thought, well, can we not utilise that energy into vehicles?

Alex: What? That sounds mad.

Britt: I know. It's pretty cool, eh. Um, when Denny pitched this idea within DHL, he basically made it through all the, uh, innovation panels, like starting from regional, national to global, and ultimately, DHL did something they have never done before.

Adam: So typically they would normally purchase companies or, um, take on, uh, equipment and make it standard spec. Uh, with Trilar, they actually gave the pot of money to create a new company, um, and basically gave the pot of money to Denny and Aaron for them to create Trilar, which they did.

Britt: Denny made a conscious choice to stay in Oldham rather than, for example, picking up sticks and moving to Birmingham, which seems to be the centre for transport.

Adam: The majority of the people that work here at Trilar are from Oldham as well. So, uh, we've kept everything pretty local in terms of, um, the people we employ. Um, and it, it sort of created a very family, uh, friends culture, um, for considering again, we were part of DHL, um, a big, massive corporate. We were still able to run as our own sort of independent. Um, so that's, that's been great and that's what's sort of seen us through, um, this whole period, especially with Covid and everything as well. Um, everyone's here, everyone's, uh, mucking in and, uh, we're all in and around the area. Um, and so, so we've, from, um, from Denny's setting up the business, he managed to employ 45 people, of which about 30 of them were from, um, the Oldham and Manchester area.

So it's been a great story, um, for, for all of that really.

Alex: But wouldn't it be better to just move to EVs completely?

Britt: Yes. Um, we asked ourselves that same question, um, but from my understanding, Trilar see themselves as a provider to bridge a gap.

Adam: So the, the good thing about, um, the Trilar system is it's that, um, stepping stone between moving from your diesel driven vehicles to sort of your EV vehicles, your hydrogen vehicles, um, that you can't quite afford at the moment, or the infrastructure's not quite there, but you can still do your bit by reducing that CO2, um, with the vehicles that you currently run at the moment.

Britt: And it seems that while they provide for that gap, Trilar is also innovating the way that solar could be used on vehicles in the future.

Adam: Um, Oldham Council itself has been an early adopter of the technology. We've been speaking with, um, a lot of the councils and stuff, and, uh, especially Andy Burnham and getting into the decarbonisation plan for Department for Transport has been a massive thing for us, and we've worked very close with, uh, Oldham Council, um, and placing our, uh, panels, uh, straight onto their refuse trucks and helping drive down from there.

And they've been, uh, one of the first adopters and they've taken to it really well. They love the product and obviously it's something for them to drive down because you can't really go into EVs with those types of vehicles because the range isn't there. The infrastructure isn't there.

Alex: It sounds like they're very committed to the local area.

Britt: Yes, and that's worth a lot in itself. You know, creating local jobs and also expertise that can be shared with other businesses.

Let's have a look at some council level strategies that create good conditions for these kinds of businesses and for this kind of local work.

So we're gonna start with newts.

Alex: Sorry, newts?

Andy: From being a, you know, a child, I've always been a lover of nature, you know, as a kid I was always like pond dipping and, you know, I knew all about all the Latin names of like snakes and all the rest of it. I was obsessed with it, you know. And, um, as a child, I used to, in the summer holidays used to go roaming around the local

green spaces and in amongst the ruins of old mills and, you know, where there's, there's lodges full of newts and all this sort of stuff.

Britt: So this is Andy. Um, you will have met him if you already listened to episode three on solar. Andy is the sustainability lead for Oldham Borough Council and is leading on something called the Oldham Green New Deal. At the beginning of our conversation, I ask Andy what motivates his work. .

Andy: So I decided I wanted to do something to try and preserve nature. So back in 2003, I managed to get a job with Bury Council, my local council as an energy efficiency officer. I was promoting loft insulation schemes, cavity wall insulation, you know, not rocket science, but that was where I started.

Britt: Andy tells me that he thinks he might have actually mainly gotten that first job because he knew how to plan a project and run a budget from organising concerts.

Alex: Shows that it needs all sorts of hands-on skills in this sector.

Britt: Yeah, in my books knowing how to organise a good party on budget and a curiosity about newts are great baseline requirements.

Alex: Absolutely.

Britt: Andy says he managed to get the hang of it pretty quickly and gathered more experience in the sector and ultimately got to do more and more strategic roles.

