

# **Build back better**

Britain after coronavirus:  
policy ideas for  
Liberal Democrats

Edited by Layla Moran MP

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## **Britain after coronavirus: policy ideas for Liberal Democrats**

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All contributors have written their pieces in their own individual capacity. Their inclusion in this booklet should not be taken to mean either that they agree with every proposal in it or that they are supporting Layla Moran's candidacy for the Liberal Democrat leadership.

PDF available for download from [www.LaylaMoran.com/Build\\_Back\\_Better](http://www.LaylaMoran.com/Build_Back_Better)

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# Foreword

*Layla Moran*

The assertion that ‘Britain is at a crossroads’ is one of the most tenacious clichés of modern politics. Scarcely an election – in recent times, even a year – passes without us being told that our choices will set the country’s course for decades to come. The financial crash of 2008, the coalition, the EU referendum – all significant, all noteworthy, and in the case of Brexit, incomplete. Yet all pale into insignificance when compared to the coronavirus crisis and its impacts. These pose both a threat and an opportunity for our party, the country and indeed, the world.

The coronavirus pandemic has affected our lives like no crisis since the Second World War. The future role of the state, international trade, the links between private business and the public realm, global governance over problems that defy purely national solutions – all require new thinking and new approaches. And these challenges have come on top of existing emergencies, including climate change, the destruction of the natural environment and the floods of refugees fleeing from war and poverty. The democratic vision and humane values of Liberalism – promoting individual liberty and global justice, reconciling freedom and fairness, dispersing significant concentrations of wealth and power – are needed as never before.

With great need comes great opportunity. In normal times, an appetite for improvement is often balanced by a fear of change. Voters’ caution is a sentiment that we politicians ignore at our peril. That’s where we must start. We recognise that people are scared. Their lives and their livelihoods have never felt more fragile. They seek certainty, steadiness and answers. But – and this is the truly exciting part – people are also beginning to see the opportunity for a transformation of the world as we know it.

And therein lies the opportunity for the Liberal Democrats. How do we seize this moment and respond in a way that both reassures the British people, amid the pain that will undoubtedly continue, and drives a new Liberal settlement at the end of it?

That is the purpose behind this booklet, which contains contributions from forty Liberal Democrat party members and sympathisers. I asked them to consider what party policy should be for Britain after coronavirus – whether the changed political and economic circumstances require new policy prescriptions, or whether they reinforce and highlight the case for our existing proposals.

You can decide for yourself whether you think they met the challenge – but whether they did or not, I hope they stimulate you to think about new ideas and new approaches. Because we Liberal Democrats are the party of ideas or we are nothing.



I must emphasise that this booklet does not form part of my candidacy for the Liberal Democrat leadership. When I first decided to ask friends and colleagues whether they would be prepared to contribute to it, the leadership election was scheduled to kick off in May 2021. After it was brought forward to the summer of this year, we decided to accelerate the booklet’s production in order to be able to contribute to the policy debate within the party as the country emerges from lockdown.

Neither is this a manifesto – there are important topics that are not discussed here – but we have tried to cover the main areas of policy where we think the party would benefit from looking again at existing policies in the light of the pandemic and its impacts.

All contributors have written their pieces in their own individual capacity. Their inclusion in this booklet should not be taken to mean either that they agree with every proposal in it – I’m not sure I do! – or that they are supporting me for the leadership.

I want to put on record my warmest thanks to them all for their hard work over a very short period, and particularly to the lead authors for each chapter – David Boyle, Duncan Brack, Christine Cheng, Martin Horwood, David Howarth, Julian Huppert, Mohsin Khan and Paul Noblet – who coordinated the input from their colleagues and pulled the chapters together. My thanks also to those contributors who had to remain anonymous for professional reasons, to Richard Rowley for the design and, especially, to my editorial team of Duncan Brack and Gareth Lewis Shelton, who liaised with contributors and processed and edited their contributions; without them this booklet would not have happened.

Layla Moran MP  
June 2020

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# Introduction

*Layla Moran*

The world is facing the greatest economic, political and social upheaval in peacetime. It is seeing the greatest depression in possibly 300 years. There has not been such a sea change in the way people live in much of the world since the Second World War.

Much of what we took for normal in February 2020 is gone. Much of it will never come back. Many of the changes that we will see are simply adjustments that were going to come in time. These have been accelerated and concentrated from a ten-year period to ten weeks. Others are changes and challenges that will be entirely new in the making. If these are managed well, they could lead to the emergence of a better, cleaner, tolerant, happier and more equitable world. Left to their own devices, they could lead to a more divided, polluted, angrier and selfish world.

Out of the ashes of World War II came the NHS and Beveridge's five pillars of welfare. It produced the United Nations, the Marshall Aid plan, the end of colonialism and the European Steel and Coal Community – the precursor to today's European Union. But it also led to the Cold War, the never-ending Middle East crisis, the nuclear arms race, the division of Germany and the still-divided Korea of today.

As Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War*, 'In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity'. That applies to a post-coronavirus world as much as anywhere else.

Just last year, politicians mocked anything that was slightly out of the ordinary. If an idea had a cost to it they labelled it as unicorn politics, or spending from a magic money tree. What coronavirus has shown is that there is another world where the unicorns exist in blessings, and there are rainforests of magic trees. Things can change for the better. It is possible. It just takes belief, drive, hope, optimism and determination.

This booklet explores and analyses some of the many possible impacts and problems the post-coronavirus world will have to address. It is by no means exhaustive; nor can it be when so much is changing so quickly and so dramatically. However, it is our attempt, as proud democratic liberals, to outline new thinking, new ideas and new choices for how, given the chance, we can make the country, and the world, a better place for ourselves and future generations.

This booklet aims to create an arena where bold new ideas can be examined and discussed so that in the midst of such an all-encompassing and terrifying event as the pandemic there are exciting, hopeful and optimistic plans that promote the best the world has to offer while at the same time suggesting new ways to head off the worst aspects of what coronavirus has brought.

The changes, challenges and opportunities that people, the country and the world face can be viewed through ten distinct prisms, each outlined in the chapters that follow. Each area has been exposed in some way – sometimes in many ways – by coronavirus as currently flawed or outdated, and each requires new thinking fit for the rest of the twenty-first century.

What would Liberal Democrats do differently to make sure the country can strive, thrive and survive in the new dawn? How would we help shape a new world that delivers freedom, opportunity, happiness and a planet we could proudly hand to our descendants?

After the end of the Second World War, the survivors believed that the next chapter in the history of the world needed to be significantly different from the old one. They knew that it needed to mark a shift from the deprivation, poverty and suffering that had affected so many people both before and during the war. They owed it to those who died in their millions to try and make the world a better place than it had been before the carnage started.

There was a renewed vigour, an optimism that things could, and should, be done better. There were new ideas, new ideologies and new hopes and dreams that fuelled a belief that a better future was possible.

The new momentum that was spawned, which lasted for 75 years, produced eye-watering wealth. It lifted millions out of poverty, reduced hunger, increased life expectancy, delivered once-unimaginable technologies and provided freedoms unheard of in the early years of the twentieth century.

Yet even before coronavirus became a reality it was clear that the golden road that had been embarked on by the post-war generations was coming to an end. Life expectancy in developed countries began to stall as people struggled with mental health issues, drug addiction and obesity. Technology started to become an all-encompassing and intrusive government and corporate tool rather than an aid to the individual. Democracy began to wobble as ever-more autocratic demi-god leaders took to the global stage, undermining the liberty and freedoms we had taken for granted as they went.

The job for life that remained a cornerstone of society until the 1980s became a job of zero hours in a gig economy. Workers and employment were treated like a switch, turned on and off at the whim of shareholders or a remote hedge fund manager. Rather than the company serving the people, the people now served the company. The financial markets, rather than elected politicians, governed policy. Banks became too powerful to fail, leaving taxpayers to pick up the pieces while executives counted their bonuses. Those who stole billions from the markets would never be prosecuted, yet a teenager who stole a bottle of water could be jailed for months. A human being had become just another by-product in the endless pursuit of high profits for shareholders at the expense of everyone, and everything else.

The cost to the environment that this never-ending quest for more and more consumption was rising ever higher. Climate change is beginning to threaten the end of human civilisation as we know it. Nuclear proliferation was becoming more widespread, genocides more commonplace. Nationalism, populism and racism were beginning to rear their heads once more, as they had in the 1930s.

Now, thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, the world has reached this historic moment of choice: a dead end to what went before or a new way in a new era?



Governments, parties in power and civil servants are inherently slow to adapt and are conservative in nature. Their default position is to veer back to the status quo. However, the rest of the world moves on. Businesses change, people adjust and priorities alter; they recognise the realities of a new normal far quicker. Individuals and communities have seen new opportunities, where governments stick resolutely to looking at what was once upon a time, trying to recreate a former utopia that was crumbling at its core and anyway hadn't existed for decades.

There is a choice. Government can carry on ploughing the same furrow as before. They can continue to widen the gap between the haves and have nots. They can increase digital and state intrusion into our lives, they can continue to feed the ever-greater state of fear, depression, angst, stress and unhappiness that besets much of the UK. The country can continue striving for an economic growth that makes no one happy, buying things we don't need, don't want and can't afford while all the while dismantling our precious environment. And we can allow ageing, outdated has-been leaders to stoke the fires of shallow populism, nationalism and xenophobia in order to suit their own ambitions rather than those that they should serve.

There is another way. We can decide that we want a more equal society, where people are valued for the work they do. We can decide that we want security from fear and debt, that we want an economy and public services that are resilient to crises and emergencies, not cut to the bone to offer electoral bribes. We can decide that we want to tackle the huge intertwined climate and nature emergencies, altering our ways of life if necessary to protect the underpinnings of human civilisation. We can decide that we want government that serves local communities, not communities that serve the centre. We can decide that we want freedom from companies and governments poking into the corners of our lives where they have no place. We can decide that we want an education system that, from cradle to grave, makes sure that everyone has the opportunity to learn, appreciate and discover. We can decide that we want to build a world where nations cooperate in trust and openness.

And, as Liberal Democrats we can decide that we want a party that is up to this challenge, that rediscovers and builds on our local campaigning roots and is not afraid to collaborate with others to defeat the most narrow-minded, hypocritical, ideologically blinkered – and incompetent – government in living memory.

These are the themes that are tackled by the contributors to this booklet. Before coronavirus, many would have perceived this world to be impossible, a dreamer's world. The pandemic has taught us otherwise. It has shown us how received wisdoms and long-held beliefs can be torn up in the face of an overwhelming emergency. It has opened up a small chink of light to allow us to see that this new world is available. Now we must seize the opportunity. We owe it to the tens of thousands who have died to make that better world.

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## Economic policy and the state

*David Howarth*

Periods of crisis – of real crisis about life and death – can either give rise to frivolity and forgetting, as in the 1920s, following the First World War and the Spanish Flu, or to reflection and profound re-evaluation, as in the late 1940s, following the Second World War, the Holocaust and the coming of the atomic bomb. That bifurcation applies as much to economic policy as to politics and culture. The 1920s saw Churchill flippantly and foolishly rejoining the Gold Standard, and a dangerous outbreak of beggar-thy-neighbour protectionism, whereas the 1940s saw an attempt to create a new international consensus about new institutions designed to create economic stability, both domestically and globally. Which way the coronavirus crisis will go is currently unclear, but we should hope for, and promote, a period of seriousness at least as profound as that of the 1940s.

### **Economic ideology and the virus**

The most striking contrast to come out of the coronavirus crisis is that between countries that have been following a market-fundamentalist line in economic policy and those that have not. The former, including the USA, Brazil and the UK – especially England – have seen catastrophically high death rates from Covid-19, whereas countries which have rejected market fundamentalism, such as Germany and Korea, have seen much lower death rates. Many factors might be important in explaining the differences – the average age of the population, for example, or genetic differences, or the degree of centralisation of the political system – and some odd anomalies exist, such as Sweden, but the influence of ideology is impossible to discount.

The market-fundamentalist approach is purely utilitarian or wealth-maximising. Its basic commitment is to the idea that policy should be neutral about what kind of society we want to live in and what kind of people we want to be, and that the only thing we can possibly agree on is that more wealth or more satisfaction of individual preferences is better than less wealth or less satisfaction of individual preferences. As a result, policy should aim solely at maximising wealth or maximising the degree to which individual preferences are satisfied. Who gets what, and what kind of society or people we become as a result, should, on this view, count for nothing. It also follows, for those who take this view, that the allocation of resources should be done by markets, since ultimately only markets reflect what individuals want and can produce. Where markets do not exist, market fundamentalists say that policy should be to create them, and where that cannot happen, policymakers should attempt to model what a market would have produced and to make that result the basis of government action. Efficiency, in the technical sense of the allocation of resources that maximises

utility or wealth, is pursued to the exclusion of all other goals, since efficiency is the only goal that needs no agreement on the substance of what to do.

Market fundamentalism has played out in the coronavirus crisis in the form of demands that 'the economy' should be 're-opened' regardless of the cost in human lives. Lives matter in market fundamentalism only to the extent that other people value them enough to change their own behaviour, and so if people prefer enjoying themselves to reducing the risk of passing on a fatal disease, that is the verdict of the market. Consequently, libertarian think tanks and their favourite politicians first denied that the virus was a threat, then played down the extent of the threat and finally claimed that the damage to 'the economy' (by which they mean exclusively 'markets') outweighed any damage the virus threatened to human life. They justified this claim by saying that since we permit other risks to life to exist, such as those caused by road traffic, we impliedly put a market value on human life all the time and so there is nothing offensive in putting a lower value on lives lost to the virus than on a mass of market transactions. A cost-benefit analysis, in which both the benefits and the costs are measured in ways that imitate the market would, libertarian analysts claim, show that 'the economy' should come first.

At its most extreme, exemplified by the [remarks of retired Supreme Court justice Jonathan Sumption in May 2020](#), libertarians insisted that those who spread the disease have no responsibility for the harm suffered by those who catch it because those who catch it should be considered as having chosen to take the risk of catching it. The lockdown was unjustified, in Sumption's view, because it interfered with people's freedom to choose their own level of risk, and the risk people pose to others is a matter solely for potential victims, and nothing at all to do with potential spreaders of the disease: 'Those who do not want to run the risk of being infected can isolate themselves voluntarily. They will be no worse off than they are under the current compulsory regime. The rest of us can then get on with our lives.'

On the other side, several approaches exist that might be characterised as opposed to market fundamentalism. Some of these approaches are deeply unattractive to liberals because they are authoritarian and collectivist to the extent of denying any value to human freedom. But that was not the approach, for example, of the German government. Angela Merkel was clear from the start that the German state valued each individual person. As she said in her televised address of 17 March 2020, 'we are a community in which each life and each person counts ... No one is expendable. Everyone counts.'

Situations might arise in which, whatever decision is taken, lives will be lost. In those situations, aiming to maximise the number of lives saved cannot be criticised. But that is because the calculation does not violate the principle of treating each person as equally valuable. The calculation is in terms of lives, not of pounds or euros.

That commitment to equality of respect for each individual person meant that German policy acted in ways that UK market fundamentalists would consider inefficient. For example, even before the coronavirus crisis began, the German health system carried very large levels of spare capacity – including tens of thousands of intensive care beds. It also meant that the goal of policy was always to suppress the virus, not just to 'manage' it. The German approach accepts no trade-off between costs and death. It simply looks for the best way to eliminate the threat. As Merkel later explained, the German state, including its health system, exists to protect human dignity.

