

*A Round-Table Discussion on Students' Involvement in
Manchester Sustainability Development and Issues Affecting
Manchester Residents*

LOCATION : THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER MAIN LIBRARY, GROUP STUDY ROOM 14

DATE : 4th OCTOBER 2017

TIME : 4.00 P.M. – 5.15 P.M.

PARTICIPANTS :

1) Councillor Angeliki Stogia	Manchester City Council Executive Member for Environment
2) Timothy Loh (MODERATOR)	Co-founder & Treasurer of Manchester Energy and Environment Society (MEES)
3) Arveent Kathirtchelvan	Founder of Liberasi
4) Nick-Mykola Kuzmin	A 1 st year Philosophy, Politics and Economics student at UoM
5) Soumya Sheeram	Vice President of STEMsoc
6) Ahmed Manar	Content Contributor of Manchester Energy and Environment Society (MEES)
7) Delib Kathirtchelvan	Welfare Officer of Malaysian Students' Society Manchester (MSSM)
8) How Kin Yau	A 4 th year Electrical and Electronic Engineering student at UoM

1. General Details about Discussion

i. Aim of Discussion

To explore collaboration, partnerships between Manchester City Council and the student body in the University of Manchester

ii. Details about Participants

- **MEES** – A society committed to creating an active community centred on the intelligent understanding of the field of energy and its impact on our society, economy, and environment.



- **STEMSOC** – A student outreach society engaging the public with science, encouraging children to pursue a career in STEM, and helping to fix the gender gap in these fields
- **Liberasi** – A socio-political movement society, advocating revisionism, responsibility and freedom
- **MSSM** – A society that serves as a platform for Malaysians and non-Malaysians to interact and foster unity and goodwill through activities that showcases Malaysian culture

The discussion started with Councillor Stogia being requested to provide a brief background on the ongoing projects of Manchester City Council (**hereafter abbreviated as MCC**), and give ideas on what students can do to help the MCC. However, Councillor Stogia proposed having the participants in the discussion to talk about the issues that students face on a daily basis, and suggestions on how to solve these issues. These issues can either be local issues (affecting an area such as Rusholme, Hulme, etc.) or wide ranging issues (affecting the whole of Greater Manchester).The issues discussed are shown below.

2. Topics/Questions Discussed

a) Cycling & Transport – Timothy Loh

Timothy is a volunteer for Biko Bikes, which is a student-led project contributing to a more sustainable Manchester by promoting cycling, offering affordable bicycle rental and teaching bicycle maintenance to students. Timothy lives in Rusholme, and he cycles everywhere. The issues he faced while cycling on the roads are as follows :

- Safety of cyclists

Timothy thinks that the current cycling corridors are still very restrictive. He cycles on Anson Road and Upper Brook Street, which has no dedicated cycling lanes compared to Oxford Road. While cycling on these roads, he comes into close proximity with cars, which endangers his safety. Soumya agreed with Timothy, and commented that vehicles on the left side of the road come quite close to cyclists. Timothy also commented that there is a choice for him to use Oxford Road for cycling, but this will add 10-15 minutes of journey for him from his accommodation to his classes.

- Behavioural Issues with Motorists

One example provided by Timothy is drivers edging in front of the stop line or into the cycling box when the lights are red.

Councillor Stogia's Response :

The cycling infrastructure on Oxford Road (which is a first in Manchester) was the result of collaboration between the council and Transport for Greater Manchester. She admitted that Manchester is lagging behind in cycling infrastructure compared to some international cities, but in the UK itself, Manchester can be considered to be one of the leading cities. She informed that the council is investing in further cycling infrastructure through government grants; however funding for cycling infrastructure is not one of the UK Government's top priorities. The grants for cycling infrastructure given by the government are also insufficient, and she said that the council cannot be

reliant just on money from the UK Government for building cycling infrastructure. She believes that the residents of Manchester must be encouraged to cycle more, and students too can do more in terms of encouraging their own peers to cycle. She supports Biko Bikes, saying that it is an extremely good idea, as the council had have issues dealing with abandoned bikes, and she would like to explore the possibility of working together with Biko Bikes. She believes by having more people cycling on the roads of Manchester, the council has a higher chance of proposing a viable business case to the UK Government to secure more funds for cycling infrastructure. Regarding the construction of cycling infrastructure on other roads, she said that a plan on the usage of roads in Manchester is required by the council in terms of safe car traffic. Vehicles still require access to the city centre, and considerations in the traffic flow must be taken into account before building any other cycling infrastructure. Her aspiration is to have the residents of Manchester consciously deciding to use a bike or public transport as their preferred mode of transport instead of personal vehicles, in her own words “ cycling as part of their DNA”.