Andy: First at Traffic Council and then with Oldham Council and here I am, um, I developed the Oldham Green New Deal Strategy, um, and I'm the program manager for the delivery program. I'm very lucky actually, because Oldham is a very forward looking council.

Alex: So what is a Green New Deal strategy?

Britt: Well, I'm so glad you asked Alex. Because this is what I actually wanted to speak to Andy about in the first place, uh, not just about newts. Um, I had heard that Oldham is the first council in the UK to have proclaimed a local Green New Deal strategy. So I ask Andy to tell me a bit more about where this idea comes from, and he says it's based, uh, on an idea called the New Deal.

Andy: The New Deal was an American idea. I think it was, uh, between the wars. It was focused on economic regeneration after the Great Depression. And the idea was

that a program of investment could actually create the, you know, the jobs and the training opportunities, uh, and actually set the economy.

Britt: Um, so that was the New Deal and the Green New Deal, Andy says, is an idea also developed in the United States, which proposes to both achieve our environmental objectives and create good jobs and training opportunities in the process.

Andy: So it's, it's like a joint economic environmental approach. And Oldham, uh, adopted this approach back in, um, 2019.

So our existing climate change strategy was expiring and we needed a replacement for it.

Britt: Yeah, so a local authorities climate change strategy is a high level plan on how to reach the carbon reduction and environmental improvement targets the elected representatives have set in order to slow climate change.

Alex: And what does that mean? Like in real life.

Britt: Um, so for example, Greater Manchester has pledged to be carbon neutral by 2038, Oldham even by 2030. And this will need major infrastructure changes. So this is about transport as we touched on in episode one, local renewable generation moving away from gas, heating, you know, decarbonizing Oldham businesses and the big, big job of making homes more efficient or, um, you know, it's also about shortening the journeys, for example, that food and goods have to take to get to people. Um, and where and how we produce food and how we reduce waste. Plus, of course, you know, the education pieces of how to adapt behaviour.

And I'm deliberately just talking local changes at the moment. So the ones that are in our sphere of influences as local stakeholders.

Alex: So in summary, there will be quite a bit of work coming up here.

Britt: Yes, absolutely. Um, so when the climate strategy needed renewing, Oldham Council decided they wanted to, um, do a Green New Deal approach for Oldham, and Andy led on creating the strategy and it was adopted in March 2020.

Andy: So it didn't get the best start in life, but it was, um, the first local authority, Green New Deal strategy in the UK.

Alex: Oh, I didn't know that. Wait, that was when the first lockdown happened?

Britt: Yeah, it was literally adopted by a cabinet a week before the first lockdown in a much more holistic way.

Alex: And what, what do you mean by that?

Britt: I think it will become much more clear from what Andy tells us. But in a nutshell, the Green New Deal approach in Oldham is about using the need to decarbonize most sectors as a way to create local opportunities. So jobs and training and good infrastructure, um, and also building local and community well, building and distributing resources more fairly.

Andy: The easiest way to explain Oldham's Green New Deal is that it's a classic climate change and mitigation strategy and climate change and mitigation is about reducing carbon emissions essentially. You know, there's a lot more to it than that, but that's basically what it focuses on. But the thinking behind Oldham's Green New Deal is that we can do that and realise a whole range of co-benefits at the same time.

And broadly, you may have heard of the term community wealth building. Oldham's Green New Deal is essentially climate change mitigation with community wealth building principles.

Alex: Okay, wait, lots of lingo there. First up, co-benefits.

Britt: Yes, they are additional benefits that come from an action we do. So, for example, using your retrofit example, insulating, my home means I have to heat less. So I emit less carbon into the atmosphere. And I might then also have a heat pump, or I'm connected to a heat network run with renewable energy. I might even produce that renewable energy myself or I get it from a local plant. Alright, so this will save carbon and mitigate climate change and the co-benefits are that in the long run I spent less money to heat and it will be warmer. Both the building and me will be healthier physically and mentally, and that in turn has benefits for our public health system.

Alex: Strike

Britt: I don't know if you, um, have ever seen this cartoon before?

Alex: I haven't. No.

Britt: Um, you might have to describe it for our listeners to get it.

Alex: So picture the scene. It's a big climate summit, like what you would see at COP or something. There's a bloke on stage making a presentation from a podium with a big screen behind him listing all the benefits that you would get from decarbonising rapidly. He's got energy independence, preserving the rainforest, sustainability, green jobs, and then there's one rather pointy-headed spectator shouting out to the rest of the crowd. "What if it's a big hoax and we create a better world for nothing?"