Even those in Germany who disagree with Merkel's approach mostly do so on the basis that the lockdown is a greater threat to human dignity than the virus. They do not argue, in the manner of Sumption, that people should be able choose what to do given their own estimation of the risk and that if they don't care about the consequences of their actions for others, that is simply a risk those others have no choice but to tolerate.

A precisely parallel analysis can be made about climate change. In the market fundamentalist approach, climate change only matters to the extent that current consumers care about it, and if they prefer future generations to be faced by a climate that makes human life difficult or even impossible, that is the verdict of the market and not to be questioned or undermined by present-day policymakers. As a consequence, and also in exact parallel to the coronavirus crisis, libertarians first denied the existence of the problem of climate change, then, when its existence could no longer be denied, played down its seriousness, and finally made the claim that 'the economy' was more important than the climate. A different approach, in contrast, would emphasise a fundamental equality between people in the future and people now, and so would not accept that we now are entitled to trade the interests of future generations for our current enjoyments.

### **Liberalism, respect for individuals and wealth maximisation**

Liberalism is not libertarianism. Liberalism starts with respecting human beings as individuals. It values human beings for themselves, not as a tradeable commodity. It insists on equal respect for each individual as a separate person. That position is incompatible with market fundamentalism's insistence on treating people as merely a source of pleasure or pain for other people and thus, in Merkel's words, 'expendable'. The Merkel approach to the virus was fundamentally liberal. The approach of Sumption and the libertarian wing of the Conservative Party was not.

Cost and efficiency are not, however, irrelevant to the liberal approach. They are important in ensuring that maximum benefit is extracted from available resources, but cost and efficiency do not constitute or determine the goals of policy themselves. The state has substantive goals, and those goals ultimately refer back to the dignity and fundamental interests of individual human beings. One can go further. Since cost and efficiency are about means and not ends in themselves, the search for efficiency should not be allowed to obstruct the achievement of the substantive goals. So, for example, what matters in climate change policy is stopping dangerous climate change. It is not, as sometimes seems to be the desire of some economists, to achieve only as much as can be achieved if we restrict ourselves to using the most theoretically efficient means.

**Liberalism is not libertarianism.  
Liberalism starts with respecting  
human beings as individuals.**

### **The end of market fundamentalism**

That market fundamentalism can cope with neither of the great challenges of our time, climate change and the pandemic, suggests that the era of market fundamentalism is, or at least should be, coming to an end. With it should go the search for perfect efficiency, in the hope of maximising a 'surplus' to be distributed. That search became an obsession across the whole of UK public policy, but it was always ultimately a form of displacement activity. Once economic policy has substantive

aims, efficiency can return to its proper place as a matter of deciding between means to adopt, not as an end in itself.

But the question is: what, precisely, should take its place? What should be the substantive goals of the economic policy of a state dedicated to liberalism in the form of respect for individual fundamental rights and individual human dignity? And if we can identify those goals, where should that take us?

### Substantive goals of economic policy

The most important lesson of current events is that the primary goal of economic policy, before all else, needs to be the continuation of life and the continuation of the possibility of lives worth living. Only once that goal is satisfied can policy turn to anything else.

That means that economic policy needs to start with the physical, social, and political basics of human life and to recognise that its main goal must be to provide everyone with those basics. That means in turn that economic policy cannot even start to be discussed until we have some idea what those basics are. Since that discussion is inherently political, it also follows that there can be no politically neutral or purely technical economic policy.

What are the basics? The economist [Kate Raworth's 'doughnut'](#) is one attempt to operationalise this approach. She identifies nine environmental threats to human life, and twelve basic requirements for human individual and social life. The environmental threats together form an ecological ceiling which policy should aim not to break, and the basic requirements form a foundation for social life that policy should aim at providing for everyone.

One can argue about the details. It is important for liberals, for example, that living in a liberal political system should be recognised as one of the foundations of a bearable life. At a first cut, for liberals the basic requirements include preserving the possibility of human life on the planet, health (including mental health), food and water, shelter, education, energy, communications, science, the arts, political and civil liberty, the rule of law, democracy, justice and fairness (including an approach to equality), public order and national defence.

But what about what is conventionally called 'the economy', which in reality means a high and rising level of individual consumption? Is that itself a basic requirement, something for which the state takes ultimate responsibility? For the last 75 years political leaders have taken responsibility, or at least the credit, for everyone's living standards, in the sense of our consumption of purely private goods – consumer durables, holidays, restaurant meals. One can see how the level of economic activity might be of interest to the state as a means to an end. Economic activity might generate surplus resources that might be used to meet the state's obligations, or it might, for example through generating incomes, provide the means for individuals to fulfil those obligations without troubling the state in the short term.

It is important to keep means and ends separate. Is the end of ever-rising consumption one the state should take on and treat as a basic requirement? The possible environmental consequences of doing so have already thrown that idea into doubt, and now the pandemic has exposed its limits. The notion that economic policy during the pandemic should have been aimed at increasing GDP per head rather than preserving the flow of essential goods and services is difficult to justify. The

media continued to report economic aggregates such as changes in GDP as if they mattered, but it is remarkable how little they counted for policymakers in most parts of the world.

The proper position for a liberal is that to the extent that increasing consumption threatens any of the basic requirements, such as the possibility of human life on the planet, it cannot itself be a basic requirement. If the state can find ways of creating conditions in which individual satisfactions will increase without threatening any of the basic requirements, that is not a bad thing, but if it turns out, for example, that consumerism is a threat to mental health, the state should not encourage consumerism.

### **Basic requirements, the market and the state**

To classify something as a basic requirement does not, however, mean that it must automatically be provided by the state. We all need food, but it would be odd to insist that the state should own and operate all food shops. But it does mean that policy should aim at ensuring that no one starves, which in normal periods might be achieved by providing everyone with an adequate income but in abnormal times might additionally mean that the state must move directly to secure supplies and supply lines. One would have thought that would be uncontroversial across the political spectrum, but it is not. The view of Conservative ministers, influenced by libertarianism, is very different. Zac Goldsmith, for example, answering a written parliamentary question in September 2019 on behalf of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, declared that: ‘Defra is not responsible for the supply of food and drink to the population in an emergency, and the expertise, capability and levers to plan for and respond to food supply disruption lie within the industry.’

**The most important lesson of current events is that the primary goal of economic policy, before all else, needs to be the continuation of life and the continuation of the possibility of lives worth living.**

The question is: who is ultimately responsible for delivering a particular kind of good or service? The libertarian answer is that ultimately everything should be a matter for the market. On the other side, statisticians think that ultimately everything is a matter for the state. The liberal approach is that the state is ultimately responsible for ensuring that basic requirements are met.

How the state fulfils its obligations is a separate question, and it might be that the most effective and efficient means might be to supplement rather than to replace a market mechanism, but direct state action is always an option.

### **Infrastructure and the core**

Even though markets can, in normal circumstances, go a long way to supply basic requirements, it is generally the case, as we are now experiencing in the case of food, that they under-invest in the means of recovering from disasters. Private firms, unlike governments, can escape their responsibilities through insolvency, and so they have no incentive to make provision for what happens next if they cease to operate. The spare capacity needed to recover from a disaster, or indeed to ride one out in the first place, will often only exist if the state supplies it.

The private sector is notoriously bad at providing infrastructure of any kind. High capital costs combined with long lead-in times and long operating periods tend to repel private investors unless

they can secure guaranteed revenue streams, for example by being granted very long-term contracts at a guaranteed price. But those guarantees themselves tend massively to reduce the ability of the government to react to new events or new knowledge. Policy is frozen in a contractual deep-freeze, preventing the re-use or re-purposing of existing infrastructure and thus making innovation more difficult – a process that has, for example, plagued UK energy policy.

As a result, the provision of infrastructure that relates to basic requirements is very likely to fall to the state. The state should welcome that responsibility, since, as [Michael Grubb](#) has argued in relation to climate change policy, infrastructure investment is one of the few means government possesses to change society's long-term trajectory.

One of the lessons of the pandemic is that infrastructure is not limited to plant and machinery. People can be infrastructure too. One of the more obvious lessons of the lost but now returning art of input-output analysis (in the form of thinking about '[production networks](#)') is that some areas of activity ('sectors of the economy') have greater effects on other areas than others. Some activities have effects on all the others. These are the core economic activities, disturbance to which affects the whole system. The pandemic has demonstrated that those core activities can be disturbed not just through damage to equipment but also by the loss of [workers through illness and caring responsibilities](#). That is, some workers are 'core', and where those 'core' workers are involved in the provision of the basic requirements, the state has additional responsibilities for their welfare. Failure to understand this lay at the heart of the problems of securing and allocating personal protective equipment and the confusion around how and when to permit different kinds of production.

### **Economic policy post-pandemic**

More lessons for economic policy from the pandemic might yet emerge. Another striking difference between the UK and German policy responses, for example, has been just how devolved power is in Germany, which allowed local authorities very quickly to mobilise local resources, such as testing facilities that existed in universities, in contrast with the lumbering and ineffective centralised English NHS. It might well be that the merits of devolving power are about to be demonstrated yet again, and that the pandemic marks the end not only of market fundamentalism but also of centralised political control – in other words that it marks the end of the central tenets of Thatcherism: the supremacy of the market and a strong central state.

But even at this point the pandemic has allowed us to see more clearly the crucial role of the state. The task of liberals is to ensure that the lesson is learned but properly interpreted: it is not that the state should take over all aspects of our lives, but that unless the state carries out its specific functions well, we will have no life worth living.

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## Economics and industry

*Duncan Brack, Josh Babarinde, Vince Cable, Helen Cross, Alyssa Gilbert, Cara Jenkinson, Jannah Patchay, Sheila Ritchie*

### Introduction

*Duncan Brack*

The previous chapter sets out the case for an interventionist economic policy, not just to recover from the pandemic but to tackle the other urgent challenges that face us: the climate and nature emergencies, poor productivity, and the pervasive inequality of modern Britain. This chapter sets out some ideas of how to do that. Vince Cable describes the elements of a liberal industrial strategy, while Josh Babarinde makes the case for a particular aspect: recovery rewards. Helen Cross emphasises the need for industrial strategy to be decentralised and rooted in communities, while Jannah Patchay suggests some technological options for modernising financial markets. Alyssa Gilbert and Cara Jenkinson analyse in more detail what an ambitious climate policy needs to contain, and Sheila Ritchie focuses on the need for just transition policies to deal with sectors such as oil and gas.

Almost every chapter in this booklet argues for higher government spending (though Chapter 9 suggests that more value can be gained through decentralising expenditure), and there can be no doubt that this will be necessary not just to kick-start the economy and sustain recovery over the short term but to invest in new infrastructure, new technology and new business models for the longer term. What does this mean for public finances?

[Latest figures from the Institute of Fiscal Studies](#) suggest that government will need to borrow around £300 billion this financial year (15 per cent of GDP), twelve times what was forecast in the Budget in March. It could be even higher, depending on how slowly the economy and consumer confidence recover. In May the *Telegraph* published news of a leaked Treasury proposal that the government freeze public sector pay and hike taxes to tackle the debt: a return to austerity.

This would be a disaster. Depending on how fast the austerity agenda was imposed, it could choke off the recovery just as it was gathering steam (as the coalition's austerity measures probably did in 2010) and undermine any attempt to remould the economy to meet future challenges. One reason the UK has suffered from coronavirus more than any other European country – in terms of the



impacts both on health and the economy – is because of years of under-investment in health and social care. To fail to correct this will be to risk the same outcomes from the next pandemic, or the second or third waves of this one.

But the UK has been here before; coronavirus is not the first national emergency we have faced. By the end of 2019, accumulated government debt stood at about 80 per cent of GDP; by the end of April 2020 it had jumped to just under 100 per cent. During the First World War it rose from about 30 per cent to above 150 per cent. Having never fallen below 100 per cent during the interwar period, it escalated again to almost 240 per cent during the Second World War, and did not fall below 100 per cent until the 1960s. The loans taken out during wartime were not finally paid off until 2014, along with some dating back to the Napoleonic wars of the early nineteenth century. The IFS projection of £300 billion government borrowing this year would still, as a share of GDP, be below that borrowed in each of the four years from 1940–41 to 1943–44. And, as many have pointed out, this is the biggest peacetime crisis in our history.

This is how governments finance emergencies, and there is no reason to think that it needs to be different this time. True, governments with high levels of debt – and, more seriously, of high and continuing public sector deficits – can be vulnerable to panicky investors, but in practice the demand for government bonds is never likely to disappear; there are too many savings in the world looking for a safe haven, which is what developed economies generally are. Furthermore, for the last 20 years in the UK and Europe, interest rates on government debt have fallen drastically, and are now at historically low levels, so servicing the debt, even at a much higher total, will not bankrupt the government. Again, there is no reason to think this will change.

Tax increases will be necessary at some point, when the economy is strong enough. The Liberal Democrats should make the case for them to be used also to meet other pressing challenges, including redressing inequalities in income and wealth and meeting the climate and nature emergencies. We need to be honest with the electorate, and not pretend that Scandinavian-style levels of public services can be paid for with US-style levels of taxation. This myth, pedalled by politicians from all parties, has contributed to the appalling impact of coronavirus on the UK.

The key thing in the short term is to stimulate the recovery, so that higher debt service payments can be met through economic growth and higher tax receipts, not by cutting spending. This means building an economy that is sustainable and resilient to future shocks, whether these are caused by another pandemic, by economic turbulence, such as trade wars, or by the impacts of accelerating climate change. That is the challenge that the contributors to this chapter seek to meet.

## **Industrial strategy and Liberalism**

*Sir Vince Cable*

In the long liberal tradition of economic thought there have been different views and fashions on how deeply government should be involved in supporting one firm or sector over another, or should be trying to take a strategic view of the economy rather than passively responding to markets.

## Origins

At the dawn of the nineteenth century one of the greats, Alexander Hamilton, became the first modern politician to promote industrial strategy as part of an essentially liberal approach to the establishment of American capitalism. He was a serious economic liberal who had read, absorbed and applied the thinking of Adam Smith, as well as a political liberal who abhorred slavery (unlike his slave-owning contemporaries and rivals Jefferson and Madison). But he saw the limitations of pure market economics and disagreed with Smith on one key point: that a country trying to catch up technologically should give temporary support to new industry. Hamilton's arguments have been used and abused by many governments since, from Bismarck's Germany and Meiji Japan to modern Korea and the USA to justify launching new industries with state support.

British Liberals have traditionally been reticent about 'industrial strategy' and have relied on the doctrine of 'free trade'. Keynes, the old Liberal Party's most famous economist, was critical of Roosevelt's New Deal not just for its insufficient government borrowing and deficit financing but for its excessive government intervention at a company level. Leading post-war Liberals like Professor Alan Peacock and Richard Wainwright MP were highly sceptical of intervention. And Labour's attempts at planning and 'industry policy' failed to attract broader political support and became discredited.

In recent years there have been distinct strands of opinion. One, which held sway for much of the Thatcher era and beyond, was that government had no business 'picking winners' (or losers) and should trust markets. Government should ensure robust competition policy and free trade but otherwise keep out of the way. A variant of this approach prevailed in the Blair-Brown era: that open markets generally worked but that government had a major role dealing with clear market failures: funding scientific research, training and infrastructure, or when there was a strong non-economic rationale (nuclear power and 'security of supply'; building aircraft carriers in Scotland to support the local economy). Broadly this was the orthodoxy of the EU Single Market as it applied to state aids and is reflected in my own and other contributions to the Lib Dem *Orange Book* .

