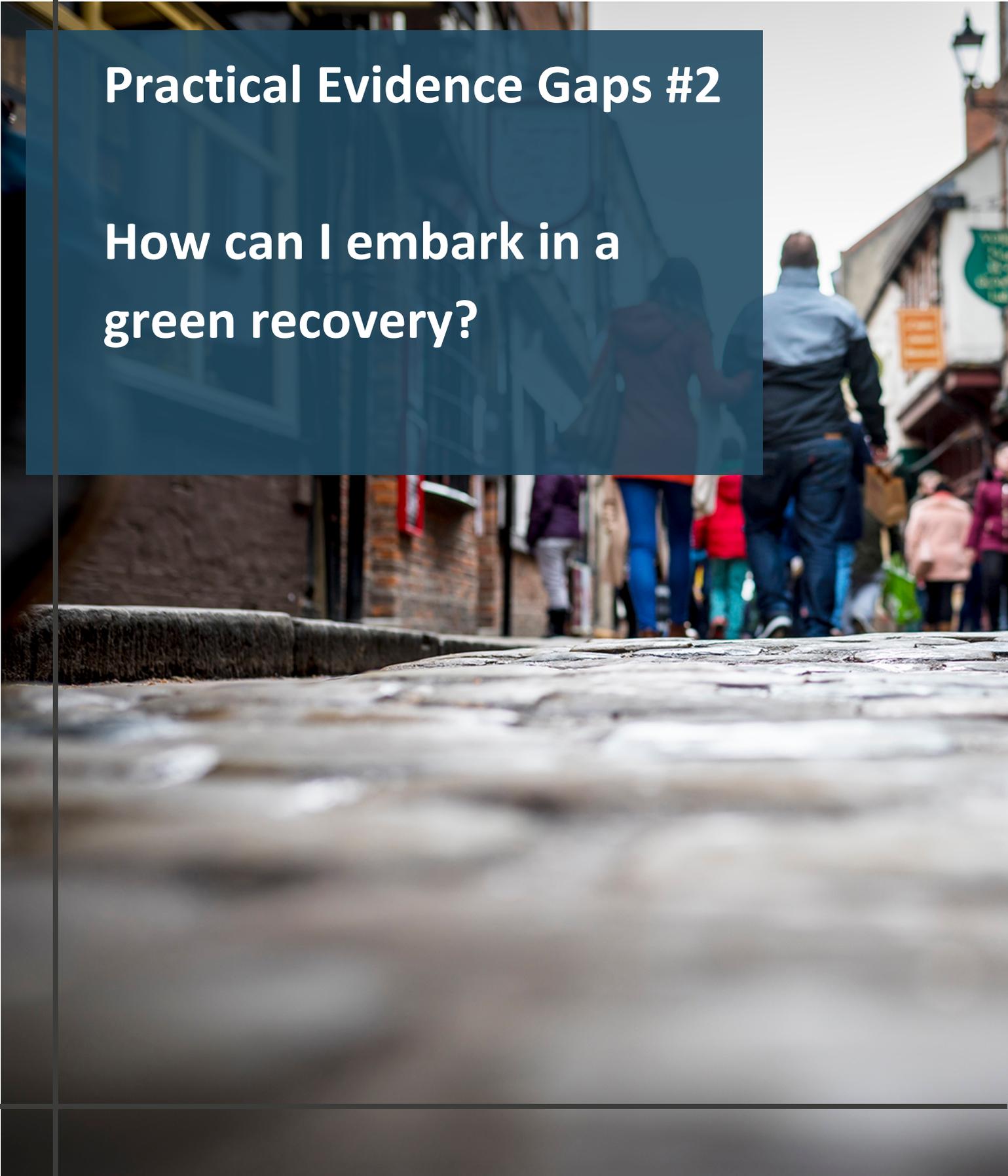


## Practical Evidence Gaps #2

How can I embark in a  
green recovery?