In terms of motorists behavioral issues, she replied that the council has been working with the police to reduce the rate of drivers driving too close to cyclists. It includes police on bicycles fitted with cameras which will capture the vehicle plate if vehicles drive too closely to the police cyclists. However, Greater Manchester police are now downsizing, and fewer officers are available to help the council. Another issue is the lack of access to bicycles at reasonable prices to the public, which discourages cycling.

Councillor Stogia admitted that perception of safety among cyclists and residents alike is a very big challenge. Besides including the safety of cyclists, safety in her opinion also includes the need for women to have peace of mind while going through dangerous routes at dangerous times of the day.

Council Procedures for Abandoned Bicycles Collection

Timothy enquired about the procedures for collection of abandoned bikes around the city by the council, and Councillor Stogia’s response was the bikes are identified and their locations logged by highway officers, and the relevant party will go and collect those bicycles. Timothy said that some people are interested in helping the council to collect the bicycles, which was welcome by Councillor Stogia. She is unsure of how the collected bicycles are dealt with, but postulated the bicycles are donated to charities and other organisations, which is agreed by Timothy as he is aware of the National Cycling Academy having an annual bicycle sales for students.

Bus 50

Timothy also raised the specific issue of Bus 50 always being chronically late, and the bus fares have also increased. Councillor Stogia said she is well aware of the issue, and stated that bus franchising is one of the powers held by the mayor, and the council will be working hard over the next few years to solve these bus issues.

Shifting of Traffic

Timothy also asked about the plan by the council to try and shift traffic from Oxford Road to Upper Brook Street, which trying to get cyclist to use Oxford Road more often. Councillor Stogia informed that shifting traffic from one street to the other is not as easy as it sounds, as the council has to think

about how the affected streets are used. When a road is designated predominantly for a transport mode, where previously the road was open to all kinds of traffic, considerations have to be made for what happens to the displaced traffic on that road. Further improvements to the other roads in proximity to the displaced road will also have to be made. For example, before the switch from all kinds of traffic to a predominantly bus traffic on Oxford Road, cars were parked on both sides of Oxford Road. However due to the switch, the drivers will have to search for other parking spaces, and Councillor Stogia hopes that this will at least encourage the drivers to consider cycling as their mode of transport.

Promotion of Better and Efficient Driving Habits

Ahmed asked about the possibility of the council promoting better and efficient driving habits. This was replied with a challenge by Councillor Stogia to Ahmed on the reasons why the council should be responsible for this. She explained that accidents on the road are usually caused by either bad driving behaviours or streets in poor conditions. The latter is under the jurisdiction of the council, as the council has a responsibility to maintain the streets in proper driving conditions, but the responsibility for the former does not lie with the council, and the council has always been unjustly blamed for motorists behavioural issues. The responsible party for bad driving behaviours is the driving schools, as they are the institutions who teach people how to drive.

Soumya from STEMsoc begged to differ, as she is of the opinion that people as individuals are always reluctant to change, but the council as an institution with influence and power has the capability to enforce a change in mindset among motorists. Councillor Stogia understood Soumya's perspective, but reiterated that drivers are responsible for their own behavior on the road. She stated that the council can work with the police and the driving schools to start a campaign on promoting better and efficient driving habits among motorists. She explained the council has been making changes to the roads in residential areas, making drivers more aware of how they drive in residential areas so as not to endanger the residents, and thus returning ownership of the roads back to the residents. She believes that if the council takes responsibility for motorists' behavioural issues, individuals will then be lazy and not feel empowered to make a change. She conceded that the council needs to do more to empower people to make the change, and believed partnering with various parties such as students will allow this challenge to be tackled from different perspectives.

b) Brownfield Sites/ Abandoned Construction Grounds – Ahmed Manar

Ahmed stated that Manchester being an industrial city, brownfield sites and abandoned constructions sites can be found throughout Manchester, and he would like to know what has been done by Manchester City Council to clear the contamination and allow the sites to be reused for other purposes.

Councillor Stogia's Response :

Most brownfield sites belong to the private sector, and due to not having ownership of the land, the council will need to work with the Government and the private owners to remediate the site. Councillor Stogia explained developers prefer to take a site with no issues instead of a site that

requires remediation, as this will affect their profits adversely. The developers are the key stakeholders in this issue, and the council is thinking of methods to work the developers and land owners in Manchester to prioritise remediated sites. With the population of Manchester set to grow in the future, housing demand is expected to soar, and this poses a problem as available sites for construction and the housing supply are both low. Compounding the problem is the fact that residents of Manchester are opposed to having skyscrapers and instead prefer a traditional one or two-stories house.

c) Infrastructure of Students' Accommodation – Arveent

Arveent said that he stays in a house in Rusholme, and during winter the house gets very cold due to poor insulation. He would dearly like to contribute to this issue, but is unsure of the methods students can contribute to better infrastructure in buildings

Councillor Stogia's Response :

