

Submission from Green Light

Introduction

Dear Committee

This submission comes from **Green Light**, a community group, from an area around the small town of Alnwick in rural Northumberland. Our backgrounds include pig farming, journalism, teaching, project management, science, the priesthood, making music, fund raising for charities, public administration and bookselling.

Having studied and discussed over six weeks the talks and PowerPoints prepared for the UK Citizen's Assembly on Climate Change, available online (<https://www.climateassembly.uk/>), we are deeply concerned, even appalled, at the gap between the annual recommendations to the UK government made by the Committee on Climate Change and the actual performance of government departments; and also the inadequate collaborative working with regional and local communities. By getting better informed, we have come to realise that meeting the dangers of the climate crisis requires a revolutionary change in our society and our day-to-day way of life.

We are writing to make a local voice heard. This submission shares our experience of how things feel, and are, at the *local* level; the frustrations encountered; stories that excite us; and some practical, realistic, down-to-earth ideas about how more of them could come about. We would be happy to provide sources for the facts quoted.

People in our group have in the past supported at least 4 different political parties, yet we are united on this. What we see as the key national priorities are listed at the end of this submission.

It is urgent that the government, in partnership with regional and community leaders, identifies and starts implementing a clear, joined-up, integrated strategy. We urge then a public education climate change campaign as comprehensive as the AIDS or COVID-19 public communications, developed with the assistance of top advertising agencies.

It seems to us that local voices are rarely heard. We would welcome feedback from the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

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Submission to the Environmental Audit Committee from *Green Light, Northumberland*

Q 1 How can any fiscal and economic stimulus packages be aligned with the ambitions on net-zero, biodiversity, the circular economy and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals?

Action to recover should:

- **build resilience to systemic shocks**, such as climate change and another pandemic.
- **promote the growth of green, fair and sustainable economic recovery**, with a fair transition for those working in sectors most affected into new green jobs.
- **use a national economic triaging system** under which businesses in the transition to a zero-carbon future would receive funding to help them undertake low-energy restructuring.
- **embed and build on recent behaviour change** that helps improve health, increase resilience and reduce emissions.
- **Build on local knowledge and empower regional and local communities.**
- **Be international.** Poorer nations are most affected by global heating and yet contributed least to the crisis. Policies to aid the UK's economic recovery and zero-carbon transition must not contribute to further damage and exploitation elsewhere in the world.

Q2 How should the policy response to the current crisis differ from the response to the global financial crash in 2008?

The 2008 bail-out was at a huge cost to public institutions and those most vulnerable. The **measures post-COVID must be seen to be equitable for all.**

In 2010, emissions were allowed to reach an all-time high of 9.1 billion tons of carbon, compared with 8.6 billion tons in 2009. **Policy must be directed to radically reducing emissions.**

Q3 In what area should interventions be targeted to deliver both economic and environmental benefits in the short and long term?

A. BUILDINGS (18% of 2019 emissions)

Our local stories:

- *'I was amazed to hear that solving cold homes could save the NHS £848 million in England alone.'*
- *'I have retrofitted my house to make it carbon-zero. Over the same period, a million houses have been built that will need to be retrofitted. This is since the Committee on Climate Change unsuccessfully asked the government to improve building regulations.'*
- *'I am still not allowed to fit double glazing or wall insulation in my listed property.'*
- *'Why is VAT 20% on energy-efficient products like insulation, while much less for polluting gas?'*
- *Should I buy a hybrid boiler that could convert to hydrogen? Hard to get any clear national direction.'*
- *'A few years ago, I considered building a Passivhaus-type home, but was unconvinced local workmen had the skills to do the job.'*

Stories that give us hope:

- **Northumberland County Council** greening its offices with a solar farm, with battery, and installing 60 electric vehicle charge points.
- **Community-based initiatives like:**
 - **Brighton and Hove Community Land Trust** which uses investors' cash to install renewable energy systems, and thermal efficiency products to properties, including schools and a housing co-operative for low-income families.
 - **Schools Energy Co-op**, raising money to install solar panels on UK schools.

B. TRANSPORT**Our local stories:**

- *'Our local bus system involves several companies competing...but very few buses. ... none that allow me to attend evening events.'*
- *'I want to buy an electric car, but I live in a block of flats and no charging points are nearby.'*
- *'I'd like to work more from home, but the broadband just isn't up to it.'*

Some stories that give us hope:**CARS**

- The high-density **Climate Innovation District**, planned for Leeds, designed around walking and cycling, so residents use their cars less.
- Nottingham City Council's **workplace parking levy** - funding extensions to the city's tram and Linkbus networks.
- In March 2020, **sales of battery electric vehicles in Norway** were more than 75% of new car sales. (In December 2019, UK sales were about 6%, half of which were hybrid)
- **Charge My Street** in the north-west raised community finance to install 100 community-owned charge points.
- Electric car and cycle clubs, funded by community shares.