## Recent history

In the last decade a new approach has evolved, due in large part to the financial crisis which exposed the vulnerability of firms and sectors dependent on access to credit and short-term funding and facing overseas competition from companies benefiting from preferential procurement, hidden or overt subsidies and access to long-term funding. The idea that government can be a force for economic good, supporting local business while complying with international rules, has been reinforced by the experience of countries like Germany where there is supply-chain planning, help with innovation (through the Fraunhofer applied science, research and development institutes), and access to long-term funding. Even in the USA the role of the Defence Department and other agencies has been significant.

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I was encouraged by such experience when launching the UK Industrial strategy in coalition government in 2011. Peter Mandelson had taken a few hesitant steps along that road during the previous Labour government, with the steps taken to protect the car industry from meltdown in

the wake of the financial crisis. The Conservatives required more persuading but, thanks mainly to Michael Heseltine, went along with a comprehensive Industrial Strategy. We identified some key sectors: 'growth' areas of manufacturing like aerospace, bioscience and automobiles; traded service activities like creative industries, universities and financial services; and economic building blocks like construction and ICT. Representative groups were organised to develop a strategy at sector level for the long term.

Such activities could be dismissed as the work of 'talking shops'. But the talking led to action: a £2 billion joint programme between aerospace companies and the government to develop the next generation of energy-efficient, quieter, engines; a £1 billion programme to develop next-generation car engines, which evolved into a programme for electric cars; another programme for life sciences. Cross-industry work led to efforts to build up a UK supply chain for offshore wind turbines and railways, including a new Hitachi manufacturing plant in Durham.

In parallel, the Catapult network of innovation centres was established, adapting the German model, for advanced manufacturing, new renewable energy technologies, space applications, new transport systems, and half a dozen other frontier technologies. A public sector bank, the British Business Bank, was established to provide a wider range of financing options for innovative business. Apprenticeship standards were built around sector priorities. There were unresolved issues like how to integrate the national Industrial Strategy with locally devolved decision-making to the new City Regions, as with Manchester and the West Midlands, and broader initiatives like the Northern Powerhouse. But the success of the Industrial Strategy is indicated by the decision of the following Conservative government to continue it.

## The future

Many of the cosy assumptions made about the continuation of policy and institutions have been rendered very uncertain by the pandemic and its economic aftermath. But whatever happens there will be a need for a private sector weakened by the lockdown to work in partnership with government and also to think long term. The framework of industrial strategy already established is a good place to start.

There is a broad understanding that environmental priorities, especially climate change, should be central to the Industrial Strategy (see further below). Some of the building blocks exist like the sector group for wind power, and the Catapults developing battery technology, new renewables and new energy systems. But one of the most successful innovations of the coalition, the Green Investment Bank, was sold off after proving its value through facilitating around £12 billion of investment, much in offshore wind. It will now need to be recreated.

A second, related, requirement is a much higher level of financial capability-for the British Business Bank and the recreated Green Investment Bank than was permitted during the coalition. One of the reasons given to stop these bodies expanding by acquiring borrowing powers was the imagined hostility of the European Commission. But this was always exaggerated, and in any case EU state aids rules are no longer a constraint. The need for the Industrial Strategy to be backed up by financial firepower has been increased by the loss of funding from the European Investment Bank, which was important not just for infrastructure but for specialist investment vehicles like the EU JEREMIE funds set up to finance SMEs.

## Recovery rewards: locking social innovation into Economy 2.0

*Josh Babarinde*

If the economy were a bowl, coronavirus is the hammer that has smashed it to pieces. We should learn from the Japanese practice of [‘kintsukuroi’](#) (‘golden repair’) to rebuild it better. We must grasp the golden opportunity to lock environmental, social *and* economic sustainability into the Great Recovery and correct past market failures.

A programme of Recovery Rewards would make a significant contribution to this effort. Inspired by [‘inducement prize contests’](#), government-sponsored Recovery Rewards would provide significant cash prizes to individuals, businesses or others that invent outstanding solutions to highly specific social or environmental problems that we refuse to tolerate in our ‘new normal’.

Recovery Rewards would trigger a nationwide series of recovery races to counter some of the injustices that coronavirus has so brutally exposed, and to preserve some of the silver linings that have come with lockdown. As an example, in order to reduce the number of polluting commuter car journeys made per day, we might use a Recovery Reward to trigger a recovery race to improve the suitability of the home as a remote workplace.

Significant economic stimulus could be leveraged via Recovery Rewards inasmuch as they incentivise innovators to make large investments in research and development. We saw this via [Ansari X prize](#) for space tourism, where 26 teams of innovators spent \$100 million in total to compete for the \$10 million prize.

The social innovation brain drain could also be reversed. Recovery Rewards would serve as a lightning rod to attract top talent from across all sectors to participate in a newly-competitive social innovation powerhouse, just as the [Dynamic Demand Challenge](#) did for energy efficiency.

What’s more is that Recovery Rewards are quintessentially liberal. They represent a bold and balanced partnership between government (the enabler), the economy (the protagonist) and society (the beneficiary) to achieve social, economic and environmental progress.

We must grasp the golden opportunity that Recovery Rewards represent. We must grasp it for those who will inhabit this place after us. And, consistent with the commemorative spirit of kintsukuroi, we must grasp it to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives to this pandemic.

A third and crucial ingredient will be programmes to deal with mass unemployment and retraining for the millions of workers whose jobs have not survived the pandemic. One invaluable institution which grew up alongside the Industrial Strategy was the Talent Retention Scheme, which acted as a ‘dating agency’ matching redundancies with skill shortages. That will need to operate on a much bigger scale.

Another crucial element is ‘place’. The Industrial Strategy did have its successes in otherwise neglected areas of Britain: the Siemens wind turbine manufacturing enterprise in Hull and the Advanced Manufacturing Catapult based near the site of the former Orgreave colliery and with offshoots in Teesside and Coventry. But there was powerful pressure to locate scientific institutions

in the 'golden triangle' of Oxford, Cambridge and London, and financial institutions in London. With more decentralisation, there is a danger of duplication, as happened under the regional development agencies before 2010. Getting the balance right will not be straightforward.

Finally, a successful Industrial Strategy needs cross-party support. This is not easy in the UK where party politics has become very tribal and destructive and the default position of parties coming into government is to reinvent the wheel. The contrast with Germany, Holland and Sweden is painful. But, more positively, the Industrial Strategy of the last decade has more or less survived different ministers and governments. It must continue to do so.

## Community-based prosperity

*Helen Cross*

The coronavirus pandemic has placed the UK in an exceptional position, facing mass unemployment and the worst recession for over 300 years. It has exposed the long-term inequalities and weaknesses in the UK economy that have been growing since the 2008 financial crash. These include:

- Low productivity, leading to ...
- Low-skilled, low-paid jobs as an increasing proportion of the economy, and ...
- Regions of the UK being left behind in terms of growth and good-quality jobs providing wages, stability and advancement that enable people to prosper and fulfil their potential, and ...
- An economy which does not create prosperity for most people – especially BAME people, whose undervalued status in the economy have been particularly exposed by the pandemic.

The economy will not recover unless we address these systemic issues and ensure that everyone benefits from the recovery in a fair way. The UK has tried and failed to address these issues before, but we can make it different this time.

Below I outline six ways in which we could approach economic growth differently. These build on the successful support for the development offshore wind that the Liberal Democrats delivered in government, learning from the now-abolished Regional Development Agencies, and the experience of the German programme which addressed the impact on coal-producing regions of the shift to renewable energy.

### 1 Acknowledge this as a major cultural change for the UK

A move to a high-skill economy is a significant shift for both business and the UK population. The UK has traditionally relied on a relatively low-skill, low-cost, low-productivity worker base and a focus on shareholder return rather than investment. A shift to high-skill economy requires a step change in our business culture and the expectations of the workforce.

Our traditional emphasis in education has been on the professions via the university sector, not on life-long learning and continuous re-skilling. But in the future people will be increasingly compelled to move industries, retrain and do very different types of jobs to the traditional nine to five work. Key industries that support a local area may completely disappear.

For business, this requires a greater focus on investment rather than short-term shareholder returns; automation will drive demand for higher-skilled jobs, which are more creative and cognitive. For the working population, the increased pace of change will require rapidly changing, more specialised skills sets, requiring continuous learning and adaptation.

This enormous shift requires everyone in a community to understand the implications, develop the plan for the future and build that future together. As such we should be focusing on Regional Prosperity Strategies rather than Industrial Strategies.

## **2 Invest and take the long view**

The government's current Industrial Strategy simply restates existing policy and proposes a number of pilots. To succeed we need to shift to what [Siemens boss Jurgen Maier has called the 'frontier economy'](#): industries that are innovation-intensive, have high export potential and are at the forefront of productivity improvement. These currently account for around 10 per cent of the UK economy; we should aim at least to double that proportion. We need national ambitions with supporting funding that regions can develop and deliver. We need to move away from a pilot-based approach and provide structural investment to drive research and development over decades.

## **3 Take advantage of the green revolution and adoption of digital automation**

While moving to a zero-carbon resource-efficient economy is a good thing in itself, this is also an opportunity for the UK to become a world leader in the new green industries. Building higher skilled jobs in these areas will stimulate the service industries and supply chains that support them. The UK's major investments and ambitions should be focused on the green economy. There is also a requirement for greater support and advice, particularly for SMEs, for example for the adoption of automation for greater productivity gains, further driving more skilled work across the whole economy. Taxation of industry needs to be reformed to support this type of capital investment.

## **4 Regional scale and empowerment**

Delivery will have to be regional, ideally through new regional prosperity bodies with adequate capacity and expertise, acting on clear ambitions from the centre. Key to this empowerment is democratic accountability; the old Regional Development Agencies suffered from a democratic deficit because the planned regional assemblies were never created. In their place, cross-local authority working, with clear accountability back to the local electorates, must be baked into any new organisations. Crucially these bodies must be held to account for the impact on BAME, women and other disadvantaged groups. Impact assessments on each of these groups should be open and transparent.

## **5 A cultural shift to social consensus**

To achieve this massive cultural shift will need a new way of approaching economic change. It will not be possible without a focus on a 'broadly accepted social consensus' – a term used by the [Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment](#) established by the German federal government to address the shift from coal to renewable energy in their coal-producing regions. This exercise involved extensive engagement with unions, local groups and experts, and focused on

what establishing consensus across multiple community stakeholder views – a stark contrast to what happened to coal-producing areas in the UK in the 1980s.

The impact of coronavirus on the economy has a similar potential to devastate communities. We need a radically different attitude to how we do things, not only to take people with us but also get them advocating and driving the changes we need. Consensus, instead of being perceived as slowing things down, should be viewed as a deliberate and necessary requirement to drive the change required for communities to adapt and thrive in the new economy.

## **6 Community stakeholder engagement**

Industrial strategies generally focus on government and businesses setting the agenda, defining skills and providing training. Little is talked about how to generate demand and ownership among the local population for upskilling and driving growth in their areas. I propose that we use a citizens' assembly approach alongside the prosperity strategy. Citizens' assemblies, with a representative demographic, bringing in underrepresented groups, should be formed at local and regional levels to debate issues such as reskilling and training strategies, delivering local growth and meeting local needs and priorities, ensuring the prosperity strategy works for everyone.

## **Modernising financial markets**

*Jannah Patchay*

In the wake of the coronavirus crisis, it has become clear that the UK's financial markets and payments infrastructure are not geared up for distributing capital and value to where they are needed the most – either to individual citizens or businesses. With respect to the government's loan schemes for supporting businesses through the crisis, acceptance rates for Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans, which are underwritten up to 80 per cent of their value by the government, hover around 10 per cent. These increase to Bounce Back Loans, aimed at smaller businesses and 100 per cent underwritten by the government. For individuals, provisions have been woeful – furloughed employees are entitled to only 80 per cent of their salary up to a cap of £2,500 per month, with many businesses still struggling to reclaim these funds from HMRC. Many individuals, such as freelancers and recent employees, have missed out on support altogether.

Small high street businesses, which often operate on very small margins, have particularly suffered as a result of the lockdown, and many face the prospect of imminent closure due to rent arrears and other debt accumulating during their closures. For many struggling SMEs, the question is how to access the types of financial products, capital and liquidity available to large corporations.

Technology advances have created the opportunity to radically rethink how the UK's capital markets and payments infrastructure function, and to develop financial products and services that enable wider social benefit, as opposed to being incentivised purely by profit. Our existing financial markets and payments infrastructure have grown organically from their origins in decades-old paper-based systems. This infrastructure has been upgraded over time, but retains many artificial constraints as a result of its legacy.

The advent of digital assets and digital currency provides an opportunity to completely rethink this architecture and the types of markets and participants needed to support it. Central bank digital currency (CBDC) is an example – the creation of a truly digital form of currency, initially co-existing in parallel with cash and bank money, offers the opportunity to re-architect payments infrastructure from the ground up, and to consider the true purpose of payments and value distribution in our society and economy. A CBDC can enable the creation of more efficient, cost-effective innovative systems that directly support the requirements of a digital economy and enable the greater adoption of other technologies, such as distributed ledger technology, artificial intelligence / machine learning, and the internet of things.

Given London's position and the key role it plays as a global financial markets centre, this is also an opportunity for the UK to take a leadership role globally in creating the ecosystem to support development of financial markets for good, through:

- The creation of a central bank digital currency. Many jurisdictions have accelerated their plans to introduce such a currency, in light of the issues experienced in distributing finance and aid during the coronavirus crisis. The Bank of England has recently published a [discussion paper](#) on the topic, with responses from industry anticipated to highlight the financial inclusion potential of a CBDC in the UK. Had a CBDC existed prior to the crisis, it would have facilitated the direct distribution of funds to individual citizens and to businesses, without the need for intermediaries such as banks (and the associated layers of costs added to fund distribution). A CBDC can also provide a cheaper, more efficient and more direct mechanism of distributing benefits, including any potential universal basic income.
- Fostering greater innovation and competition in financial markets and payments systems, driving down costs and increasing accessibility for all citizens and businesses.
- Encouraging the development of financial products and services that not only serve a profit motive but also enable social benefits and serve a wider societal purpose. This includes ensuring that the UK's regulatory regimes are fit for purpose when it comes to oversight of these products.
- Support for digital assets and markets – technology advances, such as distributed ledger technology, have enabled the creation of digital-native assets including equities, bonds and derivatives. These are governed by smart contracts, which automate life cycle events and can embed built in support for regulatory compliance, and also support for environmental, social and governance standards. They will be a vital tool in enabling the digital economy of the future, in reducing the costs associated with capital markets and in making them more fair, transparent, efficient and accessible.



# Climate policy after coronavirus

*Alyssa Gilbert and Cara Jenkinson*

The current pandemic, and the responses to it, reminds us how important it is to make society and the economy resilient to known risks. This crisis is an acute reminder of the vital need for us to act on climate change now, based on the evidence that has been mounting for decades.

The pandemic is also giving us a unique route through which to take action – we can use the urgent need for government to drive economic recovery to ensure that every penny is invested in infrastructure and activity that is zero-carbon and resilient to climate change impact. As our own [past and present governors of the Bank of England put it](#): ‘This crisis offers us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild our economy in order to withstand the next shock coming our way: climate breakdown. Unless we act now, the climate crisis will be tomorrow’s central scenario and, unlike Covid-19, no one will be able to self-isolate from it.’

## The urgency of acting now

*Tackling the Climate Emergency*, the Liberal Democrat climate policy paper published in 2019, argued for a 10-year emergency programme of urgent action on climate change, with priority given to completing the decarbonisation of electricity supply and carrying out a massive home insulation programme, cutting emissions and reducing energy bills at the same time. At the same time the foundations must be laid for longer term progress in cutting emissions from transport, industry, agriculture and land use.