The council has been liaising with landlords and the planning departments in the council to support better accommodation standards in Manchester.

d) Waste and Garbage Disposal – Delib

Delib stays in Rusholme, and would like to raise an issue regarding the amount of garbage on the streets in his local area. He thinks it is partly due to negligence on behalf of Manchester City Council in providing sufficient rubbish bins in public areas. He observed that access to public rubbish bins in his home country, Malaysia is far higher compared to Manchester.

e) Reusing and Recycling – Ahmed

Ahmed has read about the Greater Manchester Waste Development plan, and he asked about the steps that have been taken by Manchester City Council to decouple city growth from garbage growth over the next 10 years. He is curious as to whether the residents of Manchester will be incentivised to increase reusing and recycling rates. He had also asked about the efficiency of treating garbage compared to sending them to landfills.

Councillor Stogia's Response :

She suggested taking the participants of the roundtable discussion for a visit to the recycling facility to see how recycled materials are processed.

Cost Savings for Manchester City Council from Landfills to Recycling

Timothy asked about the exact figure for the savings that would have been made if a higher proportion of waste is sent for recycling rather than landfills. Councillor Stogia admitted she does not know the exact figure, but said that this has always been a big issue plaguing the city council. Local authorities have to pay a 'landfill tax' to have their garbage sent to landfills, and having a

higher proportion of residents in their area recycling will result in a lower landfill tax for the council. The savings made from a reduced landfill tax can be invested by the council in other areas, such as building more infrastructure, while helping to save the environment.

Recycling Bins in Buildings

Timothy stated that recycling bins are not present in apartment buildings on Oxford Road.. Councillor Stogia stated commercial units are required to have their own waste contract, and need to submit an application on their respective waste dealing method to the council for approval. For residential properties, landlords will need to provide recycling bins. She explained the council has educational programmes for contractors, where they handed green bags to residents to encourage them to out recyclable waste in the green bags. Split bags, where one part of the bag is used for storing paper waste while the other for cans and plastic have also been handed out to residents to promote recycling. Kin Yau agreed with Timothy as his accommodation currently does not provide any recycling bins although the students in his accommodation would like to recycle their waste. With respect to Kin Yau's issue, Councillor Stogia said the council is able to provide them with bins in their accommodation, but reiterated that knowledge about importance of recycling and ease of access to recycling facilities are the two critical factors that will increase recycling rates among residents. In this aspect, she believes that students' societies can help the council by raising awareness on this issue among students.

Councillor Stogia has also cited the difficulty in changing the mindset of people from using communal bins to individual bins. Communal bins are bins where people are able to dispose of their rubbish indiscriminately without separating recyclable waste, and hence recycling rates were low for areas with communal bins. This problem has been exacerbated by students at the end of each academic year, as most students throw everything away. However, she said the council has observed students getting more environmentally conscious in recent years, donating their unwanted stuff to charities or other organisations. The biggest problem now is the indiscriminate throwing by shop owners in shopping areas, as most shop owners will just leave the responsibility of handling the waste to the city council. In order to tackle the issue of communal bins, the council had assigned individual bins to each house to track waste disposal, but created another issue where homeowners are not taking ownership of the bins and not putting back the bins to their respective houses. She suggested this might be a project where students can think of ideas to solve the problem of bins ownership.

f) Policy Strategy for Zero and Low Carbon Energy

Ahmed enquired about the city council's policy strategy on zero and low carbon energy. Councillor Stogia answered there are carbon footprint targets for Manchester in the year 2020 and 2025 respectively, and the council is finding ways to achieve the targets. All buildings owned by the council are instructed to try and reduce their carbon footprint, and the council hall is going to be closed from December 2017 for a period of 7 years for renovation to improve its carbon footprint. Developers are also required to state the nature of the construction for their sites whether it is a commercial property or residential properties, and to follow the guideline to reduce the carbon footprint of their construction. The council has also engaged with other property owners to encourage them to reduce the carbon footprint of their own buildings. She mentioned the council

has been leveraging its purchasing power by awarding tenders to companies possessing good environmental credentials.

Councillor Stogia also informed that all conventional light bulbs in the city centre will be replaced with LED light bulbs in order to reduce the carbon footprint and energy costs of the city. One sector that the council is trying to influence are institutions such as schools. Employees of the city council have also been educated on the methods to find out and reduce the carbon footprint associated with their work.

Higher Level of Communication between Council and Residents, Students – Nick

Nick is from London, but currently stays at Hulme. He is of the opinion that more communication is needed between the council and the relevant stakeholders in tackling these issues. One of the examples given by him was the system of cycling in London, where there is not much cycling in London, as most people are unaware of being able to order recycled bikes from the local council. He also proposed creating a union or organization encompassing the council, students' union and parents, which allows the council to have firsthand knowledge of the issues faced by students and residents alike. He is of the opinion that by talking to students, the council will know the daily challenges or issues faced by their parents, as their parents would probably be complaining about the issues in their own household.