CYCLING

- **Seville** built 120 kilometres of segregated cycle paths alongside main roads. Daily cycle trips have increased per day from about 13,000 to 73,000.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- **Buses.** In **Munich** city region (including smaller towns and rural areas), buses, trains and trams are well coordinated by a public transport governing body.
- Since September 2018, Dunkirk has made **their bus services free**, and improved the network. Bus use is up about 85%, and 10% of new bus users have given up their second car.

C. OUR ENERGY SYSTEMS (the power sector: 12% of 2019 emissions)**Our local stories:**

- *'There is still no government decision about a deeply contested application to open a new open-cast coalmine in Druridge Bay here. How is opening new mines consistent with moving towards net-zero?'*

- *'It's great that in 2017 Gateshead Council opened a **low-carbon district heat network**. But why is it that only 2% of our heating and buildings in the UK are done using this kind of approach, whereas in countries like Denmark, it's over 40%?'*
- *'Our local Lynemouth **biomass plant**, converted from a former coal-fired power station, is now providing power for 450k homes. But how sustainable is the wood being used? In some biomass plants, wood pellets are coming from ancient forests in Latvia and Estonia...'*
- *'...And how will we be able to manage the **long-term storage of carbon** produced by biomass power plants? The development of carbon capture and storage will be hugely expensive and will need monitoring.'*

Stories that give us hope:

- **District heating networks**, e.g. London's Olympic Park. The Wyndford Estate in Glasgow also has a **Heat Trust scheme** to protect consumers if things go wrong.
- Plymouth Council's initiative in setting up dozens of **community-owned energy co-ops** that plough back profits into projects.
- Groups like the *Low Carbon Hub* that runs a Community Energy Fund to grow a portfolio of **community renewable energy projects** in Oxfordshire.

D. AGRICULTURE (9% of 2019 emissions)

Our local stories:

- *'Reducing sheep and cattle farming is a real problem for our farming neighbours. How can we do it? Hill farmers produce lamb on land not suited to arable crops. Should they be encouraged?'*
- *'I started keeping pigs as a source of safe, home-reared meat, but my rare breed pigs raised with maximum regard for animal welfare (and which tasted magnificent!) had a higher carbon footprint than modern breeds. In the end, I shifted in favour of less carbon and less meat.'*

E. FOOD

Our stories:

- *'Astonishing to hear that 75% of the UK population is obese or overweight; yet 2.2 million people suffer food poverty or food insecurity. And that Type 2 diabetes alone costs the NHS £12billion a year.'*
- *'I am really concerned about how vulnerable our 'just in time' food supply could be in future shocks.'*
- *'I go into a fish shop, and I have no idea what's been fished sustainably.'*
- *'...there's no info to help me know whether soya products from cleared rainforests transported halfway around the world are any better than local dairy products.'*

F. TRANSITION TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY (Waste: 4% of 2019 emissions)

Our stories:

- *'Astounded that 300,000 tonnes of clothing are sent to landfill every year...'*
- *'In the supermarket, am still astonished at the amount of single-use plastics, and how much packaging still has no recycling symbols at all.'*
- *'Would love to see efficiency standards set, so products will last a decent amount of time, can be repaired easily, or reused; and a carbon footprint label on goods.'*

- *'A friend tells me that her local council (in the south) has a contract with a recycling business that does not recycle most plastics (bottles are the only plastic they take). Why are there no minimum standards?'*
- *'Disappointed to learn that only about half of what's in our household waste (about 12% of UK overall waste) gets recycled in any way.'*

Stories that give us hope

- **Enfield's new energy-from-waste plant.** Instead of landfill, they now generate energy from most of north-east London's waste.
- **Hertfordshire's first recycling 'supersite'.** It will have a reuse centre on-site.
- The high recycling rates in **Belgium and Germany**, based on rewarding good behaviour, i.e. **save-as-you-recycle**, pay-as-you-throw.
- **Sharing platforms**, not only for accommodation and mobility (like car-sharing or car ride-sharing), but also for clothes, toys and services.
- **Packaging-free shops** in **Latvia, Spain** and the **Czech Republic**, enabling people to buy just the quantities they want.–

Ideas we like:

- Upgrade recycling infrastructure to increase its capability.
- Set a target to recycle 70% of all waste by 2025.
- Set a target to reduce food waste by 50% from the 2013 baseline by 2032
- Revise the target date for ending landfill of biodegradable waste to 2025 and ensure it is met.
- Introduce a full ban on all items in the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUP) priority list by 2021.
- Install the infrastructure for an effective deposit return scheme by 2021.
- Introduce charges on single-use disposable beverage cups by December 2020.