This emergency programme approach is essential to mobilise the technologies, skills and know-how that we already have as rapidly as possible. The coronavirus crisis has shown us that a true appreciation of urgency can lead to much more rapid adoption of technology than previously thought possible. The uptick in the use of computers, home working technology, remote services – from banking to medical, and even house viewings – gives us optimism that the rate of change can be greater than we previously imagined. This pandemic shows us that an incremental approach is not the answer.

**‘This crisis offers us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild our economy in order to withstand the next shock coming our way: climate breakdown. Unless we act now, the climate crisis will be tomorrow’s central scenario and, unlike Covid-19, no one will be able to self-isolate from it.’**

How can we remain true to our liberal values of choice and equal access, and at the same time take on this tantalising promise of ever more rapid adoption of clean energy, electric vehicles and other green solutions than we had hoped for previously? The start lies in our belief in local and community-level action. Already cities around the country are rolling out more active and green transport choices, like cycle lanes and the redesign of city centres to improve accessibility. These community-centric approaches respond to need and offer choice while enabling people to behave in an environmentally responsible manner.

There is a temporary wariness of public transport, and even active discouragement from its use, a rapid increase in home deliveries – using, for the most part, the least sustainable vehicles – and a doubling up of the servicing and use of buildings. We need much greater incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles, including reforming the taxation of vehicles, road fuel and company cars, and

introducing a scrappage scheme for the oldest fossil fuel cars in exchange for subsidies to purchase electric cars. At a local level we should be rapidly redesigning parts of town centres and low-traffic areas to favour pedestrians and cyclists, while enabling accessibility for all. And across the country we need investment in public transport that offers a reliable and fit-for-purpose service to people in rural areas, making use of technology to provide a flexible green transport offer – green buses or smaller vehicles on demand, for example. We need to invest today in electrified rail for passengers and freight that offer green longer-distance travel to all parts of the country.

We also need to use the planning system at a local level to make sure that travel systems work and that there is plenty of green space – woodland, parks, meadows – that enhance living and travelling experiences. These spaces should offer cooling and drainage as the climate changes, and sinks for carbon dioxide, but also clean and green community spaces and habitats. We will need to improve the skills and numbers of local planning officers to help them play their key role in this transition.

Energy efficiency in our older, leakier housing stock is still sorely lagging behind. It is time to legislate to require landlords to improve their homes in the next five years as a condition of continued rental, including scrapping the current cost cap on improvements. Similarly, planning permission for commercial and home projects alike should be contingent on significant energy efficiency upgrades. New home standards should be net zero with immediate effect. On heating, we need to offer greater incentives for people to install zero-carbon heating in their homes now, targeting office workers who might be working at home for the foreseeable future and who could use a grant to try something new as they invest in a new office space. These trials can help us test different models for zero-carbon heating, build skill sets and accelerate this difficult part of the transition.

Price signals should be used to incentivise the uptake of greener choices, be that for zero-carbon heating or greener travel. We should offer tax breaks to early adopters of zero-carbon heating at a single-dwelling, development and commercial level, subsidise greener choices such as public transport, and continue to increase the cost of polluting fossil fuel electricity by increasing the carbon price floor, as had been originally planned before the government froze it in 2014.

We have also learned that virtue signalling can be powerful – most people want to do the right thing. From individuals to schools to small business operators, people look to their peers for success and validation. We should encourage community groups to share lessons learned in local areas to help accelerate the rapid adoption of new technologies, for example by sharing names of skilled fitters, great EV brands and reliable, low-carbon building materials and by coordinating community initiatives, such as energy efficiency retrofits street by street, which saves costs.

### **The role of the public, private and individual**

Despite the severity of the lockdown, [global emissions are only projected to fall by between 4 and 7 per cent this year](#). These estimates show us that even with the most extreme changes at the individual level, we need systemic changes to infrastructure, across all sectors, to come anywhere close to achieving the ambition for a net-zero emissions UK by 2045 at the latest.

The Liberal Democrat approach already involves embracing the three pillars of government, business and the individual. But the first half of 2020 has increased the expectations that we can, and should, put on businesses. Businesses and individual entrepreneurs have shown themselves to be innovative

when their market structure changes completely. So let's set out challenges for business and industry that set the bar high. For a start all new buildings built from 2021 should be zero-carbon and should include measures to provide resilience to future climate impacts. We should offer an emergency support fund to help small businesses which can demonstrate a key role in the transition – e.g. energy efficiency installers – to survive the next 6–12 months. We should identify and offer support for start-up businesses and entrepreneurs through accelerator programmes that have the potential to make an active contribution to a zero-carbon future.

It is essential that any measures put in place to support economic recovery from the pandemic package do not extend a lifeline to high-carbon industries. Airlines in particular have been quick to call for government support to avoid collapse, even though aviation is the fastest growing source of carbon emissions, and the industry has been very slow to put in place any kind of climate policy framework. In France, the support given to Air France includes a stipulation that they reduce domestic flight routes where there are cleaner train alternatives available. Government recovery packages for fossil-fuel-intensive sectors must be conditional on companies' acceptance of legally binding obligations to assess their level of climate risk and to reduce their emissions, with both short and long-term targets which do not depend simply on carbon offsetting. Where government takes an equity stake to help rescue businesses, it must be accompanied by a role for government in corporate decision-making, ensuring that these businesses have a clear route mapped out to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

More broadly, the government must stop supporting the fossil fuel industry abroad through [UK export finance](#), and we should tax the investments financial institutions make in coal projects abroad more heavily than clean power investments. Domestic demand for fossil fuels should be reduced by measures including banning oil-fired heating from 2025, and gas boilers by 2030, to drive up demand for zero-carbon heating and bringing forward the ban on new fossil fuelled cars and light vans to 2030.

There are many in the UK and abroad whose livelihoods depend on the fossil fuel industry, directly or indirectly. We are committed to helping those people build a better future from today, and not wait until we see those industries in distress again. Sheila Ritchie looks at this in more detail below. Skills programmes need to be rapidly put in place, with green training programmes and apprenticeships offered to those who have lost their jobs as a result of coronavirus, through a 'Green Skills Wallet' of £2,000 per individual.

National government must commit to long-term policies, so that local governments and businesses have the certainty they need to invest. Lessons should be learnt from the rapid withdrawal of solar subsidies and changes to onshore wind policy over the last ten years. The electricity market needs to be changed dramatically – we are nearly at the end of what auctions for contracts can deliver us. A new structure of long-term contracts and demand management are needed to catapult the electricity sector towards a much higher percentage of renewables than today. This regulated structure can provide the investment needed in a flexible, interconnected grid across the whole of the UK.

But while national policy is critical, the green-recovery must be place-based. The role of local authorities as major local procurers as well as their convening power enable them to play an important role in creating green jobs and relevant skills. There should be a place-based green

infrastructure fund, and investment by local people should be encouraged by, for example, making municipal community bonds ISA-eligible.

Shifts in social behaviours are also vital to tackling the climate emergency. Local councillors should reach out to groups of people and local communities who have developed a newfound appreciation of green space and clean air during lockdown, and work with them to develop climate solutions that fit their communities and their lives. These focus groups can complement any existing climate assemblies and climate emergency strategies. We should use local mutual aid groups to build in support for a long-term climate-friendly future. These same networks can deliver community-focused support structures for greener purchases, and also provide support and resilience when climate change hits hardest – for example during periods of extreme heat or flooding.

## The economic challenge

The response to the coronavirus has had an enormous impact on the economy, which will make it difficult to roll out costly policies. However, even during the austerity programme pursued by the coalition government in response to the last financial crisis, Liberal Democrat ministers, both in the Department of Energy and Climate Change, and in the ‘quad’ that resolved disagreements at a senior level, were instrumental in accelerating the landslide move towards renewable power. It is vital that we use public investment money now in a way that tackles the climate change emergency. [All the evidence suggests](#) that a green stimulus package will trigger a faster recovery, will see larger returns on investment and can be enacted more quickly than one focusing on traditional high-carbon sectors. Renewable energy projects tend to be more labour-intensive than their fossil fuel counterparts and are far less susceptible to offshoring the jobs and economic benefits elsewhere.

Most importantly, we need to turn the tide on the most intractable sectors: transport, industry and agriculture. With borrowing rates at an all-time low, government has a massive opportunity to invest in infrastructure. But many of the projects in its current project pipeline are not green – airport expansion, road-widening, new gas-fired power stations. The recovery from the coronavirus pandemic offers a unique chance to re-set this. There is an alternative pipeline of green infrastructure projects – home energy retrofits, heat pump installations, building of new walking and cycling infrastructure, planting and maintenance of new woodland – that must be prioritised.

All infrastructure spend must be on projects that are resilient in the face of future climate change, and make sense in a zero-carbon 2045 world. These policies do not need to be costly, but they will need reformed climate-sensitive planning policies, a new Green Investment Bank to take the lead in riskier investments, and clear evidence-led guidelines implemented by the National Infrastructure Commission. For example, new investments in roads should focus on the maintenance of the current network and upgrades offering better opportunities to cycle safely, walk and use public transport. New work or housing developments should have clean transport built into the planning, empowering future residents to make green choices. Plans should be in place within the next five years to decommission or repurpose the national gas grid.

**All the evidence suggests that a green stimulus package will trigger a faster recovery, will see larger returns on investment and can be enacted more quickly than one focusing on traditional high-carbon sectors.**

## Oil and gas

*Sheila Ritchie*

Oil and gas have had their day. Carbon pollution has created a climate crisis, to which we are still too slow in responding. It's not an easy fix. In the UK 270,000 jobs directly and indirectly depend on oil and gas and their supply chains. The EU has just increased the size of its 'Just Transition' fund from €7.5 billion (agreed in January 2020) to €40 billion (May 2020), reflecting the seriousness with which they take both the problem and the scale of resource they think the solution needs. Even a year ago, the industry did not understand the need. The collapse of demand during the pandemic has focused the minds of many.

Liberal Democrats have proposed the creation of a Just Transition Commission to advise on how to deliver a net-zero economy that works for everyone, and Just Transition Funds to support development in those regions and communities most affected by the transition. Given the urgent need to act, now is the time for government to convene business, community and trade unions stakeholders in discussions to plan for a successful economic transition for these dependent communities. Initially support packages will be needed to protect workers' wages and small dependent businesses, but in the medium term reskilling will be essential for workers of all ages. We should also be investing in accelerator and innovation programmes in the region, new zero-carbon industrial hubs of the future and innovation centres to help develop new industrial strengths in those regions, creating jobs and delivering the zero-carbon future.

In North Sea terms, the training should focus on existing engineering skills and offshore experience, in marine renewables, especially offshore wind, which needs to be accelerated urgently, carbon capture, steam methane reforming, and storage and hydrogen technology.

The longer term visions for these industrial clusters, together with skills creation, should be tied to plans for zero-carbon transport and electricity infrastructure – rail, power and hydrogen – to ensure connectivity with the rest of the country for goods and also for people and the workforce, allowing for shared prosperity.

Supporting a careful and smooth transition for these communities is essential to ensuring that a zero-carbon, resilient future delivers for everyone in the UK.

The pandemic has also given us a glimpse into a world with a different type of consumerism. True to our liberal roots, we don't want to tell people how or what to consume. However, we know that the more efficient consumption of the Earth's resources is a core part of global growth pathways that deliver on climate and nature scenarios. We should set up a community business fund that offers financial support and in-kind business space to businesses and community projects that deliver on environmentally friendly modes of growth and consumption, and use these to develop new growth metrics that can be used to support more such businesses in turn.

There will be significant job losses across the country as we emerge from the coronavirus crisis, and a key priority for any economic stimulus will be increasing employment. Ambitious and rapid action on climate change has the potential to create hundreds of thousands of jobs across energy efficiency,

renewable energy, clean transport and industry and the development of new woodland and green areas rich in plant and animal life.

A green recovery offers many advantages in relation to employment. The construction of new renewable energy such as solar or wind are labour-intensive; one model suggests that every \$1m in spending generates 7.5 full-time jobs in renewables infrastructure. Home energy retrofit and heat pump installation could create tens of thousands of jobs across the country – [one recent study estimated 200,000](#) – which cannot be offshored, including energy assessors, customer care staff, quality assurers, heating design engineers, installers, electricians, finance and investment professionals. A rapid scale up of cycling and walking infrastructure will create jobs for urban planners, bike mechanics and retailers, cycling trainers and developers of logistics technologies and apps.

### The UK in a changing world

The climate change emergency needs a rapid global response, coordinated by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, whose key conference designed to raise ambition has now been postponed to 2021, but will still take place in the UK. But more than this it needed; the UK should work closely with three groups of countries.

First, the EU, which has consistently shown itself to be the most ambitious group of the largest economies. Even outside the EU, the UK could support the EU in international negotiations, join the EU Emission Trading System and fulfil its climate commitments jointly with the EU and its member states, in the same way as Norway and Iceland.

Second, developing countries, where development aid can be used to grow their economies on sustainable pathways, avoiding the high-carbon and resource-intensive growth models the UK has followed in the past. I endorse the proposals in Chapter 5 (Environment) to increase the UK's target for development assistance from 0.7 per cent to 1.0 per cent of GNP, with the additional 0.3 per cent to be directed entirely to environment and climate spending.

Third, the UK should develop partnerships with the main countries in which we contribute to emissions indirectly through our import and consumption of their products: manufactures, foodstuffs and natural resources. We should work across the public and private sector and partners to reduce emissions from these imports, providing human and financial resources as appropriate. Companies should be required to report best estimates for the embedded emissions incorporated in the products they import.

**The UK should develop partnerships with the main countries in which we contribute to emissions indirectly through our import and consumption of their products: manufactures, foodstuffs and natural resources.**

The pandemic has highlighted an increased trust in science and catapulted health professionals and educational professionals even higher in the public regard. However, it has also shown that many politicians have acted with flagrant disregard for integrity and truth and with an arrogant superiority that will continue to cause tension with the public. We must ensure that we continue to be engaged and open and put evidence and integrity at the core of what we do, and keep closely tuned into the public voice. We should establish a national Citizen's Climate Assembly to improve public

engagement, tasked with debating every aspect of climate policy and delivering recommendations to government and stimulating public debate.

If we are to stay within 1.5 degrees of warming and avoid catastrophic climate change, we need to act with urgency. By showing that bold climate action can deliver wider benefits such as well-paid jobs as we emerge from the coronavirus crisis, we can take individuals and communities with us.

# 4

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## Equalities

*Paul Noblet, Helen Belcher, Tara Copeland, Ade Fatukasi, Lynne Featherstone, Jannah Patchay, Rhys Taylor*

### A more equal country

*Lynne Featherstone (Baroness Featherstone)*

No life has been untouched by this horror of a virus. It has seeped into our nation's very soul.

The tragedy of lives cut short, enforced loneliness, economic uncertainty impacting on mental health, the increase in domestic abuse, and our older relatives left without the possibility of visitors will remain with us for many years.

In a heartbeat we've seen the world stop. The endless hamster-on-a-wheel life that we have led has stopped. As the many tragedies of this health crisis have played out it has at the same time also shown us that there are opportunities to create a more equal and caring country. As traffic fell we breathed more easily, and for the first time in many years could clearly hear birdsong, even in the heart of our cities.

