



ecobirmingham One Planet Living Leadership review

March 2026



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Report overview

Organisation:

ecobirmingham, Birmingham, UK

Organisation purpose:

ecobirmingham was established to enable and empower communities, organisations, and volunteers across Birmingham to create a sustainable, fair, and thriving city. Its mission is to deliver grassroots activities and programmes that foster education, engagement, and social change.

Description:

ecobirmingham is a registered charity. It operates through a diverse range of projects and events, engaging communities from varied backgrounds and supporting organisations on their sustainability journeys. The organisation works across all 69 wards of the city, including areas ranked among the most deprived in the UK. Its activities encompass sustainability training, Carbon Literacy workshops, and the implementation of the One Planet Living® framework to develop community sustainability action plans.

Reviewer:

Philippa Hoy

Sign-off and quality review:

Sue Riddlestone

Date of review:

March 2026

Leadership status:



Leader 2026



Bioregional and One Planet Living

Bioregional and One Planet Living

About Bioregional

Bioregional is a purpose-led sustainability consultancy. It has worked in over 20 countries on sustainable development, working with local communities, cities, and companies.

Bioregional devised the One Planet Living framework in 2003 with WWF, based on our experiences creating the multi-award-winning BedZED in South London, the UK's first large-scale sustainable community. One Planet Living has guided the development of real estate across the world, shaping exemplar communities that enable sustainable living.

About One Planet Living

One Planet Living is our vision of a world where everyone can live happily and healthily within the limits of our planet's resources while leaving space for nature to thrive.

We need to achieve this vision because if everyone lived like the average UK citizen, we would need two and a half planets to support us. The measure of this is called 'ecological footprinting'. Meanwhile, many lack what they need for a good life, and wildlife is being pushed out to make room for our demands.

The One Planet Living framework consists of 10 principles which cover the activities that drive resource consumption, and the elements that form the basis of a good life for everyone. The principles are used to identify the needs in a local area, to relate these to the planetary bottom-line, and then to structure responses to those needs.



One
Planet
Living®

A framework
by Bioregional

	Health and happiness
	Equity and local economy
	Culture and community
	Travel and transport
	Land and nature
	Local and sustainable food
	Sustainable water
	Materials and products
	Zero waste
	Zero carbon energy

What is a One Planet Living leadership review?

A review is an examination of an organisation's sustainability action plan by a suitable qualified expert from Bioregional (or one appointed by us). It will include:

- Reviewing the action plan as a whole and providing advice and suggestions on how it might be improved
- Evaluating it against several criteria including impact, systems change, ambition and delivery
- Assessing the action plan against the One Planet Living goals and guidance and local industry best practice.

A One Planet Living user can then discuss with us whether the action plan could be a candidate for leadership recognition, and to be endorsed as either a 'Leader' or a 'Global Leader'.



About this leadership review

Review summary and highlights

Review summary and highlights

ecobirmingham demonstrates outstanding leadership in implementing the One Planet Living principles at a local level. Having used One Planet Living over the last five years, its grassroots engagement is evident through workshops fostering health and happiness in deprived wards, and its inclusive approach is reflected in training delivered to diverse communities.

Robust training programmes, such as Carbon Literacy workshops and One Planet Living Integrator training, empower staff and volunteers to be sustainability champions within their organisation or community.

The organisation's commitment to equity is seen through support for local enterprises and targeted training in the top 10% most deprived wards of the city.

Environmental stewardship is embedded in community projects focused on green spaces and practical nature-based activities. Programmes promoting sustainable food, water conservation, zero waste, and decarbonisation are integrated into community plans and organisational support.

ecobirmingham is creative in the way it develops its projects to support sustainability, for example with its work engaging adults and children through art and nature.

The organisation is using One Planet Living to its full effect. It has received feedback from community members about how the One Planet Living language is so easy to follow to create change.

Of particular note is the 'OPL Sustainability toolkit' that ecobirmingham have created. This is an online tool for individuals to use to create a personalised One Planet Living action plan. The tool is easy to use - individuals choose one to 10 of the OPL principles then select actions they would like to take. Each action is

accompanied by advice. There is an impressive amount of detailed information and links to resources, tailored to the user's own ward.