G. FINANCE

Our stories:

- *'In a webcast on investment there was nothing on the impact of the climate crisis and the huge changes needed.'*
- *'The government's 2019 Green Finance Strategy said that although 70% of banks in the UK now considered climate change as a financial risk, only 10% were taking a long-term strategic approach to managing the financial risks from climate change.'*
- *'In January this year, the market commentary of the advisers that invest my pension had hardly anything to say about the impact on markets of climate change.'*
- *'Got interested in an enterprise that provides solar for schools raising money through small investors and community funds. To grow, it needs more capital. But it's too small for investment funds to do due diligence. How can this funding gap be filled?'*

Stories that give us hope:

- The recent IPPR report that investing in a green economic recovery could create as many as 1.6m new jobs in Britain as the Covid-19 crisis subsides.
- The **International Renewable Energy Agency's** recent view that renewable energy would bring returns of between 3-8 dollars on every dollar invested.
- **BlackRock** found that in the first quarter of 2020, during the pandemic, 94% of a set of sustainable funds outperformed their non-sustainable counterparts.
- Scores of **leading global corporates across** Europe and America, as well as leading bankers, now saying that recovery has to be green.

- **Grantham Research Institute** research that every £1 borrowed by the government to spend during a severe economic downturn can raise output by £2-3 or more.
- Any work to make mandatory consistent climate-related financial risk disclosures including the perspective of the harm/increase in risk created for others.

H. COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE

Our local stories:

- *'When I started this course, I felt defeated and afraid. I'd heard that one in four people in the North East were in danger of losing their jobs through this pandemic. I now think there is fantastic potential for new jobs, better health, better well-being and a saved planet.'*
- *'I've been struggling with why politicians seem to have accepted the science of climate change, and yet have downplayed the consequences. I've now found an answer. If they are worried that public support for climate action is limited, results from the UK Citizens' Climate Change Assembly, and polls, show public opinion is significantly changing. So is top business opinion.'*

Stories that give us hope

- Actions of local people to spread the message, like local Climate Cafes, One World Centres.

Ideas that excite us:

- Embedding learning about the protection of the planet in all school curricula from primary upwards.
- Run mandatory education to enlighten and support decision-makers at all levels of public life.

Q4 How could the autumn budget be used to shift taxation from economically beneficial things, such as jobs and incomes; to environmental harms, such as pollution and waste?

Ideas that most excite us:

- Move toward ending perverse subsidies, e.g. to agriculture, water, fossil fuels and fisheries, as well as subsidies to inputs to production like energy and fertilisers. OECD estimate this is between US\$4-6 trillion globally per year.
- Reduce or abolish VAT on **green products and services**.
- Set a **Frequent Flyer Levy**.
- **Set a tax on producers** to make sure that the goods we buy have used, recycled or lower carbon content where possible.
- Use taxes to **encourage people to buy electric cars and bikes**.
- Ensure taxes are not impacting disproportionately on the poorest.

Q5 What sustainability conditions should be attached to government bailouts for high-carbon industries?

Introduce a **national economic triaging system** under which businesses in transition to a zero- carbon future would receive funding to help them undertake low-energy restructuring. This to involve:

- technology and efficiency standards.
- mandatory disclosure of emissions.
- strategies to reach net-zero to be independently monitored and audited.
- training in new skills in sustainable businesses.

Q6 How can the economic recovery stimulus be used to deliver green jobs at a time of potentially high unemployment?

A. BUILDINGS:

- Skill up the workforce to retrofit the estimated 2m UK homes with insufficient insulation. Private homes, housing associations and social housing must be part of a LONG TERM package for existing and NEW housing.
- Provide generous loans and grants for house retrofits, and also to support not-for-profit trusted *community-led* initiatives
- Regulations should revise standards to rapidly deliver high-energy efficiency and low carbon heating.
- Ensure that all homes reach at least Energy Performance 'C' by 2030, require renovation at point of sale or major refurbishment, for owner-occupiers from 2024, and new minimum standards for the rented sectors.
- Phase out high carbon heating like oil and LPG in off-gas areas from 2025 and set a date for the phase-out of replacement gas boilers.
- Ensure electric heating systems installed in new-build homes can provide flexible services, and have open protocols, so that major suppliers do not dominate.
- Set out a timescale for the roll-out of renewable heating systems and heat networks.
- Introduce a form of Certification for installers of all methods of decarbonising homes to deter 'cowboy' builders and online scammers.
- Public information and citizens' advice campaigns to share accurate information.
- Help control F-gas emissions (4% of 2019 emissions), by replacing polluting air-conditioner units.