If we were lucky enough to have partners and family in our household we've had time to see each other, and time to care. We've cooked and baked and eaten together. We've exercised. We've found time to play games. We've talked to each other, and to our wider circles via Zoom. We've seen community spirit come roaring back in local areas where neighbours and the neighbourly have made sure that those who can't do things for themselves are helped and supported.

Do we really want to go back to the way we were before the coronavirus?

No. The scales have dropped – no, been ripped – from our eyes about our world and the way in which we live our lives. We've been forced to confront our values. With the scales gone we see the unacceptable levels of inequality that bedevil our country. The way we reward effort now looks tawdry, as those we pay the least save our lives, look after us and die for us.

We've been worshipping false gods. We've made the quest for material possessions and status a way of life – virtually a religion – where the shopping mall and Amazon are our places of worship. We've ceased putting people before things.

The coronavirus has zapped us back to recognising what matters and who matters. Do we pay homage to the NHS and the care worker or to the wolf of Wall Street? There must be a better



balance between ‘what’s good for me’ and ‘what’s best for us’ – the aspiration for the common good as opposed to solely individual advancement.

Income tax across the board must rise to the level of the Scandinavian countries so that we can provide the level of public services we need and ensure that those that work in them are paid properly. We need to use that additional funding to provide fully funded childcare to give parents the freedom to work, if that is what they choose. We must ensure that those on the lowest incomes or those who rely on benefits have enough money to eat, to heat their homes and to keep in touch with their loved ones.

We must also redouble our efforts to support the aspirations of people from BAME communities, who for too long have been denied economic opportunity and access to higher education. At the same time we must continue to safeguard the hard-fought rights of LGBT+ communities, and build on Liberal Democrat successes, such as the right to same-sex marriage, which we achieved in government.

Public policy sets the tone for behaviour. We must recalibrate the way in which we assess our country’s success. Wellbeing must become an equal metric to economic status.

With higher general taxation to provide proper and valued public services, and a way of measuring success that is to do with how we feel about our lives, we can create a better country. The coronavirus pandemic has shocked us. We must not lose this vision. Change must come.

## A new social contract

*Paul Noblet*

Earlier this year, the Resolution Foundation produced an [analysis of government data](#) which found that, after housing costs, the poorest households in the UK were worse off in 2018–19 than in 2014–15, with almost one in four people now living in relative poverty. Given the additional impacts of the 2008 financial crisis and increases in housing costs, the analysis concluded that real incomes for the poorest were higher in 2004–05 than in 2018–19.

The economic impact of coronavirus will have made those figures even worse. Amongst those now claiming Universal Credit will be individuals who, at the beginning of 2020, were earning an above-average salary and now find themselves able to claim just £94.59 a week (£5,000 per year) to cover the cost of food, clothing, transport costs, broadband and utility bills.

After the 2008 financial crisis we sleepwalked into a ‘new normal’, which saw a slow acceptance of unaffordable rents, rising homelessness, and hundreds of thousands of people relying on food banks. Post-coronavirus we cannot accept that in a wealthy country like the UK it is any sort of *normal* for 22 per cent of households to live in relative poverty, including almost a third of children.

In September 2019 the party adopted *A Fairer Share For All*, a policy paper which set out the need to pay Universal Credit faster, to equalise the rate of benefits for under-25s with that of their older peers, and to ensure that housing benefit covered rent levels in at least a third of any local housing market. It also proposed making Universal Credit unconditional, bringing an end to benefit sanctions. In addition to creating a system where claimants no longer had to wait five weeks for their benefits,

and where the cost of renting was fully covered, *A Fairer Share For All* also put forward measures to cut the cost of living. The proposal for universal access to basic services advocated an increase in affordable housing, properly funded homelessness services, lower energy costs and greater subsidies for bus services.

In 2019, measures like this to boost incomes and cut costs meant that it was the Liberal Democrat general election manifesto that was rated by the Institute for Fiscal Studies as benefitting the poorest most. As a party we should be proud of that, but in a post-coronavirus world we must go much further.

This current crisis has brought into sharp relief the poverty in which millions of households in our country already live – including a disproportionate number of people from BAME communities. It has also elicited a renewed sense of collectiveness and acting together for the public good – which is why we must grasp this moment to be bold and to renew our national social contract.

Over recent years the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has developed a [Minimum Income Standard](#), based on surveys of different types of households and their living costs. Excluding rent, they estimate that an individual without children requires £11,501 per year. Currently, an individual over the age of 25 can claim £4,918 in Universal Credit. For too long we have expected those who are unemployed or who cannot work to subsist for months, or in many cases years, far below the poverty line. In a post-coronavirus UK, where the reality of just how many millions of people live a financially precarious existence has revealed itself to many for the first time, we must decide whether we are prepared to do something about it, even if that means higher taxation.

Advocates of universal basic income have come to the fore in recent months. A UBI pilot in Finland, set at a rate 20 per cent higher than Universal Credit, was found to make people happier, to increase trust in government and to give people more hope for the future. As we argued in *A Fairer Share For All*, a UBI provides an unconditional payment by the state to the individual, which also starts to restore dignity in the benefits system.

At the same time, advocates for universal basic *services* argue that instead of, or alongside, boosting incomes we should seek to [cut the cost of living](#) by providing free broadband, water and energy (primarily through better home insulation), potentially saving a single adult in the UK £1,360 per year.

Such measures would remove the dread of the final demand, allow people to remain connected with families and friends in good times and bad and, perhaps most importantly, start levelling the playing field for access to the twenty-first-century economy and lifelong learning.

If we want a universal basic income, or more generous Universal Credit, or universal basic services, we will have to be prepared to pay for them.

Taxation will have to rise – but it is worth remembering that when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister the basic rate of income tax was between 30 and 25 per cent, compared to 20 per cent now. The model of UBI proposed by Compass makes clear that providing a level of payment similar to that of Universal Credit would cost an extra £28 billion.

Increases in Universal Credit do not come cheaply either. The government's decision to raise the standard allowance – modestly – from £4,500 to £4,900 in response to coronavirus cost in the

**Advocates for universal basic services argue that instead of, or alongside, boosting incomes we should seek to cut the cost of living by providing free broadband, water and energy.**

region of £10 billion, and that is before the rise in unemployment. Providing broadband as a universal basic service would come at an estimated cost of at least £16 billion.

In 1920, as the Liberal Party continued to lose ground to Labour, the MP Tom Myers argued that ‘the great failure of Liberalism was that it could not apply principles of individualism to the economics of Collectivism’. I am not arguing for our party to adopt wholesale state interventionism, but I am urging us to remember that it was our party that in 1909 put forward the radical People’s Budget to fund pensions, establish sick pay and create the national insurance system that paved the way for the NHS.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape this country and strengthen the bonds between all who live here. We must increase incomes and restore dignity to those who live in poverty. *And* we must pool our resources to reduce living costs and put in place the building blocks for the society we want to live in after the coronavirus.

Only then can we genuinely say that we are all in this together.

## **Time for a universal basic income**

*Cllr Rhys Taylor*

When some of us fall behind and are held back, we all fall behind. Inequality divides us and stops people from creating a better future. It makes us all less happy with our lives, even if we are personally relatively better off.

Inequality destroys our future. Too many people are in low-paid, insecure jobs which restrict their choices. The pressure of low wages, high living costs and a lack of freedom shuts people out of society and limits their opportunity to get ahead.

In this time of crisis, we’ve seen that social security makes us stronger as a nation. But our welfare system is broken. It’s still rooted in the idea that we can rely on the economy to generate enough jobs. We ask employees to demonstrate their strengths and claimants to demonstrate their shortcomings. Unemployment means poverty. The welfare system should foster people’s sense of security and pride but it does the exact opposite.

Universal basic income is defined as a payment given to every single citizen, regardless of wealth and means, which is regular, direct and at a level sufficient to ensure that their basic needs are met. The recently published two-year Finnish pilot of UBI found that people were happier, had greater trust in others and in government, and more hope for the future with the greater certainty the basic income provided.

Nothing could be more uncertain than what will happen as we emerge from coronavirus. People have lost their jobs or are uncertain if there’ll be jobs to go back to. There has been an exponential increase in food bank usage. A huge number of people are applying for Universal Credit – many for the first time – and are left waiting five weeks for their first payment, pushing them nearer and nearer the brink. This comes on top of the likelihood of a deep recession, with all the ensuing impact on our wellbeing and our hope for the future.

UBI is not a silver bullet; we would, for example, need a separate, properly funded system to ensure that everyone has a safe and secure home. What UBI does is turn on its head our idea of the value each of us hold. It starts us on a clear path to a more equal society. It's a tipping point at which we can reshape our society and our economy for the better.

When I first heard about UBI, I was far from convinced. But I watched, I worried, I read and I changed my mind.

I always hear the same arguments against a basic income. The first is that it would not be fair if everyone receives it, from the millionaire to the person claiming benefits. And yet the state pension, the winter fuel allowance, and the television license fee give pensioners, no matter their level of income, the opportunity to lead a dignified life.

The second is that it would make people lazy, that they would not seek work if they are in receipt of 'free' money. And yet there are many complex reasons why people cannot work or choose not to – parenthood, care, education. There need not be a connection between non-employment and destitution, and yet this is the reality for millions. Work need not be the only way in which we measure our value as individuals.

The third argument is that it is not affordable, and this does need unpacking. It is the case that giving everyone a basic income will be more costly than our current social security system, even with the significant administrative costs of our complex system reduced. We will still need to make additional payments to those who are most exposed and at risk of falling behind so that people with particular needs are able to live safe and dignified lives.

Affordability is a valid question; but it's one of choices. The [modelling undertaken by Compass in 2019](#) advocates a two phase approach to the implementation of a UBI in the UK.

Phase 1 (the fast-track route) is a lower level of payments, and would be immediately affordable. It would be a payment of £60 per week to adults aged 18–64, with an additional £40 per week to mothers for each of their children under 18. Over-65s would receive £165 per week in this phase, and child benefit and the state pension would be abolished, with other means-tested benefits maintained. This partial basic income scheme will help everyone, and the detailed costings for this are in the Compass report.

The second phase is a weekly transfer of around £80 a week to adults, £50 per child and £180 per person of pensionable age, following the creation of a Citizen's Wealth Fund. That is money that belongs to citizens and should come back to citizens following the sale of common goods. On several occasions, including North Sea oil revenues and the sale of council homes, the UK has failed to create a Wealth Fund, choosing, rather, immediate gain. Compass outline options for us to create a Citizen's Wealth Fund, much like [the one in Alaska which pays out a yearly dividend to every single citizen](#).

This crisis has shown that where there's a will there's a way. In a matter of weeks the government created a furlough scheme covering 80 per cent of the salaries of 7.5 million workers. This has come at a huge financial cost, but we accept that without this thousands of people would be plunged into poverty as they lose their jobs. Now we must shift the dial so that it is unacceptable for people to be left destitute in one of the world's richest economies.

What's stopping a basic income is the political will and vested interests. Our social security system should foster people's sense of security and pride. It should give everyone the freedom, the dignity, and the opportunity to get to where they want to be; to have hope for the future. That is the future people need.

## **A natural home for BAME voters**

*Ade Fatukasi*

The handling of the coronavirus crisis has exposed some of the deep-seated inequalities in our society. It has proved once again that those of a BAME background are often seen as an afterthought when it comes to public policy.

Many BAME people in this country are working incredibly hard to create a better life for themselves. Many of them work in public services like the NHS and local government, and it's a shame that it took the coronavirus crisis to show how much they contribute to our society.

Too often the word 'BAME' is treated as a monolith, although there are so many communities that make up BAME identity; I'd even argue whether the term is fit for purpose. I'm a black British African, and even within that group there are differences such as cultural and generational divides, religious differences, differing levels of education, differences between men and women and the BAME LGBTQ+ community, to name but a few.

My mother's political interests are not necessarily my own. As a first-generation migrant she leaned toward voting for a party with policies that would make her and her future children feel most welcome – hence her fondness for New Labour; whereas being born and raised here, my main concerns are more broad – topics such as housing, ease of business, and the economy are my priorities as I feel immersed in British society.

The party needs a specific BAME strategy. However, such a strategy should be segmented – we must tailor our messaging to different sections of the BAME community just as we do with non-BAME voters.

For example, in talking to first-generation immigrants we must emphasise our support for ending the hostile environment and our position of seeing immigration as a good thing. In a post-coronavirus world we have belatedly come to realise the economic importance of workers who have come to the UK from across the globe. We must reinforce our position as a party that promotes life-long learning, entrepreneurship and asylum policies which view people through the lens of victims rather than criminals, and advocates championing peace and tolerance as key tenets of British foreign policy. We should also consider advocating the reintroduction of birthright citizenship in this country.

When engaging with second or third generation immigrants, one interesting policy area which arises is around the idea of 'Britishness'. Citizenship rights and the question of whether I am British by right or by privilege need to be addressed, as does media influence on how young people, particularly those from BAME backgrounds, are portrayed. Is society willing and ready to accept me regardless of my name and cultural background?

We must also address institutional biases. Implementing the recommendations of the Parker Review into the ethnic diversity of company boards, and name-blind recruitment in the public sector, would start to address some of these problems. We must tackle disproportionate imprisonment rates amongst BAME groups and look at how cuts in legal aid and a failure to take a public health approach to youth violence may have contributed to these figures. We must also look at the role of technology and whether it will reduce or exacerbate these inequalities. Our proposed Lovelace code of ethics to ensure the use of personal data and artificial intelligence is unbiased, transparent and accurate, and respects privacy, is a good start (see further in Chapter 8, Digital technology). We also need to address the discrimination BAME people can face within the LGBTQ+ community. Post-coronavirus we should also commit to the strengthening of human rights and equalities legislation to ensure additional protection for migrants.

We need to continue to emphasise our principles of fairness and opportunity – our rent-to-own policy is a good start in addressing generational and racial wealth gaps which will allow younger BAME individuals to firmly establish community roots and start to build wealth. The gentrification of urban centres is leading to an unhealthy rise in house prices. Land value tax could help to address this imbalance as well as ending the sale of public land to private developers.

We must put forward policies for parents in terms of how we would give their children every opportunity through childcare and education – policies such as free childcare and reducing class sizes could appeal. School exclusions disproportionately affect young BAME people and are often a pipeline into the prison system; we should ban them.

The UK tax system is far too centralised. We should continue to fight for an increase in local government powers and their ability to collect more local tax revenue to allow them to invest in their communities, creating and empowering ‘anchor’ institutions.

Lastly, healthcare and wellbeing will become an even more important topic after the coronavirus crisis. Plenty of BAME voters will be looking to vote for parties that are explicitly seeking to end the type of racial inequalities that we are seeing today through investment in our health infrastructure.

Liberal Democrat policies need to appeal to a broad church, to resonate with all these different sub-groups and interests while remaining in keeping with our core values. People don’t want handouts, don’t want pity or to be mollycoddled; all they are asking for is a fair opportunity to thrive.

Many of the policies that I’ve mentioned above are aspirational, encouraging the creation of wealth and integration into British society. Policies that provide equality of opportunity and the non-tokenisation of diversity need to be championed by our party. We need to create a policy platform that truly breaks down institutional barriers and allows people to become masters of their destiny.

There is more that brings us together than divides us. We are internationalists, and we believe in fairness, equality of opportunity and social justice – so let’s make ourselves the natural home for BAME voters.