# Table of Contents

An introduction to green recovery .....	2
Green recovery across four key sectors.....	3
Targeting social inequalities .....	4
The importance of partnerships for a green recovery.....	4
Measuring success in a green recovery .....	4
Embarking in a green recovery in practice: case studies .....	5
25 Vital and Viable Priorities.....	5
Covid-19 Recovery Framework.....	6
Acknowledgements .....	6

Practical Evidence Gaps are current issues affecting high streets and town centres that would benefit from more knowledge and examples. These gaps have been identified by conducting content analysis in two large sources of data:

- 1) the online network set up by Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) (on Basecamp), involving town and city management practitioners across the UK; and
- 2) the Expressions of Interest (EOI) submitted by local authorities to the Future High Streets Fund.

Ten Practical Evidence Gaps have been identified. All of them have been framed as ‘how to’ questions, with the aim of helping local authorities and place managers in the transformation of their high streets and town centres.

## How can I embark in a green recovery?

### An introduction to green recovery

A green recovery involves three essential areas of action<sup>1</sup>:

- (1) stimulating the economy in the short term and until recovery;
- (2) working towards a healthy and resilient future, zero pollution, biodiversity restoration, and climate neutrality; and
- (3) addressing socioeconomic inequalities.

There are increasing calls for a green recovery to Covid-19. Although the pandemic has had devastating consequences, well harnessed, an opportunity is created to make our cities greener. The pandemic has changed many of our deeply engrained behaviours, we are; spending more time at home, making greater use of ICT technologies for work and personal communications, shopping local and using independent businesses to a greater extent, commuting less and through less energy consumptions forms of transport, and engaging with nature and greenspace more<sup>2</sup>.

However, Covid-19 is also accentuating social inequalities and remind us of the need for new policies and measures to be fairer across demographic groups<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Lamy, P. (2020) ‘A Green Recovery Stimulus for a post-COVID-19 Europe’ p. 17. Gusheva, E. and de Gooyert, V. (2021) ‘Can We Have Our Cake and Eat It? A Review of the Debate on Green Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis.’ Sustainability, 13(2) p. 874.

<sup>2</sup> Mell, I. and Whitten, M. (2021) ‘Access to Nature in a Post Covid-19 World: Opportunities for Green Infrastructure Financing, Distribution and Equitability in Urban Planning.’ International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(4) p. 1527.

<sup>3</sup> Fisher, A. N. and Ryan, M. K. (2021) ‘Gender inequalities during COVID-19.’ Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 24(2) pp. 237–245.

## Green recovery across four key sectors

The pandemic has shaken four sectors that are key to a sustainable future: buildings, mobility, economy, and tourism<sup>4</sup>.

With regards to private and public buildings, Covid-19 has highlighted the problem of energy poverty and poor insulation, which translates into inadequate temperatures and excessive energy consumption and leakage. This brings negative consequences, not only as it accentuates inequalities, but has a direct detrimental impact on emissions, global warming, and air pollution. Therefore, accelerating the retrofitting of buildings is a priority for green recovery and to achieve climate neutrality. This can be done through installing smart meter technology and making sure buildings are properly insulated<sup>5</sup>. This also includes nature-based architecture in cities, which involves including natural elements in our daily lives and buildings, such as green roofs and green walls<sup>6</sup>.

In relation to mobility, Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns have brought about fewer vehicles on the roads and fewer emissions, lesser daily mobility and a reduction in public transport services, and an increase in people walking and cycling. Consequently, this has been translated into improved air quality. For a green recovery, efforts need to be placed in making this changes a reality. Investing in improved cycling and walking infrastructure, as well as in electric vehicles and effective charging technology.

In relation to the economy, Covid-19 has made it difficult for clean economy small businesses and start-ups to remain open or in business. Lockdowns and the closure of non-essential businesses have also made people more aware of upcycling. A green recovery will mean helping clean economy start-ups recover and thrive and will also involve creating circular economy initiatives by reusing, repairing, and remanufacturing products, thus exploiting fewer natural resources. When waste cannot be avoided, it would also involve managing it properly through recycling<sup>7</sup>.