B. TRANSPORT

- Roll out fast broadband everywhere for home working
- Halt all new trunk road and motorway building. Limit airport expansion. Think what can be done with the £27bn recently announced for road building.
- Give grants to **encourage electric bike sales.**

C. ENERGY

- **Create a favourable planning regime** and ambitious targets for renewable energy.
- Require local leaders to recognise the need for clean heat, **create a master plan**, and use planning powers to require developers to connect to heat networks.
- Support the growth of new **publicly-owned alternative energy companies**, foster opportunities for **community energy.**

D. AGRICULTURE

- Reward a shift away from beef and sheep farming, towards low-carbon farming, enhanced wildlife protection and flood mitigation.
- A clear direction of travel to allow farmers to invest.
- Support more fruit and veg growing to reduce imports, also miscanthus for bio energy.

- Increase funding and raise targets for native woodland creation and restoration.
- Create a framework for deciding how we use our land.

E. FOOD

- Encourage **vertical farming** in urban centres to protect against the sudden disruption of 'just-in-time' imported food supplies.
- Recover fish stocks to maximum sustainable yield by protecting spawning grounds and juveniles from by-catch pressure.
- Ensure public subsidy supports only sustainable fishing practices and those on the way to it.
- Invest in other low carbon seafood.

F. FINANCE

- Address market barriers to create a more rapid deployment of green capital into priority sectors.
- Establish urgently regional, cooperative banks to channel nationally produced finance to local businesses according to nationally agreed criteria.
- Champion sustainable local economies; and support **community and not-for-profit organisations** which help finance, install, and operate various green products.

Q7 The pause in economic activity, fall in traffic and increase in working from home during the lockdown has resulted in rapid reductions in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions; what measures can be utilised in the recovery to continue these trends as economic activity resumes?

- Ensure nationwide 100% broadband coverage to support home-working.
- Support our young people to establish new local enterprises.
- New **pop-up cycle-ways, widened sidewalks, and more 20mph streets.**
- Support for local shops and locally produced food.

Q8 In the run-up to COP 26 to UN conventions on climate change and biodiversity next year, how can the UK use its influence, as both host of COP 26 and when holding the presidency of G7 in 2021, to influence the nature of economic rescue packages around the world?

- **Demonstrate global leadership** by getting on track to achieve our climate targets, and by publishing our commitments to climate action well in advance of COP26.
- The global fossil fuel industry has the capital, the cash flow and the engineering capability to solve the climate crisis. But no single company can step up on its own. **Work internationally to require the industry to clean up its waste.**
- **Be consistent.** Last month (July 2020), the government agreed to use £900 million of taxpayers' money for a gas pipeline in **Mozambique**. How can this help the UK's reputation on climate?
- Support international measures to stop the concentration of **food power** in the hands of a small number of companies.
- **Be visionary.** Poorer nations are most affected by global heating and yet contributed least to the crisis. Push for significant compensation and support to help them adapt, and pursue low-carbon development models.
- **Champion justice.** Support the calls of the least developed nations for a financial mechanism to compensate them for impacts of climate change that are now unavoidable.

- Persuade other major countries to **write off debt for the developing world**.
- **Create incentives to the developing world to remove fossil fuels** and move to renewable.
- Ensure all UK policies and proposals do not have an adverse consequence internationally.

FINALLY: KEY NATIONAL PRIORITIES

- In partnership with regional and community leaders, government must identify and start implementing a *clear joined-up, integrated strategy*.
- *Prioritise infrastructure through the net-zero lens*. Invest in renewable energy, insulation in new and existing housing stock, fibre broadband, public transport, upgraded recycling infrastructure and distribution grids, support electric vehicles (including bicycles), public charging points.
- *Avoid locking in fossil fuel use*. No more roads. Limit airport expansion, and the total number of flights. Invest in electric buses and the electrification of the railway.
- Establish urgently a system of *regional, cooperative banks* to channel nationally produced finance to local businesses according to the nationally agreed criteria.
- *Support people, rather than industries*, for the transition of jobs and skills.
- *Regulate, tax and incentivise* to encourage investment in low carbon product
- Set an example by *public procurement of sustainable products*.
- *Give city mayors, councillors, communities and people on the front line of our local services a much bigger say* over investment and services.
- Run a comprehensive *public education climate change campaign*.
- Empower *local people* to help co-create local plans.

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