Nick enquired about the expenditure for the lightbulbs, and Councillor Stogia answered the council has allocated a budget for the maintenance and replacement of the light bulbs and signed a long term contract with the company supplying the lightbulbs. The council has made two business cases, one on the cost of replacing the conventional light bulbs with LED light bulbs and maintaining the light bulbs, while the other on the cost of maintaining the old light bulbs in the city, and it was decided to replace the conventional bulbs with LEDs.

Nick suggested informing the public on their contributions to making the city of Manchester a more environmentally sustainable city to live in, to tell them their taxes made Manchester a better place to live in. He made a point of people paying taxes to the council, but are unable to appreciate their own contributions towards their own city, as they were not informed by the council. He suggested students organising events for the council to show the public what the council had achieved through their taxes, and that the public is the one that made all these changes possible in the first place.

He also suggested brokering a win-win deal between students, the public and the council, which students are able to put their experience on their CVs. Based on a case study of rogue landlords profiting from disadvantaged students, Councillor Stogia suggested a preliminary example suggested of encouraging the disadvantaged students to recycle more, and the council will then be able to hold the landlords accountable for the landlords' faults. A key consideration for this idea is the effectiveness of the deterrent.

g) Air Pollution

NO_x Emissions – Arveent

Arveent asked about the plans by the council to reduce NO_x emissions. Councillor Stogia replied the council wants to avoid charging vehicles a fee for using the road to reduce emissions, and will only

use it as a last resort. The council will instead prefer to have the UK Government consider as to how the government is able to support the usage of public transport among the public, to reduce the number of personal vehicles on the road. Councillor Stogia stated that one way to do so is to have electric vehicles, but the UK Government is expecting to get the worst polluting cars off the market by 2040, which is still a long way off from 2017.

Electric Cars – Timothy

Timothy enquired regarding the plan by the council to make Manchester a city friendly for electric cars. Councillor Stogia answered that the council has been increasing the number of charging points for electric vehicles throughout the city, and also considering switching out the council's current fleet of vehicles with a fleet of electrical vehicles. She admitted the number of normal charging points outnumber that of super charging points in the city, and charging points do also need to be installed in residential areas or in houses.

Air Pollution in Manchester – Ahmed

Ahmed asked about the plans by the council to reduce the level of air pollution in Manchester, and Councillor Stogia stated that this is her job as the Manchester City Council Executive Member for Environment, and said Friends of Earth has taken the UK Government to court on this issue. As a result of the lawsuit, the UK Government has allocated a total of £250 million pounds for all local authorities to take action to decrease the level of air pollution in their respective cities. Each local authority has been given until March 2018 to meet the targets set out by the UK Government, and the Government does not have a car scrappage scheme in place.

She said that one quick way to reduce air pollutants is to impose taxes on personal vehicles, but this will imply punishing car buyers who bought the cars in good faith. Furthermore, businesses in the city centre require loading areas, and it would be unfair of the council to penalise businesses and the people that are already suffering. Families will also be affected most if taxes were to be imposed on personal vehicles, as illustrated by Councillor Stogia's example of a mother who has to drop her kids off at different schools, then to buy groceries, followed by a visit to her aging mother. The mother in question will be greatly inconvenienced if such a tax were to be imposed. The council has been gathering information from the University and Transport for Greater Manchester in order to solve the issue of air pollutants. Councillor Stogia believes that having a solution that is feasible not only currently but also in the future, and changing the behaviour of people are the key factors to combat the issue of air pollution. The residents of Manchester will also need to be consulted with to obtain their input on ways to solve this issue. Ahmed suggested taxing only diesel cars during peak hours, but Councillor Stogia explained it will not be feasible to do so until sufficient data has been collected. One of the methods to solve this issue will be to lobby the UK Government to have a car scrappage scheme.

Conclusions :

Councillor Stogia thinks any project that is initiated should be something inspiring and motivating, not prohibitive. The goal of the project should tend towards asking people to take proactive action rather than advising them not to do something.

The proposed topics of discussion as themes for possible projects for students are shown below :

- Cycling
- Reduction of air pollutant levels by March 2018
- Increasing communication between the council and residents to inform residents on their contributions to making Manchester a great city to live in
- Bins ownership in residential areas

Councillor Stogia concluded that the project, if initiated, requires something more tangible than data, as not everybody is used to data, and this will depend on the level of engagement for the project. Councillor Stogia also informed us the council would like students to come together and think of the best method of partnering with the council, and selecting topics that will have traction with all students. Decisions regarding the theme of the project can be made at a later time after more information has been gathered, and inform Councillor Stogia if the project requires the council's help. Once a decision has been made, more meetings can then be scheduled with the council on how to take the project forward.