Oh, that's brilliant. Okay, so we've covered some of the, I guess, economic public health co-benefits. What's community wealth building?

Britt: Yep. Well, let's hear from the horse's mouth, as they say.

Antonia: How can we make sure that we are developing our local places and the jobs within it and you know, the natural environment within those places to meet the challenges for the 21st century and do so in a way that really benefits everyone and hopefully reduces inequality as well.

Britt: This is Antonia. She has just, um, recovered from a monumental cold, but she's keen to keep to our online meeting because she and her organisation are big supporters of the way Oldham is approaching local economic development.

Antonia: My name is Antonia Jennings, and I'm an Associate Director at an organisation called CLES, which is the Center for Local Economic Strategies.

And we say that we are the National Organization for Local Economies. So what that means in practice is we work across the country, the UK that is, but we only work on a local level.

Britt: CLES are based in Manchester and they work across the country with councils, combined authorities and also the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to support them in figuring out what actions they can take to help create thriving local economies that produce maximum benefits for local people.

Alex: That's really interesting. So does that perhaps address some of the questions that came up in the last episode about actually making sure local companies can invest in innovation and in training people because they know there is work in that area on the horizon?

Britt: Yes, definitely. That's a big part of it. I ask Antonia for some hands-on examples for us, because this can all feel a bit abstract sometimes. She tells me about work they have recently done in the South of Scotland.

Antonia: We recently worked with seven housing associations in the South of Scotland, and we worked with them to figure out the size of the opportunity that will come from making all of their buildings more energy efficient.

Britt: So they looked at, uh, the amount of work that needs doing, the size and specification of contracts that will be going out, and then showcased all of that to what she calls the ecosystem of the organisations and people that could be involved in making that happen locally.

Antonia: The idea behind this project was to figure out the size of the opportunity to also map that opportunity according to physical geography and also showcase that opportunity to local firms, to councils, um, to colleges, to all of the different people involved in that ecosystem that will need to make this happen.

And off the back of that, we saw that there was an absolutely huge opportunity by way of jobs, gross value added, you know, how much this can assist the decarbonisation agenda, how much this could improve skills in the area. The figures were really outstanding and off the back of that, we've been using this report as an advocacy tool to try and cajole this ecosystem together to try and make it happen.

Britt: And this is where the work actually really starts according to Antonia, because it's ultimately about getting different actors to work together towards a common goal. Because as Antonia and Andy both point out to me, we have the opportunity right now to build up the supply chain of local businesses, and the people currently doing their training, for example, in Oldham College, can grow into those jobs and also run new businesses in the future.

Antonia: One thing I'd add to that, and the reason housing associations are really well placed to lead this kind of work is because they have this thing that I was calling economies of scale. Collectively, they have such a big slice of the pie here that they're best placed to kind of kickstart the market here.

Britt: She says if housing associations have got their ducks in a row, they can create this very local, vibrant supply chain for retrofit, for example, that will serve other landlords and homeowners going forward.

Antonia: So that's the kind of community wealth building, just transition thing in practice.

Alex: So basically we have to decarbonise anyway. Now is the opportunity not only to create green jobs, but also make sure local businesses grow and benefit from that.

Britt: Yes. And that in turn will benefit local communities. Remember what Mark and Orianne from B4Box said?

Mark: Like 80% of the employees that work for us are Stockport residents, you know? Yeah. They're beneficiaries from the work that we do. Yeah. And we, um, you know, we keep, so we tend to use all our suppliers, Stockport suppliers, so, you know, it keeps the money within that pool where we are working, we tend to keep it there.

Britt: So that's that ecosystem Antonio is talking about. The example that Antonia, uh, gives us here is quite small scale. Um, Preston, for example, implemented this kind of approach at a big scale and the outcomes are really impressive.

Antonia: So in Preston specifically over I think a seven year period when the council was making a lot of effort to procure more locally, we saw around 70 million pounds more for the local economy funnelled through the local economy.

Um, actually the wider region that Preston sits in, I think had more than double that funnelled through it by way of Preston redirecting its contracts locally. But I think one of the most tangible ways that SMEs, um, experienced this was, through that process that, um, Preston City Council developed, it managed to bring together all of the, what we call anchor institutions in Preston to work on this agenda together.

Alex: Anchor institutions?