The 'Greener Community Plan' approach, as evidenced by the plans for Sparkhill and Allen's Cross, also demonstrate Leadership in approaching community action plans. There has been extensive research and analysis of local needs and well constructed plans co-created to meet these needs.

ecobirmingham will launch its new strategic plan in April 2026, with outcomes and indicators based on the 10 One Planet Living principles. A key aim of the new plan is to raise the profile and use of One Planet Living in the communities it works with.

Bioregional is pleased to recognise ecobirmingham as a Leader in One Planet Living.



Comment from Bioregional

“ It’s wonderful to see how ecobirmingham has been using the One Planet Living framework to such great effect over the last few years. Their achievements stand out as a beacon of community-driven sustainability.

ecobirmingham proves that collaborative action and inclusive leadership can deliver real, measurable benefits for people and planet, inspiring others to follow their example in building a fair and thriving city.

”



Sue Riddlestone OBE
CEO & co-founder
Bioregional

Comment from ecobirmingham

Kam Bola
CEO
ecobirmingham



“ At ecobirmingham, we have embedded the One Planet Living principles at the heart of our sustainability work, using them to guide both our strategic direction, measure our impact and the practical actions we take with communities.

The framework has enabled us to tailor activities to people’s principle preferences, turning abstract sustainability goals into clear, achievable steps.

One Planet Living offers a universal language that communities can relate to - removing barriers, meeting people where they are, and helping them feel empowered to make a real difference through their own actions.

”

Overall leadership qualities

Overall leadership qualities

Scope of the action plan

Does the action plan address all impacts and important considerations that relate to the organisation's activities?

ecobirmingham's activities are impressively comprehensive, addressing all ten One Planet Living principles through a dynamic blend of educational workshops, outreach projects, and consultancy support. The organisation operates across all of Birmingham's 69 wards, including some of the most deprived areas in the UK, ensuring that sustainability training and practical initiatives reach a broad spectrum of communities. The scope of their actions not only encompasses environmental goals but also strengthen social and economic resilience.

Transformation potential

Is the team approaching things in a way that is likely to succeed in showcasing a positive sustainable future, ideally helping to transform accepted norms?

ecobirmingham's transformative impact is most evident in its grassroots engagement with deprived wards and diverse communities. By delivering inclusive workshops focused on health, happiness, and mental wellbeing, the organisation tackles social challenges head-on, helping to reduce isolation and build resilience.

The environmental transformation is equally striking. Projects such as green space restoration and biodiversity planting schemes not only improve local environments but also foster a sense of stewardship among residents. Community events and workshops promote waste reduction, the circular economy, and nature-based learning, enabling participants to take practical action towards sustainability. These initiatives are carefully designed to address specific needs, ensuring that the benefits of transformation are felt by those who need them most.

ecobirmingham's work with local enterprises and employment skills workshops also contributes to economic resilience, demonstrating a holistic approach to

transformation that encompasses social, environmental, and economic dimensions

Ambition (Goals)

The ambition of ecobirmingham is evident in its pursuit of excellence and innovation. This ambition is not just about scale, but about depth and quality. Programmes are designed to be inclusive and equitable, ensuring that the most vulnerable communities are supported.

Partnership-building is central to their ambition. ecobirmingham actively seeks out opportunities to collaborate with local businesses, authorities, and urban agriculture groups, expanding its reach and deepening its impact. Their willingness to pilot new projects, such as circular economy schemes, signals a forward-thinking approach that sets them apart as leaders in local sustainability.

Implementation (Actions)

With strong leadership, and staff and volunteers equipped with robust training, the ecobirmingham team are empowered to lead change and support others on their sustainability journeys.

ecobirmingham's approach is both strategic and practical, ensuring that every initiative is grounded in evidence and tailored to local needs. Needs analysis and community research are not one-off exercises but integral parts of their strategic vision, allowing them to adapt and evolve in response to changing circumstances.

Their ongoing monitoring and evaluation enable them to refine programmes and maximise impact, making them a model for effective sustainability implementation in urban environments.