**There is more that brings us together than divides us. We are internationalists, and we believe in fairness, equality of opportunity and social justice – so let’s make ourselves the natural home for BAME voters.**

## A double burden

*Tara Copeland*

The double burden faced by working women is not a new problem but it has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, particularly for mothers. Women are often those who take on the majority of caring and housekeeping duties in families, even if they are also in employment; they take on 60 per cent more unpaid work than men in the UK. Of the 3.2 million workers in 'high risk' roles, [77 per cent are women, putting them under increased stress and at a greater risk of infection](#). This double burden not only affects women's time, but can also negatively impact their health due to stress and loss of sleep.

Society's perceptions of women as the primary carers in families lead to an expectation that women will take full maternity leave or leave paid employment altogether once they have children, meaning that they are often passed up for opportunities for promotions and pay rises. This 'motherhood gap' contributes to the gender pay gap and the 'glass ceiling', meaning that women do not gain the ground they deserve in the workplace. These gaps have been further compounded during the pandemic, where women have been losing their jobs at a greater rate than men; an [IFS study](#) found that women were not only more likely to have been furloughed compared to men but were also 1.5 times more likely to have lost their job or quit. [Women are one-third more likely than men to have been working in industries which have been seriously hit or shut down by the virus](#). This means that women are more likely to have had to rely on benefits during this period.

Women from poorer backgrounds are even further limited by the double burden, as they are less often able to afford to offload domestic work through hired help. When once they may have relied on the help of grandparents or other relatives, this option is no longer available due to social distancing. The loss of this valuable source of extra childcare is felt even more by single parents who may feel unable to continue work while caring full-time for a child.

The coronavirus crisis has seen an increase in the amount of care and domestic unpaid labour undertaken by women. Women will more often than men be responsible not only for the care of their household, but also for family members in at-risk categories outside their household such as elderly parents or immune-compromised relatives. With the closure of schools, parents must also fulfil the roles of educator, supervisor, and caretaker during the day, possibly while also working from home. Work that was originally the responsibility of teachers and day care workers is now again most commonly fulfilled by women. With this increase in domestic responsibility we have seen the worrying trend of women leaving their paid employment to better manage household responsibilities.

An important part of the road to fairer society is gender equality. Alleviating this double burden placed upon women is a vital step towards this goal.

Providing paid equal paternity leave will help to encourage men to take on childcare responsibilities in the early stages of their child's life. This will also mean that families do not have to choose between having a mother at home or at work. Countries which have already implemented equal paternity leave have seen an increase in men's participation in childcare.

Universal basic income would help to ensure that fewer people are left to rely on benefits in order to provide the basic necessities for their families while also giving women more financial independence.

Universal free childcare until children are of school age, and free after-school care, will mean that parents do not have to choose between work and care (see Jannah Patchay's suggestions below).

Incentivising companies of all sizes, perhaps through a business tax scheme or a government loans system, to maintain and increase options for flexible working and working from home would allow both women and men to make their career work around other responsibilities such as child and other unpaid care work (see further in Chapter 8, Digital technology).

A better social security net for families, removing the two-child limit on benefits and unfreezing child benefit would enable families to better provide for their children and give them the best shot at life.

We don't know when things will return to normal – or if they ever will – but we need to help support women by giving them the best chance at achieving their goals.

## Childcare and opportunity

*Jannah Patchay*

The potential for anyone, from any background, to realise their potential and fulfil their ambitions through participation in a market economy is arguably a core tenet of the liberal vision. Given that we live in a society that is historically and structurally unequal, how can we best ensure that every citizen is afforded the opportunity to achieve this? [Income inequality is on the rise again](#) for the first time following the last great recession in 2007–08, and is likely to increase further as a result of higher unemployment following the coronavirus crisis, with [estimates](#) as high as a quarter of the UK workforce at risk of losing their job. The most vulnerable workers are the most at risk, with half of all jobs classified as at risk paying less than £10 per hour.

Against this background, the stage is set for a dramatic rise in household inequality. Concerns have already been raised around the disproportionate impact of lockdown and the closure of schools, nurseries and other childcare providers on children from already economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and the impact that prolonged closure can have longer term on their lives and opportunities. As has been noted elsewhere in this chapter, coronavirus has highlighted the unfair burden of childcare for women of all socioeconomic backgrounds, with [mothers on average only able to do a third of the hours of uninterrupted paid work as fathers](#). These factors lead to cycles that perpetuate inter-generational poverty.

Too often, early years childcare is conflated with education. Yet these are absolutely not the same. Early years childcare provides the critical infrastructure that enables parents and carers to improve the economic situation of their family: to study, to work, and to develop their careers. Without access to early years childcare, parents and carers are unable to make a better life for themselves and their children.

Government support for childcare providers impacted by the lockdown has been woefully inadequate. [Many face imminent and permanent closure](#) as a result of lockdown, with mounting debt combined with no income from fees, and no recourse to government support schemes. Those



that operate as community or charity providers are at greatest risk, and this further reduces the availability of places for vulnerable two-year olds and children with parents on lower incomes, who otherwise cannot afford more expensive for-profit providers.

We need to:

- Build on the childcare policy laid out in our 2019 election manifesto, including the properly funded offering of free childcare for 35 hours a week, 48 weeks per year.
- Make childcare costs tax-deductible, at source where possible, for parents and carers, so that childcare becomes more affordable and accessible.
- Recognise the vital role that is played by the early years childcare sector in addressing growing inequality and helping to achieve equality of outcomes, particularly following the crisis.
- Provide better funding for local authority Early Years support teams, which play a vital role in coordinating and ensuring consistency of childcare provision.
- Reassess the Early Years Framework to ensure that it promotes and supports equality of opportunity for children of all backgrounds.

## Dignity not discrimination

*Helen Belcher*

Removing inequality lies deep within the psyche of Liberal Democrats. The oft-quoted first paragraph of the preamble to the party's constitution states that 'no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity'.

The coronavirus crisis has freshly exposed the fact that millions in this country are enslaved by poverty or are living a precarious existence, and the resulting economic fallout will only make that number larger. You may have been self-employed and seen your business disappear overnight, or be someone in a low-paid carer's job, expected to work without adequate (or even any) PPE. In the coronavirus crisis these voices have been marginalised and ignored until it was too late.

Too often, economic fear and inequality lead to discrimination. If the state intervened to guarantee an income everyone can live on – and in my view a universal basic income could provide that – and housing they can afford we could reduce that fear and the tensions within communities that result.

But while addressing people's basic financial needs removes fear, it will not necessarily remove discrimination – the deliberate disadvantaging of people based on their characteristics. Some discrimination is explicit, the result of decisions made to treat certain people less favourably than others. Some of it is implicit, or systemic, in the assumptions underpinning decisions. Discrimination is based upon fear: fear of difference, fear of challenge, fear of change.

Liberals' standard response is that education eliminates discrimination. My view is that education can enable one to be *aware* of discrimination. Being aware of one's own inbuilt unconscious biases and how to manage them is the first step. However, lots of racists are very aware that they are racist – they simply don't want to do anything about it.

That is why, in addition to removing people from poverty, we need to fund the systems and reform the laws that can tackle direct discrimination in its different forms. This becomes even more urgent given the anticipated fallout, exaggerating inequalities, from coronavirus.

As the employment market contracts, we need to ensure that access to justice, including in employment matters, is guaranteed. I have been both an employee who has threatened to take an employer to a tribunal, and an employer who has been worried that a dismissed employee may (wrongly) play the discrimination card. I therefore understand that it is important that we don't see delays in court and tribunal proceedings. We must invest in virtual hearings where practical, and redouble our commitment to properly funded legal aid, recognising that those already penalised by discrimination can rarely afford good representation to put their case. We must also recognise that these proceedings are stressful for all involved, and be mindful of any mental health issues that may arise.

The Equality Act 2010 was enacted to level up the playing field across various strands of discrimination law, encapsulated within nine protected characteristics. (Some of the protected characteristics – religion, sexuality and gender reassignment – are self-defined, in that no official process is designated for claiming one or more of them.) Despite this Act, other aspects of discrimination law remained unchanged – for example, enhanced penalties for hate crime apply for some characteristics but not for others. A fairer system would be to ensure that any crime where a hate or discriminatory motive can be established applies an escalator to the penalty, irrespective of whether the discrimination was focused on any of the established protected characteristics.

The Government Equalities Office plays a crucial role, acting as both guidance and gatekeeper for new policies within government. Instead of being reduced to solely a research hub, as the current Minister for Women and Equalities has proposed, it needs to be beefed up, as its move into the Cabinet Office was supposed to achieve – becoming the champion for people who otherwise don't have a voice.

As part of this championing role we need to see much greater weight and consequence given to Equality Impact Assessments. When properly done, they reveal some of the unintended consequences of policy proposals. The problem is that they're optional, and are often treated as an afterthought, with those completing them often knowingly turning a blind eye to impacts which can be clearly anticipated. We should push for a completely independent body to undertake these assessments, make them mandatory, and bar the implementation of any policy which further disadvantages any already disadvantaged minority group. This would replace the 'due regard to' clause in the Public Sector Equality Duty and place an obligation on public authorities to start eliminating discrimination.

We must also ensure that regulation of the media is fit for purpose. The Editors' Code – which is the guidance for the body processing complaints about pieces in most of the press – contains a clause prohibiting discrimination, but this only applies to whoever brings forward a complaint. It does not prohibit clearly discriminatory pieces targeted at groups. As part of properly implementing the Leveson proposals for the reform of press regulation, adjusting the code to prohibit discrimination on the basis of any of the nine protected characteristics would be a welcome start.

**Being aware of one's own inbuilt unconscious biases and how to manage them is the first step. However, lots of racists are very aware that they are racist – they simply don't want to do anything about it.**

At the same time, we need to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to have their voice heard. Moving to a proportional voting system for both local and central government across the UK increases the chance for minority voices to gain representation.

The less commonly quoted second paragraph of the preamble to the party's constitution reads: 'We look forward to a world in which all people share the same basic rights ... we reject all prejudice and discrimination based upon race, colour, religion, age, disability, sex or sexual orientation and oppose all forms of entrenched privilege and inequality.' Put simply, discrimination removes dignity. As a party we must work to ensure dignity for all.

# 5

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## Environment

*Duncan Brack, Richard Hebditch*

### Environmental policy after coronavirus

*Richard Hebditch*

Despite the demonstrable links between the destruction of the natural environment and the emergence of the coronavirus, the impact of the pandemic on UK environment policy is not clear. Will the evidence of what government can do in the face of a crisis encourage it finally to respond to the climate and nature emergencies? Will people be inspired by cleaner air to change their travel choices? Or will people revert to their pre-crisis behaviour and pro-environment policies be seen as a luxury as government tries to get the economy going again?

What coronavirus has exposed is how fragile our economy and society are if we ignore their environmental underpinnings. Most glaringly, it has shown us the results from continually pushing back on the space given to nature as farms and wild animals come into much closer contact, with higher risk of diseases jumping from animals to humans. The state capitalism of China is the immediate source of our current pandemic, but populist capitalist Brazil could be another. Both share little interest in precautionary regulation to avoid problems like these, as can be seen with the lack of action on China's wet markets.

The pandemic has also provided a shock to our assumptions that food will always be available whenever we want it, whether from supermarkets or, increasingly in recent years, from online home delivery. For over a century, apart from wartime, the UK as a whole has rarely faced food shortages. Food has always been available if you can afford it – and though an increasing number have been forced to look to charity in terms of food banks, for most people low prices have kept food affordable despite falling or static incomes.

Now, though, we have experienced what many across the world face where food supplies are not guaranteed. The UK's dispersed supply network bounced back strongly, but climate change and a growing global population will put much more pressure on food supply chains in the years to come. If you think empty pasta and flour shelves are a nuisance, wait until the world loses some its most productive land as global temperatures race out of control.

Many have been tempted to see coronavirus as a wake-up call, a warning from our future to our present. But if that is so, it is important to draw the correct lessons from it. Worldwide, liberal

democracies have been the greatest engines of domestic progress, distributing prosperity fairly across their societies where democracy trumps capital. International cooperation can also share that prosperity globally.

It is important that countries do not retreat into autarky and isolationism. We need global cooperation in the fight not only against climate change but also to safeguard our planet's wildlife and natural resources. The UK is poorly placed to pursue autarky: maximising agricultural production in the short term will impose significant long-term costs. We are already one of the most severely nature-depleted countries in the world, and trying to squeeze more farming, more housing, more transport, more space for water and flood management out of that land will impose severe strains.

The traditions of liberalism and social democracy offer us a way forward – reforming UK institutions to protect the environment, building on the model of the Committee on Climate Change; international cooperation, including through the UK's close relationship with our EU partners; and a mixed economy of state, private sector and civil society that empowers citizens and consumers. These themes are explored in the rest of this chapter. (Climate policy is covered mainly in Chapter 3, on economic and industrial policy.)

## Protecting the global environment

*Duncan Brack*

The coronavirus pandemic has helped to highlight the nature emergency – which, while just as critical as the climate emergency, has tended to receive less public and policy-maker attention.

Worldwide, deforestation and other forms of land conversion are driving exotic species out of their evolutionary niches and into human environments, where they interact and breed new strains of disease. [Three-quarters of new or emerging diseases that infect humans originate in animals](#), and the risk of contagion is multiplied where animals live in or near human-disturbed ecosystems, such as recently cleared forests or swamps drained for farmland, mining or residential projects. As natural habitats shrink, wild animals concentrate in ever smaller territories or migrate to homes, sheds and barns. Effective national and international policy and legislative frameworks are therefore essential to halt and reverse deforestation and protect nature. Yet in many countries, and at the global scale, they are largely lacking.

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity was agreed in 1992, and now has almost universal participation (notably not including the US, which signed the agreement but never ratified it). While it recognised, for the first time in international law, that the conservation of biodiversity is 'a common concern of humankind' and an integral part of the development process, in reality its impact has been highly limited. Although it places a requirement on parties to draw up national biodiversity strategies and action plans, there are no real penalties for non-compliance or for any failure to implement meaningful policies and measures. The Convention's conference scheduled for October 2020 and now postponed was due to agree more ambitious objectives, but would not, realistically, have tackled these underlying weaknesses.

**The coronavirus pandemic has helped to highlight the nature emergency – which, while just as critical as the climate emergency, has tended to receive less public and policy-maker attention.**

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), agreed in 1973, has had more impact on controlling the legal and illegal trade in wildlife. Unlike the Biodiversity Convention, it possesses a reasonably effective non-compliance procedure (suspension of trade in wildlife), though, like most international environmental agreements, it is hampered by a lack of resources and, in some countries, political will. And its remit only extends to trade, not habitat protection and land use.

Apart from military force, there are only three real ways in which countries can apply pressure to other countries to change their behaviour, for example to protect their forests, wildlife and habitats: through applying diplomatic pressure (including encouraging countries to accept commitments under international frameworks), through providing money and through restricting trade and investment. The UK should take the lead in using each of these three routes, including:

- Committing to increase the UK's target for development assistance from 0.7 per cent to 1.0 per cent of GNP (a target endorsed by UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade, Aid and Development, as far back as 1968), with the additional 0.3 per cent to be directed entirely to environment and climate spending. On 2019 figures, this would add another £6.5 billion to the existing £15.2 billion annual spend on development – a little less than ten days' worth of government expenditure on the furlough scheme during April / May.
- Arguing for increased ambition within the Biodiversity Convention and CITES, and increasing funding and technical assistance for international and national strategies aimed at delivering commitments under these two conventions.
- Including strict sustainability clauses in free trade agreements and bilateral investment agreements, making trade and investment preferences conditional on the acceptance by all the parties to the agreement of ambitious environment and climate goals. The UK after Brexit is particularly ill-placed to insist on such clauses, desperate as it is to replace its lost trade deals through the EU; and the EU is far better placed than the UK to apply them, given its far greater weight in international negotiations (and the EU appears to be moving in this direction in any case). This is just one of many environmental arguments for the UK to rejoin the EU or, at least, the customs union and single market.