Britt: Yeah. Anchor institutions are, um, they're locally rooted institutions, so for example hospitals, housing associations, fire departments, schools, colleges, you know, all those, um, organisations that are not going to decide to pick up sticks and take their business elsewhere and because they aren't going anywhere, they have a real stake in the success of the wider ecosystem they sit within. So together they have quite a lot of local buying power. And the agenda Antonia talks about was a commitment, um, to buy a maximum of services and goods locally with local providers.

Antonia: They were also able to look into the future and see what would be the needed sectors in the next five to 10 years that they didn't have locally rooted businesses for. And the two they identified were around food, so delivering catering contracts and around tech. And because they had the power of bringing themselves together and the opportunities that came collectively because they had the economies of scale, they were able to collectively incubate, nurture, develop, and scale that new generation of SMEs.

Britt: And um, so this is not an example specific to decarbonisation. It kind of happened before all of that push from local councils. Um, but it gives an idea of what is possible.

Antonia: And again, you know, with the promise of those contracts coming down the line, which the anchor institutions could give the new SMEs, those SMEs are really thriving, you know, being able to invest in themselves and their future and, you know, creating a more thriving ecosystem of locally rooted businesses for Preston

Alex: and creating good jobs.

Britt: Snap.

Antonia: And creating good jobs. That's a huge part of it. You know, off the back of Preston's efforts, um, there's many thousands more people being paid the real living wage, because this is the other thing that if you're a public sector body, a state body, you can put requirements into your contracts around this kind of stuff.

But the one that always sticks with me, is, um, over the first five years of the Preston model being developed - that's what it's called, Preston's efforts in this area - at the end of that period, Preston was seen as the most improved place to live in the UK and I think that's ultimately what it comes down to.

Alex: Wow. That makes so much sense, doesn't it?

Britt: And interestingly, Antonia like so many others we speak to, emphasises how much this work is about building partnerships and building trust.

Antonia: So I would honestly say that the biggest challenge with community wealth building isn't finding the answers or doing the modelling or writing the papers. It's hearts and minds. Actually, stakeholder management, it's bringing together, um, relevant people. It's winning people over. It's getting them to truly believe in the art of the possible.

Britt: Yeah, so this is really about creating connections and having conversations and doing some long-term thinking together. And it's often about relationships, trust, and also sharing risks. And I've had the opportunity over the last years to speak to many different local authority officers in the UK and also across Europe, and read a lot of case studies. And my sense is that the places that are most successful in implementing their climate strategies, so getting things going on the ground are the ones that have created possibilities for conversation and collaboration between businesses, uh, local authority and communities. Um, you know, may that be like via

round table events or local business, uh, uh, networks or citizen advisory boards or, um, skill sharing and experimentation and innovation. Um, and generally a local council's role here can be to model behaviour and the way they treat their own operations as one of the anchor organisations. And then they also are really well placed as a sort of enabler, connector, you know, facilitator for the different stakeholders to work together.

And Oldham works in this way as much as they can within their resources.

Andy: We had a study done, uh, looking at our green technology and services sector, and there's about a hundred or more companies in it doing a wide variety of things. So, you know, we know who we've got, we know what they do.

Britt: So, you know, one of them would be Trilar, who we heard from in the beginning.

Um, so this is Andy again. The next steps he says are about creating the connections and bringing the different actors together.

Andy: We want to set up this green business network to, to keep our local supply chain abreast of our plans. You know, maybe we're not designing the Green New Deal right. You know, to get maximum benefit for local businesses.

So we can say to 'em, these are our plans. What do you think? You know, how, how could they be better? You know, what are your needs as businesses? What support do you need as businesses to bid for some of these opportunities? Do you understand the opportunities? You know, do you feel that you've got the right people in the company to be able to bid for these opportunities. Um, do you want us to hold a conversation with the college to make sure they're putting on the right courses so that you know, young people are, have actually got the skills that you need to get involved in these opportunities?

Britt: Andy also points out that this network would be the ideal place for other Oldham businesses to get the support they need to decarbonise. Um, so this would be businesses that are not green technology, um, businesses, but they still have to, of course, lower, you know, uh, uh, the carbon in their production and organisations like Trilar who we heard from at the beginning of the episode would be really useful in that kind of setting. For example, thanks to their extensive experience in that area and their commitment to Oldham as a place.

