



## The UK's High Ambition, Low Carbon European Green Capital

---

*#MayorsCare Summit on*

*Modern Slavery and Climate Change: The Commitment of the Cities*

New Synod Hall, 21 July 2015

George Ferguson – Mayor of Bristol

Thank you very much, fellow Mayors, friends. It is wonderful to be here. I will try to take a minute and a half of my presentation time. I am an architect so I need visual representation because I think in terms of images.

Bristol is that tiny dot on that tiny dot on the top of the map there. It is the capital of the southwest of the UK. It is a beautiful but very complex city. It is a new city (it is less than 1,000 years old), compared with some of the cities we have been listening to. It has a river flowing through it and it has many natural advantages, it is surrounded by beautiful countryside. It is a very complex, historic city. And I think it is very common to so many European cities that we have this very complex fabric around which we have to build our policies. We do not have that clean sheet that Ana Laura talked about, but I want to create that clean sheet in terms of our policies; I think that it is really important.

We have a horrible history. This is how the slaves were laid out in the ships going across to the West Indies, it was a triangular slave trade between Bristol and Africa, Ivory Coast, which is represented here, and the West Indies. It is a terrible history, and it only ended in 1833, only a few lifetimes ago. It gives us a very special responsibility as a city. It colours our city in many positive ways: the culture of our city is enriched by the history of that terrible trade. This is my friend Miles, a Jamaican who sells jerk chicken in my market and is a wonderful character. Bristol is enriched by that culture. But we are now trying to be the exemplary trading city. We are a global city. We always have been small but global, and fair trade is really important to us and we are now celebrating our 10th year as Fair Trade city, and this is the 9th International Fair Trade Conference that happened only a couple of weeks ago in Bristol.

We have 45 different religions practiced in Bristol. We have a Catholic cathedral, a very fine modern Catholic cathedral. We have 190 people from 190 different countries speaking over 90 different languages. We are a city of sanctuary. We have brought in a huge number of people from North Africa and particularly from Somalia as refugees in recent times, and I believe very strongly they enrich our culture. Only on Saturday morning I was participating in the Eid ceremonies that are so important to a large part of our population.

But this is our clean sheet. We are European Green Capital for 2015 and it is a really important stimulus for us to change. We won European Green Capital not because we are as good as Stockholm, not because we are as good as Copenhagen, not because we are as good as Freiburg that has not even been Green Capital, but we bring together civil society. We have 800 different organizations within Bristol, from our universities down to small food growing projects, that are part of the civil society green capital partnership that enables us to be that Green Capital and to be determined and ambitious about the change.

I believe that children are at the heart of that change. If we cannot change the minds of children, we can change the minds of nobody. I have a collective noun for those who resist change: *adults*. It is very difficult to get people out of their cars. It is not difficult to get children out of their cars. It is not difficult to get them to plant a tree, so I am getting every small schoolchild up to the age of 11 to plant a tree. And I want every city across the whole world to get every small child to plant a tree. It a brilliant education lesson, it holds back desertification, it produces food, it produces medicine, and it is great for environmental education.

So I have joined up with an Australian charity, we are setting up our own energy company so that we can be much more in control of our energy. This is an illustration of one of the ways we are externally insulating some of the basic housing in Bristol, just with a sense of fun – we like to do things with a sense of fun. I think if you are going to make a change, you have to inspire people, you cannot do it simply by lecturing to them, you have to involve them, and I thank Anne Hidalgo for saying that we must lead by example. I have sold my car. I only go around by foot or by bike. Occasionally I get on a bus, and I engage with people so much better, and I engage with people on the whole environmental agenda.

This had a massive highway running through the square. I believe very strongly that we should turn our tarmac into grass where we can, and into trees. It is difficult to imagine that this was part of the major inner city highway, right in the middle of the city, and I want to do more of that.

I have started a program called "Make Sunday Special". Sunday should be special. It is not just about going to Church; it is about communication, it is about family life, it is about social life. We are commercializing Sundays, so I am fighting back the commercialization of Sundays. What I am doing is what I call "opening streets to people". The traffic people call it "closing streets". It is "opening streets", we must change the language to a positive language in this change, it is very important. We have a hill that runs from the university down to the cathedral, to the Protestant cathedral, and we turned it into a water slide. These things engage with people. We are now designing housing that is not reliant on cars. As I said, we are setting up an energy company and investing in our own renewables and we very much want to join with Vancouver and others who are now pressing for 100% renewables as soon as we can.

But what I do think is really important is that we are transparent about the measurement of our achievements, and that is why I applaud such initiatives as the Carbon Climate Registry which is doing just that. And I thank ICLEI, I thank C40 and I thank UCLG for bringing us all together in cities, because together in cities we can be a really powerful force. But that depends on the people pressing us and I would just say to Bill Clinton, "it's the people, stupid" – I say to Bill Clinton because he said it was "the economy stupid". But maybe more eloquently William Shakespeare in Coriolanus asked the question, "What is the city but the people?" And it is the people who matter, and it is the people we have to protect, it is the people we have to engage with, and it is the people we have to bring with us if we are going to tackle the issues of modern slavery and the environment.

Thank you very much.