In regards to tourism, the effects of Covid-19 have been devastating. A green recovery for this sector would involve focusing on coastal communities, islands, etc, that have been hardest hit by the crisis. It will involve developing and supporting small scale, green, and locally sourced services tourism services; and encouraging expenditure on family own businesses, small B&Bs, local food systems, biodiversity protection, etc.

Covid-19 has been translated into a rise in unemployment, and any measures in the areas explained above or in a green recovery will bring generate more jobs than a 'quick rebound' would do.

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<sup>4</sup> Lamy, P. (2020) 'A Green Recovery Stimulus for a post-COVID-19 Europe' p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Lahcen, B., Brusselaers, J., Vrancken, K., Dams, Y., Da Silva Paes, C., Eyckmans, J. and Rousseau, S. (2020) 'Green Recovery Policies for the COVID-19 Crisis: Modelling the Impact on the Economy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions.' *Environmental and Resource Economics*, 76(4) pp. 731–750.

<sup>6</sup> Newman AO, P. (2020) 'COVID, CITIES and CLIMATE: Historical Precedents and Potential Transitions for the New Economy.' *Urban Science*, 4(3) p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Agrawala, S., Dussaux, D. and Monti, N. (2020) What policies for greening the crisis response and economic recovery?: Lessons learned from past green stimulus measures and implications for the COVID-19 crisis. (OECD Environment Working Papers).

## Targeting social inequalities

It is important that a green recovery works on reducing social inequalities, focusing on those that have suffered the consequences of Covid-19 to a greater extent, for example: coastal towns, under-served neighbourhoods, low-income households, young professionals in clean economy start-ups, older people, BAME communities, women, and people with disabilities.

The pandemic has accentuated social inequalities between social groups as the poor and vulnerable have been more adversely affected. This more vulnerable groups have more difficulties to recover from a crisis and therefore governmental measures have to be designed with inclusivity principles<sup>8</sup>.

## The importance of partnerships for a green recovery

Cooperation amongst public, private and civil society actors is key for a green recovery<sup>9</sup>.

The involvement of private partners is not only necessary for increased capital investment (which can be scarce for local councils), but also because this brings a necessary set of skills and expertise and can be key in leading innovation and job generation. Similarly, there is a need for all levels of government to be involved in the delivery. Furthermore, local communities play a key role in public acceptability, and their local knowledge and experience should be involved in the delivery so that new measures become relevant for different sociodemographic groups.

Knowledge needs to be brought together from different positions in society, but also from different fields of expertise, including, for example, experts in: architecture, urban planning, environment, public health, public policy, economy, sociology, etc.

## Measuring success in a green recovery

Success can be understood in many different ways. It is important to create KPIs for each sector and for each specific measure. Some of the KPIs to consider could involve:

- Reduced emissions
- Number of buildings retrofitted
- Number of green elements included in buildings and cities
- New jobs generated
- Distance of bike lanes put in place
- Extent of pedestrianised areas
- Number of new electric vehicle users
- Number of communities impacted by the measures

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<sup>8</sup> Gusheva, E. and de Gooyert, V. (2021) 'Can We Have Our Cake and Eat It? A Review of the Debate on Green Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis.' *Sustainability*, 13(2) p. 874.

<sup>9</sup> Harman, B. P., Taylor, B. M. and Lane, M. B. (2015) 'Urban partnerships and climate adaptation: challenges and opportunities.' *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 12, February, pp. 74–79.

- Number of start-ups impacted by the measures
- Public acceptability of measures
- Number of partnerships created

## Embarking in a green recovery in practice: case studies

**Highline Camden Town**, has been described as a new park in the sky for London. The Camden Highline route runs through some of the most deprived and densely populated areas nationally. This intervention proposes a new green artery, bringing health and wellbeing benefits (as greenspace can help with air pollution and an active lifestyle), economic benefits (as it is predicted to boost tourism and employment opportunities), and social benefits (creating cultural opportunities and a community hub). A similar initiative in Manchester,

The initiative was open to an international design competition, for solutions on how to create the green passage and offer the most positive human-nature interactions. The winning entry was submitted by a team led by James Corner Field Operations, the firm behind South Park at Q.E. Olympic Park and New York High Line. This multidisciplinary team includes newly emerging local talent and internationally experienced experts, who will work with the community to imagine and design the Camden Highline as a resident amenity and ground-breaking visitor's destination.

