



23rd February 2022

To: Cllr Ian Ward – Leader of Birmingham City Council
cc: Cllr Karen Mc Carthy – Chair of the Planning Committee;
Cllr Waseem Zaffar – Cabinet member for Transport & Environment

An open letter re: Birmingham, climate goals and the Commonwealth Games

Dear Cllr Ward,

On behalf of independent organisations concerned at the impact of global heating on both sports and cities, as well as the climate impact of global sports, we would like to congratulate you on your recent leadership in this field. Your ambition to “*deliver the most sustainable Commonwealth Games since the event began nearly a century ago*” is impressive and highly welcome given the challenges that the world of sports faces to both reduce its own impacts on the climate, and adapt to extreme weather events.

We also write on behalf of a campaign set up to stop advertising further fuelling the climate emergency. Global sports is itself a significant player in contributing to the climate crisis through its direct carbon footprint from major sporting events and regular operations.¹ It also plays a role indirectly by promoting major polluters and high carbon lifestyles via advertising and sponsorship deals with a range of fossil fuel companies, car makers and airlines. These activities give to providers of high carbon goods and services what has been called a ‘social licence’ to operate, creating positive brand associations with spectators,² and making the

¹ Estimates on the sector’s overall carbon footprint situates between the equivalent emissions of a country like Bolivia (at the lower end) to that of Spain or Poland (higher end). Source: Rapid Transition Alliance, June 20, 2020, *Playing against the clock: Global sport, the climate emergency and the case for rapid change*
<https://www.rapidtransition.org/resources/playing-against-the-clock/>

² In a recent report “*Sweat Not Oil: why sports should drop sponsorship and advertising from high-carbon polluters*”, more than 250 partnerships between sports groups and big polluters were identified. Source:



necessary shift to low-carbon living harder and slower. This issue has, to date, unfortunately been omitted from remedial international climate initiatives, such as the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework, and is of crucial importance in creating the conditions for climate action.

We therefore strongly welcome the fact that no high-carbon brands feature in the list of official sponsors of the Commonwealth Games to be hosted this year in Birmingham.³ This policy is consistent with the approach adopted to deliver the most sustainable games and it should be celebrated alongside other steps to embed sustainable procurement policies and promote low-carbon modes of travel.

To follow through on your ambition to use this sporting event as a catalyst for change across the city of Birmingham and the wider region, for consistency and coherence of the message being sent to people visiting the city for the Games, **we would strongly encourage you to step beyond the confines of the immediate games venues and remove all forms of high-carbon advertising in Birmingham for at least the duration of the games.** This would set a positive precedent and follow in the footsteps of other Councils - including, Liverpool, Norwich and North Somerset - who have adopted motions in favour of low-carbon and ethical advertising policies.⁴

Local authorities have significant powers in driving sustainable behaviour changes by removing incentives to choose high-carbon products and activities. On the advertising spaces they control, such as hoardings and screens at bus stops on council-owned land, local authorities can decide to turn down big polluters.⁵ **Doing so would align with, help and reinforce the Birmingham City Council's commitment to become net zero carbon by 2030.**⁶

<https://www.badverts.org/s/Sweat-Not-Oil-why-Sports-should-drop-advertising-from-high-carbon-polluters-March-2021v3.pdf>

³ <https://www.birmingham2022.com/about-us/partnerships/>

⁴ <https://www.badverts.org/s/Local-Policymakers-Toolkit-Badvertising-10.pdf>

⁵ Councils will need to create a commercial advertising policy to govern the commercial contracts they have with external providers who manage these ad sites such as Clear Channel UK and JCDecaux

⁶ https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20015/environment/2026/climate_emergency/3



Early this year, the city of London experienced extreme peaks of pollution which forced the authorities to discourage Londoners to practice any outdoor physical activity during this time.⁷ Such episodes are likely to become more frequent if we do not drastically reduce the use of fossil-powered vehicles in cities. It should therefore come as a priority for local authorities to stop promoting activities and products, such as highly polluting SUVs, that make matters significantly worse.

The world of sport is awakening to the challenge of the climate emergency. There are increasing attempts by various sports to clean-up their game, and doing everything possible to align with the aim of being zero carbon by 2030 is a vital contribution to meeting international climate change targets. By screening out high-carbon companies from their sponsorship activities, the Birmingham Commonwealth Games are supporting efforts to remove big polluters' social licence to operate. We believe that sport can provide influential role models to encourage others to make urgently needed changes. By removing high-carbon companies' promotional activities across the whole city for the duration of the games, would show great climate leadership and help meet wider social and public health policy objectives. We also believe that it would help avoid mixed and clashing messages should there be high profile advertising that clashed with the climate friendly ambitions of the games. Such an initiative might also work as an effective pilot for a longer term policy.

We would warmly welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these proposals.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories

Chris Broadbent, Founder and CEO, Planet Earth Games

Andrew Aris, Spirit of Football

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<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/13/londoners-told-to-reduce-physical-activity-on-friday-due-to-pollution>



Katie Cross, Pledgeball

Dave Hampton, Champions for Earth

Stuart Parkinson, Scientists for Global Responsibility

Prof Bill McGuire, New Weather Institute

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org

Jesss Worth & Chris Garrard, Culture Unstained

Jenny Amann, Spirit of Football

Andrew Simms, Rapid Transition Alliance

Craig Foster AM, Australian Multicultural Council, Stan Sport, Adjunct Professor,

Torrens University

Robbie Gillett, Adfree Cities

Emilie Tricarico, Badvertising