Opportunities for improvement

With an excellent track record of delivery and impact and ambitious future plans, there is little this reviewer can think of to suggest for further improvement, beyond 'keep up the great work' and to formalise the organisation's own One Planet Living action plan.

Keep doing:

- ❑ Exploring innovative approaches for climate resilience and circularity, including piloting circular economy projects and renewable energy schemes.
- ❑ Monitoring and impact measurement across all programmes, including health, equity, and environmental initiatives.
- ❑ Working in partnership – expand and deepen stakeholder engagement with local businesses, authorities, and community groups.
- ❑ Communicating sustainability successes, such as green space restoration and zero waste events, to inspire broader adoption.

A One Planet Living action plan for ecobirmingham's own operations

With the recent move of the organisation to new premises at the Midlands Arts Centre, this would be a good time for ecobirmingham to update its previous environmental policy and create a One Planet Living action plan for its offices, staff, travel etc. This would also be an excellent example to other small organisations and businesses as to how the One Planet Living framework can be used to create a simple, but effective, sustainability action plan.

The development of ecobirmingham's own action plan would also provide a platform to engage with the Midlands Arts Centre about the Centre's current sustainability initiatives and how these could evolve in the future.



Detailed review against the 10 One Planet Living principles

Detailed review

The table below presents a summary of how ecobirmingham’s actions address each of the 10 OPL principles. It highlights any opportunities for further action and presents a colour-coded rating of 1-5 as shown to the right.

- 5** Well addressed
- 4** Well addressed but additional suggestions provided
- 3** Partly addressed but additional content needed
- 2** Not adequately addressed
- 1** Not addressed

	Highlights	Opportunities	RAG rating
 Health and happiness	<p>ecobirmingham promotes health and happiness by embedding the principle that active, social and meaningful lives are essential for wellbeing. Its programmes encourage walking and cycling, community gardening, outdoor education, and shared food activities, all of which support physical and mental health. Through its Inform–Help–Connect model, the organisation empowers residents with accessible sustainability information, practical support, and opportunities to connect with others, strengthening confidence, reducing isolation, and building community resilience.</p>		5
 Equity and local economy	<p>ecobirmingham’s commitment to diversity is reflected in its beneficiary demographics, with significant representation from Asian, Afro-Caribbean, White British/Irish, and mixed heritage communities.</p> <p>The organisation supports volunteers in communities and provides work placements for university and secondary school students from across the City three times a year.</p> <p>Partnerships with local enterprises, including the Green Enterprise Network and Sustainability West Midlands (SWM), encourage local procurement and economic inclusion.</p>	<p>ecobirmingham plans to make more of its connections with SWM and will consider running networking sessions (eg breakfast meetings) to improve links with local businesses.</p> <p>Providing opportunities for pop-up stores at community events could help incubate local eco-businesses.</p>	5

Detailed review

- 5 Well addressed
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- 2 Not adequately addressed
- 1 Not addressed



Culture and community

Highlights	Opportunities	RAG rating
<p>Community events and workshops, such as ‘Planet, Pizza & Play’ promote waste reduction, the circular economy, and nature-based learning, enabling participants to take practical action towards sustainability. These initiatives are carefully designed to address specific needs, ensuring that the benefits of transformation are felt by those who need them most.</p> <p>Activities are tailored to the demographic needs of each ward, such as intergenerational storytelling events and ‘Heritage Week’ celebrations that honour local history. The ‘Community Champions’ scheme fosters leadership and encourages cultural exchange through art workshops and shared meals.</p> <p>ecobirmingham has trained staff in local organisations in Carbon Literacy and One Planet Living®, equipping them to become community champions and advance their organisations’ sustainability plans.</p> <p>The organisation uses the arts and education to engage people creatively in projects that provoke debate and inspire action, and partner with a number of arts organisations.</p>	<p>Continue to expand intergenerational initiatives, such as youth-elder gardening clubs.</p>	<p>5</p>
<p>ecobirmingham provides extensive online resources to encourage sustainable travel. These include digital walking and cycling maps and downloadable guides. ‘69 wards by bike or foot’ is a collection of 13 online maps showing bike and walking-friendly routes linking all 69 wards of Birmingham to encourage people to get outside and choose sustainable transport more often.</p> <p>The organisation offers cycle tuition for adults and children, including cycling ability, route-finding, bike maintenance and guided rides. It also offers resources to help teach those with autism, dyspraxia and hyper-mobility how to cycle at home, further adding to the inclusive nature of ecobirmingham’s work.</p>		<p>5</p>