While environmental degradation in the UK is a serious and ongoing problem, it seems unlikely that it has contributed directly to the emergence of coronavirus (though air pollution has certainly made its impact worse). The UK, along with other rich nations, shares responsibility for the nature emergency through its consumption of tropical timber and agricultural commodities such as beef, palm oil, soya and cocoa whose production drives deforestation and environmental destruction. Global deforestation continues at an unacceptably high rate. In recent years it has actually increased in the tropics – [primary rainforest loss hit record highs in 2016 and 2017, and remained above historical levels in 2018 and 2019, with a three per cent rise in 2019](#) – with catastrophic consequences for biodiversity, climate change and people. Clearance for agriculture is the main driver of forest loss, accounting for almost three-quarters of forest loss in the tropics.

We need to put in place policies that promote forest growth, and, as a critical first step, stop deforestation. We can help to achieve this by eliminating the link with our consumption. We should:

- Legislate to place an obligation on companies to exercise ‘due diligence’ throughout their operations and supply chains to avoid environmental destruction, and also human rights abuses such as modern slavery and child labour. This measure, which would require companies to assess the risk their activities pose to the environment and to take action to avoid them and to repair any damage caused would be a major step with significant implications for corporate behaviour worldwide, and not just for forests.
- Introduce a system of nature-related financial disclosure to require banks and other financial institutions to assess and disclose the risk their lending and investment activities pose to nature, and place them under a similar obligation of due diligence to reduce and eventually eliminate the risks.
- Aim to reach bilateral agreements with producers of commodities associated with deforestation, such as Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire (the source between them of two-thirds of the world’s cocoa) or Indonesia (a major exporter of palm oil, rubber and tropical timber) to improve standards of governance and law enforcement and put in place the conditions for sustainable production.

## Protecting the UK environment

*Richard Hebditch*

Coronavirus has shown us that the UK cannot sail on in glorious isolation when it comes to the environment. But if we are to make the case that all countries need to better protect and enhance their natural environment, to expand their carbon sinks and maintain wild spaces to reduce the risk of zoonotic disease pandemics, then the UK must also practice what it preaches.

Our starting point must be to recognise just how much our environment has been damaged over many centuries, and the UK’s historic contribution to global warming.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, [ranking 189th out of 218 countries on the intactness of its biodiversity](#) (looking at current biodiversity compared to originally present species). Southern and Central England – with their widespread, intensively managed agricultural land, urban sprawl and high population density – are ranked lowest within the UK. The UK has one of the lowest rates of woodland cover in Europe. Designations like Sites of Special Scientific Interest are often isolated from each other rather than connected, which reduces the viability of wildlife populations. Our National Parks are under pressure from development and have the lowest level in the international system of categorising national parks because of the lack of emphasis on nature in their protection. The land spared for nature is small in size and does not make up an integrated network. The intensification of farming in the late twentieth century has also seen agricultural land shared less with nature. The [index of farmland birds has declined by more than a half](#) from the 1970s, and in just six years in the 1980s, [a fifth of hedges in England and a quarter in Wales were lost](#).

This also matters for our own well-being. The UK is putting more and more pressure on its land, particularly as development has become centred on the south-east. Much of the south and east of England is under extreme water stress, with much of the new Oxford-Cambridge arc already seeing

[over-extraction of scarce water resources](#). We are building on flood plains, and our engineering-dominated approach to flood management pushes water on to the next pinch point. We need more space to manage flood water, to allow rivers to live and better absorb heavier downpours upstream through woodlands. Our growing and changing population needs more homes. Road, port and airport infrastructure is hungry for more space, dividing wildlife populations into smaller and smaller pockets rather than joining them up.

An effective and democratically accountable planning system is the best way to resolve these issues. Yet the UK has seen repeated attacks on this. New Labour's regional planning often seemed to be more about backroom deals between council leaders' schemes for by-passes, while their changes to national infrastructure planning seemed more about overriding the legitimate environmental concerns of local communities. The Conservatives have repeatedly whittled away at local planning to turn it into a process that is more about rubber-stamping development rather than strategic choices about how to make best use of the scarce and finite resource of land.

To be able to lead internationally on the natural environment and reverse its decline at home, we should:

- Match our international ambition for a refresh of the Biodiversity Convention with domestic ambition.
- Expand the spaces given over for nature, link them up in a coherent network and improve their condition. This should be a partnership between conservation bodies, government agencies (including major landowners like the Ministry of Defence, Network Rail and Highways England), local government, community initiatives and individual landowners. This would be backed by incentives from the replacement for the Common Agricultural Policy (see below).
- Ensure that the regulations governing National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty give much greater weight to the need to restore a healthy and beautiful natural environment.
- Expand the UK's tree and woodland cover, to help restore nature, meet the UK's net zero carbon emissions target and provide cleaner air and shade. The Liberal Democrat manifesto in 2019 committed us to a target of an additional 40,000 ha a year (about two-thirds the size of the New Forest); we should raise this to 50,000 ha a year, as outlined in 2019 in the Committee on Climate Change's most ambitious net zero scenario.
- Harness young people's enthusiasm to tackle climate change and care for the natural environment through a new Green Corps to provide opportunities for volunteering with environmental organisations, including supporting those organisations as they recover from the significant loss of incomes as a result of the pandemic.
- Draw on the model of the Climate Change Act to legislate for a new Nature Act to set out targets and milestones to turn around key species and biodiversity and restore our natural resources, and create the institutional framework to ensure short-term business or political concerns cannot override long-term environmental needs.



# Food, diet and agriculture

*Richard Hebditch*

The difficulties with food supply during the initial impact of coronavirus have led some to argue for UK agricultural policy to focus on self-sufficiency, paying farmers greater subsidies for food production and bringing more land under the plough. But the UK has not been self-sufficient in food since the beginning of the nineteenth century and we currently produce a little over half the food we eat. Around a quarter comes from the EU.

Some of this is because UK consumers aren't keen on UK produce, so we buy different foods from abroad, and export some of our produce to overseas markets that want it. For some foodstuffs, it is more efficient to grow them abroad where there are lower costs and climate impacts; [a 2009 study](#) estimated that importing Spanish lettuce to the UK during winter months resulted in three to eight times lower emissions (including transport emissions) than producing it locally in heated glasshouses. [A 2018 analysis of the climate footprint of diets across the EU](#) showed that food transport was responsible for only 6 per cent of emissions, whilst dairy, meat and eggs accounted for 83 per cent.

There are also real dangers in putting more land under the plough. Despite some welcome changes to make space for nature within farmland – for instance leaving field margins and stopping ploughing up land where the return is only marginal – UK land is under pressure as never before. Trying to get more out of UK farming by pushing more land into agriculture will not be successful in the long term, either from the damage caused to biodiversity or to natural resources like water and soil quality. Of the two-thirds of streams, rivers and lakes which currently fail to achieve good or high ecological status, in around a quarter of cases this is because of agricultural pollution. Soil damage is an increasing risk and Defra evidence suggests that some of our most fertile soils in East Anglia will be lost at current rates of degradation and erosion.

Our aim should be food security, not fighting a wartime-style war on nature to drive up production in the UK. 'Food security' is defined by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation as existing 'when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'. This does not need self-sufficiency in food production, but it does require fair and stable international trading relationships – currently under threat from the government's obsession with Brexit at all costs.

The two big drivers of vulnerability to the achievement of this aim of food security are a rising global population and climate change. In response, we should continue to focus on the UK role in international development – particularly around education, agriculture and climate – and build on the commitment to spend at least 0.7 per cent of GNP enshrined in former Lib Dem MP Michael Moore's Act in 2015, together with international cooperation to tackle climate change (see Chapter 3, Economics and industry).

Given these global pressures, the UK cannot prioritise nature over food production within our own country. But growing more food does not necessarily need to mean less nature. We could be on the cusp of using AI, robotics and earth observation to improve the productivity of farming, reducing the

**Given these global pressures, the UK cannot prioritise nature over food production within our own country.**

inputs of energy, pesticides, labour and fertiliser whilst growing production and still creating more space for nature. Lab-grown food could further reduce the need for land use.

This requires a new approach to how the UK government support its farmers. We need more investment in skills and technology and advice and assistance. Productivity has barely improved in recent years. Capital investment has seen ever heavier machinery applying pesticides and fertiliser in bulk; this results in compacted soils, adding to the problems of soil degradation and erosion, poor water quality and declines in insect numbers. These new technologies mentioned above need support to be scaled up and investment in agricultural colleges and on-farm advice to support farmers to transition to these new approaches.

Diet also drives the demand for food and land and the squeeze on space for nature. The UK's diet is not something set in stone through time – [consumers in the UK increased the amount of chicken they ate one hundred fold following the Second World War, while egg consumption has halved since the 1970s](#). UK farming is currently driven by high levels of meat consumption, both directly in terms of livestock and indirectly in terms of crops grown specifically to feed them. Future changes in diet could free up land, and also help cut greenhouse gas emissions; agriculture, alongside transport, is the sector with the least progress in emissions reductions in the UK. While changes in consumer behaviour may drive this, government can also play a role, as it has on the salt content of foods, where the focus on targets for the industry led to voluntary changes in the formulation of processed food and significant cuts in salt levels and consumption.

The crisis has shown the adaptability of markets and companies, with the redirection of supply and retail. Supply chains have kept food flowing through the system, and supplies which went to restaurants and take-aways have been redirected into new routes. Restaurants and other small businesses have been pushed by lockdown rules to develop home delivery and other options. The just-in-time system has survived, not least because governments have facilitated food imports and exports rather than completely isolating societies. Failure to secure a trade deal with the EU by the end of the year poses a serious threat to this.

The dominance of the supermarket chains has not necessarily been fundamentally challenged but the growth of other options can allow a more equitable distribution of income and profits in the food sector, for instance by allowing farmers to develop their own food products (and therefore capture more value) at smaller scale than for supermarket contracts.

This applies to farmers themselves. Currently, farming is worth £10 billion out of a total £120 billion food sector contribution to GDP. Farmers are price-takers rather than price-makers, with most of the value from food being fought over by food retailers, processors and catering. The big four supermarkets (Tesco, Sainsburys, Asda and Morrisons) [enjoy almost two-thirds of the grocery market share](#). Their market pressure pushes down farmgate prices. They also create waste at both farm level (e.g. crops ploughed back in for not meeting aesthetic criteria) and at consumer level (e.g. through buy-one-get-one-free offers and product sizes unsuitable for many households).

The only counterbalance to the push down on farmgate prices and farm incomes is the support from the Common Agricultural Policy; most farmers would not make a living without its subsidies. The new UK domestic farming system that is replacing it is rightly placing emphasis on 'public money for public goods' (e.g. biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, protection of natural

resources), but with other public spending rising and increased borrowing, it could become a victim of Treasury cuts. There will be little public benefit without public money.

In the coming year we could see a perfect storm of cuts to support for farmers coupled with more pressure on farmers as price-takers, particularly as household incomes are hit and supermarkets seek to cut prices – and, possibly in the longer term, if and when a trade deal with the US is reached, increased competition from American food products produced to far lower health and environmental standards. This will leave farmers unable to invest in new technology and advice and unable to innovate in ways that improve sustainable productivity and enhance the natural environment.

Faced with this, the alternative has to be a policy that helps farmers to become price-makers by helping them invest to diversify income and for their produce to have more value, with a more varied and diverse food sector. This new domestic farming policy needs to be funded at current levels to make it worthwhile for farmers to apply for public money to provide environmental benefits. It also needs to help farmers to innovate and work together by supporting advice and providing finance for investments. This may increase average food prices to consumers, but the solution to that is a more generous welfare system (see Chapter 4, on equalities), not keeping food prices low at the expense of farmers, their communities, farm animals and the environment.

As liberals we believe in creating an economy and society that allows people to exercise agency over their own lives and to take responsibility for their actions. Farmers are best placed to lead a renaissance for the natural environment in the UK and overseas. But without change to the structures of power and the economics of price, farmers will be pushed into further environmentally damaging practices. We should

- Support the move to a new system of funding for farming based around the principle of public money for public goods.
- Invest in research and innovation in agriculture, and in on-farm advice for farmers to adopt new approaches and to capture more value for their produce through developing new retail products outside the big supermarkets and food companies.
- Work with the food industry to explore new approaches to diet, backed up by targets and regulation as a backstop if voluntary approaches do not work. Labelling, education and public procurement all have a role to play, and taxation may have to, if sufficient progress is not made through these means.
- Support conditions for new entrants in the grocery market to help farmers capture more value from nature friendly farming approaches and to reduce food waste.

## Putting environment at the heart of government

*Duncan Brack*

The current structure of government in Britain is badly suited to addressing the climate and nature emergencies. No mechanism exists to ensure that climate and environmental objectives are given

priority; to the contrary, environmental factors and outcomes are routinely downplayed compared to economic or political priorities. Decision-making is chronically short-termist, the departments responsible for environmental policy are of low political status, and the dead hand of Treasury orthodoxy militates against ambitious action.

There is no substitute for political will. If a government is elected that does not want to pursue ambitious environmental policies, there is no institutional set-up which can make it do so. But where the will is there, it can still be frustrated by the existing institutional structure, which places too many barriers in the way of strong and consistent leadership throughout government.

Radical reform of government is therefore needed, to create a clear voice and leadership for climate and nature policy and to require all government bodies to embed long-term environmental thinking in their decision-making. We should:

- Break up the Treasury, which has proved consistently incapable not only of responding to long-term environmental risks but even of managing the UK economy particularly well. Like most developed democracies, we should create separate departments for the economy and for government finance.
- The economics department should take the form of a Department of Sustainability (wrapping in the current responsibilities of BEIS and Defra), taking the lead in ensuring that the economy is environmentally sustainable, resource-efficient and zero-carbon. The head of this department, replacing the Chancellor the Exchequer, would be a key figure in government leadership; there may be a case for appointing them Deputy Prime Minister, to ensure that the department carries sufficient clout.
- Extend the UK's National Security Strategy to include risks to UK society and economy from environmental factors and ensure they are discussed regularly by the National Security Council (chaired by the Prime Minister).
- Appoint a Chief Sustainability Adviser to the Prime Minister, and a sustainable development risk analysis unit in the Cabinet Office, to help the PM provide consistent leadership on environmental issues.
- Create a government Sustainable Development Service (along the lines of the Government Economic Service or the Government Legal Service), to help improve training and professional development and encourage networking and the spread of best practice.
- Ensure that the new Office of Environmental Protection shortly to be established is fully independent of government, and possesses powers and resources to assess and advise government on the impact of significant new (and existing) policies, undertake independent analysis of the government's environmental performance, and enforce compliance with climate and environmental targets.
- Provide the resources for the Environment Agency and Natural England to do their job; each has experienced budget cuts of over 60 per cent over the last ten years.

- As argued above, draw on the model of the Climate Change Act to legislate for a new Nature Act to set out legally binding near-term and long-term targets for improving water, air, soil and biodiversity.

Local government also has a critical role to play in meeting the climate and nature emergencies. Many of the solutions to climate change and habitat destruction are best tackled locally, with cities, towns and rural communities developing zero-carbon and nature strategies for housing, transport, local energy generation and land use. Innovation often takes place most successfully and visibly at the smaller, local, scale, as Liberal Democrat-run local authorities such as Sutton, South Cambridgeshire and Eastleigh have demonstrated. Local leaders are more trusted than national politicians, and are closer to their residents. They are better placed to promote change with imagination and sensitivity. They are accustomed to forming constructive partnerships with each other and with the many organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors which need to contribute to change.