A similar initiative has been proposed in **Manchester**, transforming the disused Castlefield viaduct into a 330m long green oasis. The National Trust has lodged plans for a 20-month pilot scheme that will see part of the 1892 Manchester viaduct transformed into a public park from 2022. This pilot concept seeks to marry the city's proud industrial heritage with a modern urban park concept, more reflective of the Manchester of today. The principal architectural challenge is to achieve the transition from hard grey metal into a soft green oasis, a place people can relax and unwind in nature while immersed in the viaduct's history.

**Brent Councils Town Managers** joined forces with a local micro business, In Your Face Alternatives (IYFA), who produce compostable biodegradable products. The aim was to roll out #plastic free campaigns and decrease the use of plastic bags usage in Wembley Town Centre. They worked with traders (pubs, clothing shops, sweet shops, green grocers, etc.) to use #plastic free as a unique selling point to encourage footfall and drive retailer sales, as well as increase brand social responsibility. The campaign was promoted on social media (hiring young people, university students, etc.) and showed great results: in terms of plastic reduction, increased footfall, and business and customer satisfaction. This initiative won the ATCM Environmental Award 2019.

In **Southampton**, there is an initiative in place to cut carbon emissions, engage in active transport, and contribute to the community by providing free trishaw taxi service to travel to local essential appointments. It runs with the support of volunteer drivers, while passengers can enjoy the ride and fresh air. Sustrans Waves in Weston is behind this, and although this is a pilot initiative, it can help inspire or inform similar projects. You can read more [here](#).

## 25 Vital and Viable Priorities

Research has identified 25 priorities for attractive high streets that create long-term success. This Framework can be used by place leaders to prioritise action. Embarking in a green recovery in your town centre links to some of these 25 priorities, and reading about them can therefore be helpful in this task.

Embarking on a green recovery can link to the following priorities: Vision and Strategy, Appearance, Experience, Place Management, Walking, Attractiveness, Recreational Space, Adaptability, Liveability and Innovation. You can find more information about the 25 priorities [here](#).

## Covid-19 Recovery Framework

This framework has been designed to assist place leaders who are responsible with the huge task of supporting their cities and towns through the pandemic. The Framework sets out a series of systematic preparedness, response and recovery measures, across four stages: Crisis, Pre-Recovery, Recovery, and Transformation.

Network and capacity building, creating partnerships, securing funding and investment, and delivery are important aspects of a green recovery and are all included in different stages of this recovery framework. You can read more about it and download an editable version [here](#).

### Action points for embarking in a green recovery

1. **Conduct research:** find examples and guides on how to successfully embark in a green recovery.
2. **Identify key sectors:** which of the four sectors has been hit by Covid-19 the worst and needs to be prioritised in the recovery?
3. **Identify measures within each sector:** From all the measures available, which are you going to put in place? For example, if you are focusing on mobility are you going to work in improving cycling infrastructure, electric vehicles, both?
4. **Identify areas of expertise:** what fields of expertise are relevant to be represented in the development of each of the measures? For example, if you are working with improving cycling infrastructure, architecture might not be relevant.
5. **Identify key partners:** who are you going to involve in the design and delivery process? How are you going to work with businesses? How are you going to conduct public consultations?
6. **Identify vulnerable communities:** what segments of the populations are experiencing the crisis the most? Who do you need to prioritise? How are you going to involve them?
7. **Establish KPIs:** how are you going to measure success? Is it going to be about jobs generated? New partnerships created? Communities that have been reached? reduction in emissions?

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