Travel and transport

Detailed review

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Land and nature



Local and sustainable food

Highlights	Opportunities	RAG rating
<p>Environmental education is delivered via hands-on projects including ‘Pollinator Pathways’ planting schemes, tree-planting drives, and regular ‘Green Space Restoration Days’ where volunteers rejuvenate local parks. Biodiversity walks and citizen science days further engage the public.</p> <p>ecobirmingham’s ‘Wild Bunch’ programme is based on forest school principles and provides outdoor activities for children from 4-15 years old. This is run weekly, with additional holiday programmes for young children and a separate camp, Young Bunch, for teens.</p> <p>Stories for Nature (S4N) is a programme of 12 x 1-hour weekly nature play sessions using the power of stories to introduce empathy towards the natural world and improve nature literacy in pre-schoolers.</p> <p>The organisation has joined the City of Nature Alliance to support the greening of Birmingham.</p>	<p>For specific projects, such as the creation of a community garden, encourage volunteers to undertake a baseline biodiversity and track changes over time.</p> <p>Look for opportunities to be involved with the new ‘Birmingham Biosphere’ initiative.</p>	5
<p>Programmes encourage healthy eating and support local producers through ‘Grow Your Own’ workshops, urban allotment open days, and farm-to-table community lunches. The ‘Local Produce Fair’ provides a platform for small producers to showcase their goods.</p> <p>ecobirmingham provides free mentorship to organisations wishing to create a community garden, offering downloadable guides, and tips and advice on funding, planning, designing and running a community garden.</p>	<p>Look for opportunities to create shared garden tool libraries to encourage food growing at home.</p>	5

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Sustainable water

Highlights	Opportunities	RAG rating
<p>Water conservation is promoted through ‘Water Wise’ awareness campaigns, installation workshops for water butts, and interactive sessions demonstrating water-saving techniques in schools and community centres.</p> <p>Despite this general work, there are no actions for Sustainable Water included in either of the two Greener Community Plans that were part of this review. Action to further promote water saving activities is however a key objective of the new strategic plan from April 2026.</p>	<p>ecobirmingham have agreed to look again at the Greener Community Plans and incorporate water saving initiatives where possible.</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>Organisations receive guidance on sustainable procurement via ‘Eco Procurement’ seminars and ‘Plastic-Free Pledge’ campaigns. Sessions regularly highlight alternatives to single-use plastics, and workshops on upcycled materials demonstrate practical solutions.</p>	<p>The organisation could consider creating a ‘Circular Business Challenge’ to encourage local businesses to embrace circular business models.</p>	<p>5</p>



Materials and products

Detailed review

- 5** Well addressed
- 4** Well addressed but additional suggestions provided
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- 2** Not adequately addressed
- 1** Not addressed



Zero waste



Zero-carbon energy

Highlights	Opportunities	RAG rating
<p>Waste reduction and circular economy principles are championed through ‘Community Swap Shops’, regular recycling drives, and pilot upcycling projects. Events such as ‘Repair Cafés’ and ‘Reuse Festivals’ inspire practical behaviour change.</p>		5
<p>ecobirmingham demonstrates commitment to decarbonisation with tangible initiatives. The organisation’s energy advisors work with partners across the city providing advice and support in the community through pop-up energy advice sessions, workshops and home visits as well as online advice and attending community events. As well as advice, free energy saving items are given away such as LED lightbulbs, draught excluder tape, window insulation and radiator reflector foil.</p> <p>One example is the work ecobirmingham do with Footsteps, Faiths for a Low Carbon Future, to provide energy audits for places of worship in Birmingham.</p>	<p>ecobirmingham is committed to achieving net zero – it may wish to make a public commitment to this on its website to encourage others to do the same.</p>	5

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