Andy: It's about everybody working together. It's about communities having their say on what infrastructure they want and need. It's about supporting our green

businesses to grow, making sure they've got the skills, and it's about making sure that the rest of our businesses have the opportunity to actually, you know, improve their environmental performance, which let's face it quite often includes becoming more competitive in the market.

Alex: This is all great and sounds brilliant, but how are these opportunities funded in the first place? Where does the investment come from?

Britt: Mm-hmm , that is the billion pound question. Quite literally, actually.

Antonia: So what we're seeing in local government and specifically within Oldham, who's a pioneer in this space, is we're seeing huge amounts of political ambition when it comes to decarbonisation.

We're now in a position where the majority of councils have declared a climate emergency, and the majority of councils as part of that, have decarbonisation targets ahead of the national 2050 targets.

Britt: Antonia says that it is really encouraging to see the ambition match the emergency of the situation we find ourselves in.

And local authorities have developed strategies on how to reach those targets, so plans on how to decarbonise food, transport energy homes at a local level, and they have quantified how much that will cost.

Antonia: I have worked with countless councils across the country who hand me over their environmental strategy. Um, and it looks great. It reads amazingly, but there are literal question marks next to most of the deliverables around how on earth do we fund this? Because there is no money. The average council in England since 2010, has received cuts, um, to their central government funding to the tune of around 60%. That's huge. And alongside that, what's happened, the demand for services, demand for their services has skyrocketed because of austerity. So we're in a situation now where local government have the ambition to realise something really amazing, but not the means, they don't have the funding to do it.

Alex: So then what happens?

Britt: In Oldham's case, they are looking at several options and it's a mix of whatever government funding becomes available with private investment and actually in Oldham's example, also with community investment, which we heard about in episode three. And for the really big infrastructure projects, they're looking for external companies who can, um, forge out that sort of money.

Andy gives the heat network they're planning to build as an example.

Andy: For very large pieces of infrastructure, you know, 20 million pounds. It's estimated that the, the proposed heat network would cost. You know, there's not very many companies within Oldham that would have that kind of money. So, um, you know, it would probably be a company from outside Oldham.

However, the way that the whole thing is set up can be set up by the council in such a way to secure as much social value as possible, so to make sure that the end users of heat, you know, are getting a good deal, you know, to make sure that as much as possible, olden companies are used in the construction process.

You know, to make sure that, um, students from the college can, you know, maybe, uh, come on site, you know, for a, a day a week to, to receive training as part of an apprenticeship or, or something similar. So, um, it, it's, um, it would be lovely if Oldham could do everything, but we can't, but what we can do is, is make sure that the power of the wider economy, um, can be, uh, tailored, uh, and captured for the benefit of Oldham residents and businesses in a kind of circular economic model, as you say. So, you know, the benefits stay within Oldham as much as possible.

Britt: What Andy talks about here is using progressive forms, new forms or um, future boundary pushing forms of procurement, so buying things or buying services that set obligations for the company around social value they need to deliver. Like for example, you know, using local subcontractors.

Andy: The key is making sure that A, the investment comes in and that B, it's spent with Oldham companies as much as possible. And that then creates a pipeline. And, you know, if the college is offering training courses in these skills, then Oldham companies know that, um, they're gonna be able to recruit people to expand their businesses with the right skills.

And the college knows that there is gonna be jobs at the end of the training courses for the, you know, the young people that, that are coming up in, in that industry. It's about bringing in the investment, creating that pipeline of works and really supporting Oldham businesses to then be able to expand further into Greater Manchester and beyond.

Alex: But isn't there a kind of tension here in that the actual infrastructure would be owned by an external company, so the profits would likely be controlled by their shareholders?

Britt: Yes. This, of course depends on what kind of an investment it is and what kind of company it is to, to a degree. But yes, in terms of community wealth building principles, this is likely going to be a compromise.

So in an ideal world, the profits from running that local infrastructure could be reinvested in future projects. If this was owned publicly, or let's say by community investors or a social enterprise or a local, even, even to a degree by a local company potentially. Which might sound quite farfetched to us right now, but it's the reality in many countries and has been in ours in the past as well.

Andy: In fact, you know, the first, the very first district heat networks, the very first, uh, you know, street lights, um, and power stations were owned by the local authority or the equivalent of what it was back then. And it, I suppose it stands to reason, doesn't it? It's the local municipal authority providing services for the residents. You know, what could be more logical?

Britt: And he's not proposing that we necessarily go back to that model, but he does point out that one important element of community wealth building is what he calls plural ownership. So basically a mix of ownership models, you know, public and private. And also with private ownership including citizen ownership. So local people's ownership of shares, like in the model of community energy we spoke about. I think ultimately this all comes down to accountability. The problem with our system as it stands is that global companies, private or public, really are operating in places and communities, which they are not accountable to.

Andy: We visited, um, an installation in Germany where, uh, the local authority had actually developed a solar farm, um, but had made, I think it was 25% or maybe, uh, 50% of it available to the community via community shares. So, you know, there's a different kind of public-private partnership there. It's the public authority, but the private citizens actually, rather than other companies, jointly controlling, um, the means of production of their energy.

And, you know, when communities are empowered like that, you know, they're really in charge of their own destiny.

Britt: Andy says he hears criticisms on the idea of a local green New Deal quite a lot by people who say that it is too much of a compromise. So in a way, what you were asking me before and people are saying that we need a National Green New Deal or ideally a sort of global re-imagining of our economic system for these principles to really take root. Andy and Oldham Council don't agree. They believe in the power of setting a trend, and they believe that they can still create enough local value for

companies and communities to be able to lead by example and hopefully change hearts and minds of the leadership, at least in this country.

Andy: In Oldham, we are doing our best to secure the social value, and we think we've got a model which is fairly unique and fairly good in terms of building that local circular economic model for energy. But we are working within the context of Greater Manchester. We're working within the context of the national kind of scene, the national policy framework, and we are limited by that.

And if only we had these big national levers pulled in our favour, there would be so much more that we could do. We have to hope that Father Christmas delivers that. Um, but in the absence, uh, in the absence of a National Green New Deal in the stocking, you know, I think we're just gonna have to carry on with, with uh, you know, try trying to emulate that if you like, trying to get the benefits of a green New Deal at a local level as best we can.

Britt: You can gather that Andy and I chatted just before Christmas and I'm afraid Father Christmas did not deliver this time around. Um, I ask Antonia on her position on this question and she agrees with Andy.

She thinks that in the absence of ideal conditions, we need to focus on creating the best possible outcomes for workers and local communities right now and focusing on community wealth and wellbeing of our planet and future generations. And a key local economic strategy is a great start.

I ask Antonio about her thoughts on the current economic model, and she says that she believes that we need to have more nuanced conversations about what the purpose of our economy is.

Antonia: Growth isn't in my mind necessarily good or bad. We know that, um, when we decarbonise, there's sectors of our economy that are gonna grow, and that's great. I think we need to have a much more nuanced debate around what grows, who is benefiting from that growth, and also what are the democratic mechanisms that are allowing us as a society to determine what we want to grow as well.

Britt: Antonia says that it is probably pretty uncontroversial to say that the purpose of the economy is to generate good lives and a good standard of wellbeing for all.

Antonia: And so to that end, when we're thinking about what could replace growth, I don't think it's one thing. Um, I think it's a suite of measures based on what we care about as a society.

So it's probably something along the lines of a reduction in health inequalities, um, a reduction in wealth inequalities, action on environmental breakdown, and also wellbeing and happiness.

Britt: There you go.

Alex: It's fascinating, it kind of reminds me a bit of what Lucy was saying towards the end of the first part 1 about reevaluating what we value societally and that being the key to unlocking all of the green jobs that we've been talking about. I dunno if you share that thought.

Britt: Absolutely. I think, you know, like what matters, what really matters to people? And often when you ask people, you know: What matters to you? It's probably actually that what they say.

Alex: Not GDP.

Britt: Oh, absolutely not GDP. Like, you know, friends, family, doing good stuff together, maybe working a bit less, but being able to still feed your family like it's not rocket science.

Alex: Thanks again Britt. That was brilliant and thanks for letting me host as well. Appreciate it.

Britt: Ah, you're so welcome. I think I'll have you back .

Alex: Nice one. Cheers. Bye.

Outro

Thank you for listening. This is the end of Season one.

Power in the City is produced by Carbon Co-Op and funded by the Electricity Northwest Powering Our Communities Fund, ICLEI Action Fund and UCL Grand Challenges.

This episode was written and produced by Britt Jurgenson and hosted by me, Alex King, local research and interviews Melissa Kelly Shore, sound design and post-production by Barry Han.

You can find a list of all episode contributors and lots of additional information and links in the show notes.

Thanks again.