The role and powers of local government are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9 (Community), but these should include creating a statutory duty on all local authorities to produce a Zero-Carbon and Nature Strategy, including plans for local energy, transport and land use, and devolving powers and funding to enable every council to implement it.

# 6

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## Health, wellbeing and social care

*Mohsin Khan, Humaira Ali, Cara Jenkinson, Tamora Langley, Anisur Rahman*

### Introduction

*Dr Mohsin Khan*

Historically, pandemics and wars have led to deaths and suffering – but also to rapid progress and the development of measures that have helped save lives. The Black Death improved the lives of peasants as the feudal system crumbled. The cholera epidemic led to the reform of the sewerage and waste management systems in London. World War Two sped the development of widespread antibiotic use and advances in plastic surgery, burns treatment and trauma, and paved the way for the NHS. Crises, while deeply tragic, have spurred on innovations, both scientific and political.

This chapter covers several areas in which recent events highlight areas for reform around health, social care and wellbeing, and suggests how Liberal Democrats can facilitate this in a post-coronavirus era.

‘Valuing staff, telemedicine, addressing the backlog’ proposes improvements to how we treat staff. It looks at how telemedicine can be a constructive, careful and balanced choice for the patients who choose it, and how we can best address the backlog in appointments and treatments.

‘Letting go of local hospitals’ asks if our attachment to the local hospital has been broken by coronavirus, and whether this could be a catalyst for positive change. It suggests that patient representatives, rather than elected politicians, should help lead decisions to close wards or hospitals.

‘Redesigning where we heal, live and work’ considers how public spaces and services, including healthcare and office settings, could be redesigned both to reduce the transmission of disease and to improve mental and physical health.

‘Time to be loud and clear on social care’ examines long-standing and growing problems with older adult social care, which have been recently thrown into the spotlight by the scale of the pandemic in care homes. It looks at how we should build a case for making a reasonable standard of social care free at the point of use via progressive taxation, similar to the NHS.

# Valuing staff, telemedicine, addressing the backlog

*Professor Anisur Rahman*

The prospect of coping with the coronavirus crisis was terrifying for many of us in the NHS, having seen what had happened in Spain and Italy, and being in communication with colleagues there. The response from NHS staff has been widely recognised, on all sides and by all political parties, as remarkable. This has been achieved because workers throughout the health and care sectors have taken on personal risks and responsibilities far outside their normal duties, and services have been reconfigured to focus on the needs of patients with Covid-19, through innovative use of technology – for example telephone clinics and new forms of respiratory support devices.

Liberal Democrats should now demand that lasting changes are made, building on how the health and care services have risen to the challenge of coronavirus. There are three major areas where we should take a clear position.

## Staff must be valued

Although the NHS has come through this phase of the crisis, this has come at a cost. We went into the crisis with an underfunded, understaffed and underequipped NHS and care sector in comparison with other European countries. [Our country spends less on healthcare](#) as a proportion of GDP than other similar European countries. During the years of austerity NHS staff have been subject to real-terms pay-cuts year after year. Liberal Democrats should be the party that is on the side of NHS staff, because without the staff there is no NHS.

**Liberal Democrats should be the party that is on the side of NHS staff, because without the staff there is no NHS.**

## Learn from the changes made during the coronavirus crisis

The crisis has led to enforced changes in the way that we deliver care, and some of these changes have been positive.

Telephone and video consultations are an example. Since lockdown, I and many others have been carrying out all our consultations by telephone. The applicability of telemedicine will vary between specialties and diseases – breast surgeons, for example, could not assess lumps remotely without being with the patient, and patients with inflammatory arthritis may have flare-ups of joint disease that can only be detected that way. Looking at my own experience, I felt that not being able to examine patients hampered the consultation significantly in about a third of cases. Patients may also value the personal contact with their doctors and nurses, especially in primary care.

Liberal Democrats should take a balanced position about how to incorporate these changes into NHS care. Using telemedicine is a helpful and appropriate way to make clinical decisions for some patients and could lead to less pressure on face-to-face services within hospitals and GP surgeries. In the short term, remote consultations will be critical to ensure that we can have adequate social distancing within those environments. However, this depends on the provision of adequate technology and it will be important that patients have the choice of face-to-face care if they want or need it. Not everyone has an environment where they are comfortable talking to a doctor and have the technology to do this. We need to address this to ensure equality of access.

One solution might be to have private booths or rooms in, for example, local libraries or community centres, with videoconferencing technology set up and non-clinical staff to help. People would use them at specified times to make the most of their videoconferencing appointment with a clinician, without being disrupted by others or concerned about lack of privacy, Internet access or technology skills at home. (Chapter 8 (Digital technology) explores this further.)

### **How will we deal with the backlog of non-coronavirus related medical needs?**

It is now apparent that the NHS needs excess capacity to cope with demand surges. If hospitals run at 95 per cent capacity in the summer, then every winter there will be bed crises. To deal with the coronavirus crisis, we needed to shut operating theatres to create new ITU areas. As a result, other medical needs have not been served in the way that they would be normally. For example, almost all elective surgery has been cancelled. This means, for example, that people in pain who need hip or knee replacements have not had them, and that important cancer operations could not be carried out. Patients have not been coming to GPs or emergency departments through fear of coronavirus. We will not know for a long time how much excess mortality has been caused by this.

It is inevitable that there will be a bulge in activity when all the work that was not done between March and May this year is carried out later alongside normal service, while also maintaining social distancing. There is simply no easy answer to this problem.

The availability of private facilities and staff will vary in different parts of the country. At the beginning of the crisis the government was in discussion with private providers about using their resources; it turned out not to be necessary, as the NHS coped, but it was a live issue and could be again.

One option could be that for a defined period of time the government could give the NHS power to commandeer private-sector resources (e.g. operating theatres and clinic space) in order to deliver services that could be located safely there, such as elective surgery or routine dermatology. The need to use this power would vary from one region of the country to another, and would not allow private operators to control the price they receive in recovering costs from the NHS.

## **Letting go of local hospitals**

*Tamora Langley*

Our party's approach to health policy has been characterised by our Democrat(ic) tradition. When considering the problem of how to ensure democratic oversight of the National Health Service, our first point of call is local government. This makes sense. Local government is accountable to local voters, whereas bureaucratic structures like Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are not. But CCGs only commission around half of all NHS services.

Decisions on how to treat more complex illnesses and organise hospital services have little political oversight. When it comes to the 'traditional' work of the NHS – the stuff that happens in hospitals and involves specialists, such as operations, chemotherapy or childbirth – politicians are kept out of it, except in areas where there has been substantive devolution, like Manchester or Wales.



During this time of coronavirus, public support for ‘the NHS’ has become unparalleled adoration. When we come out of the crisis, the position of the NHS in the hearts and minds of the public looks stronger than ever, and it looks set to continue to secure the largest share of government spending of any public service. Looking ahead, how can we ensure that this taxpayer investment is spent equitably and well?

As Liberal Democrats we typically turn first to democratic processes to deliver fairness, while also being wary of mechanisms, like referendums, that fail to force people to decide between inescapable ‘trade-offs’. Ask someone if they would like a nice holiday? They will accept. Tell them that they need to give up their car for a year to afford it, and there’s a psychological aversion to accepting the trade-off. Instead, they look for a way to have both.

We have seen this play out in attempts to build consensus among the public for a solution to funding social care. In 2018 two parliamentary select committees took the laudable step of commissioning a citizen’s assembly on social care. Using a range of engagement techniques, a representative group of the public, with interest in confronting the issue’s complexities, reflected at length on possible solutions. The process involved much more deliberation of options and implications than any snapshot poll or election campaign. Yet the conclusions revealed a common refusal to accept trade-offs or compromise.

In the equally emotive world of NHS priorities, we know how decisions to close a hospital, or even a ward, can fuel political arguments, and win or lose elections. It takes a serious scandal to close a ward or a hospital – such as children dying because small units are carrying out surgery they can’t safely perform. The result of mediocre treatment – missed opportunities and worse outcomes – can be less easy to evidence, but they are captured by officials who evaluate quality and outcomes. The issue is that hard evidence is not always powerful enough to force a change, when local people and politicians have an emotional attachment to a local hospital.

So, those running the NHS have developed a solution. They have labelled some health services as ‘specialised’, and commissioned them centrally. Recognising the logic, the policy working group I chaired last year recommended only that ‘services commissioned by CCGs’ (i.e. services not deemed ‘specialised’) should transfer to local government. We understood the logic of letting scientific expertise determine the design of complex services for long-term or acute health conditions. If we accept that the overarching objective is to achieve outcomes in cancer, stroke and surgery equivalent to those achieved in other rich developed countries, we need a range of highly trained specialists using the latest equipment, diagnostics and treatments. This often entails pooling services into fewer sites. We have seen this with stroke services. Where these specialist units were created in Greater Manchester and London, stroke patients now spend less time in hospital and are less likely to die as a result of their stroke.

Given the constant evolution of health technology and practice, an increasing number of health conditions and services have been drawn into this ‘specialised’ group. Specialisation delivers benefits not just in quality but also in efficiency, through economies of scale and by locating expensive staff and equipment in one place. The democratic input comes through expert patient groups, who participate in the design of the specialised services the patient populations they represent will use.

Democrats may at this point feel perturbed by the apparent triumph of bureaucracy and lack of transparency. It is true that any element of effective representative democracy depends upon involving patient groups in a systematic and fair way. Patient groups would need to be universally good at representing the people they aim to help. But with this caveat, if the resulting health benefits are significant, and value for money is improved, this is a solution we should be prepared to accept. The challenge arises when the result of the trend towards specialisation, combined with the reality of limited resources, leads to a politically unpalatable conclusion: the closure of a local hospital.

A further concern is the issue of fairness. Out of the spotlight of scrutiny, Liberal Democrats may be concerned that the inequalities we know exist elsewhere are borne out here too: conditions that affect minorities may be relatively under-funded. Those with the means are more likely to be more active or successful in lobbying for resources. How do we ensure equity based on need? Who makes the tough choices about those inevitable trade-offs that we all like to avoid?

In practice, there is a political hierarchy in healthcare. In the health world, cancer commands the top spot. This is reflected in special funding – the ‘Cancer Drugs Fund’ – which provides for expensive cancer drugs to be funded by the NHS, even though they deliver less ‘value for money’ than medicines for other long-term conditions. In the NHS’s response to coronavirus, we have seen this hierarchy again, with the creation of cancer ‘hubs’, equipped with tests and lots of PPE, allowing urgent cancer operations to continue at some hospitals, while other types of surgery have been postponed. Being able to continue some cancer surgery is of course a very good thing; many cancers will deteriorate if left untreated. But is it fair that someone with an equally urgent medical need that is not cancer-related – those in urgent need of brain or heart surgery, for example – may not have been able to receive treatment?

**But is it fair that someone with an equally urgent medical need that is not cancer-related – those in urgent need of brain or heart surgery, for example – may not have been able to receive treatment?**

Within the NHS arguments rage about the ‘fair allocation’ of resources. These will become more acute as services resume after coronavirus. As a party, we have long championed parity for mental health. Another common complaint is that too much money goes into hospitals that should be spent on prevention, in community or primary care. Rural areas complain that their ageing populations are under-served, with fewer doctors per head of population, and vast distances to travel. If local government inevitably prioritises their local patch, and citizens’ assemblies refuse to accept that there are trade-offs to be made, where can we turn?

Coronavirus has forced the NHS to change fast. After years of encouraging doctors to make greater use of technology, huge numbers of patient consultations have forcibly switched from taking place in-person to happening over the phone or via video. This may have broken many people’s emotional attachment to their local GP practice or hospital. Public support for the NHS to exist is stronger than ever, but people may be less concerned if they are directed to a different location than the GP surgery or local hospital they previously attended.

We have seen the NHS rapidly reorganise. Patients have been sent further away to hospitals where they can safely be treated. A&E departments have been eerily empty. Millions have picked up the phone to call 111, rather than their local GP surgery. These dramatic changes in how people use local health services in the aftermath of coronavirus may make it easier not to reopen services that were under-performing, speeding up the move to specialisation. If this does happen, then politicians have a

duty to ensure that it happens fairly. If the closures are supported by patient representatives, then we should put away our placards.

## Redesigning where we heal, live and work

*Dr Mohsin Khan*

### The background

Epidemics have always had lingering effects on how we live healthily. Cholera influenced the modern street grid and sewerage systems, and led to zoning laws to prevent overcrowding. Epidemics in China in the nineteenth century changed the design of everything, from drainpipes to doors to building foundations.

Coronavirus will similarly highlight ways in which we need to change our offices, hospitals, streets and more to improve our public health and wellbeing at local, regional and national levels.

### Workplaces

The fashionable open-plan style encourages the breaking down of physical barriers between teams, in an attempt to breed collaboration. Smaller rooms, tiny windows and hotdesking are commonplace, with worse air quality and light access. This all risks the transmission of illnesses as well as exacerbating chronic mental and physical health problems. With 80 per cent of infectious diseases pre-coronavirus being transmitted by touching contaminated surfaces, an emphasis on this issue in urban design would yield health and productivity gains.

Architects are responding to the crisis, which offers opportunities to highlight best practice and review guidelines and regulations at local, regional and national level. One example is Zaha Hadid Architects, who have [predicted](#) wider corridors and doorways, more use of partitions, and many more staircases in future building design. Their head of analytics believes that legislation might be introduced to mandate a minimum area per person in offices, as well as a reduction in maximum occupancy for lifts and larger lobbies to minimise overcrowding. Liberal Democrats should champion such a law.

Many buildings struggle with adequate temperature regulation. Climate change will make heatwaves more frequent, further highlighting the anomaly that working standards currently only specify minimum temperatures and not maximum ones. Temperature standards and indoor air quality should also be considered in planning decisions and building regulations, as well in all new public sector capital programmes.

Yet do we actually need offices at all in the conventional way? A fully remote style of working may have a negative impact on mental health, but flexible working, with some days at home and some 'on site', may provide a welcome balance.

## Aligning health and climate policy objectives

*Cara Jenkinson*

As we emerge from the coronavirus crisis, the top priority for many people will be their own and their families' health and ability to make a living. Action to tackle climate change creates wider benefits in terms of improved health and community resilience. By demonstrating this, we can create a consensus for an ambitious green recovery.

Many who are most vulnerable to coronavirus are also often the most vulnerable to pollution. Many cities are taking bold action to embed increased cycling and walking to prevent a reversal of the air quality improvements that we have witnessed during lockdown. But much more can be done as lockdown restrictions are lifted.

A deep retrofit of social housing using an approach such as the Dutch Energiesprong whole-house retrofits can dramatically reduce carbon emissions at the same time as fuel bills, and reduce fuel poverty. Providing local authorities with funding to enforce minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector, together with raising fines for non-compliance, will be essential.

A low-carbon diet with smaller amounts of red meat will reduce the costs of treating cardiovascular disease and stroke. An increase in physical activity, such as walking and cycling, has been [estimated](#) to generate a potential saving to the NHS of £17 billion within 20 years.

Existing schemes such as the London-based SHINE programme, where health professionals refer patients for energy efficiency upgrades, should be rapidly scaled up. A much higher portion of the roads budget must be spent on active travel. Local government is well-placed to lead this agenda.

### Wider urban design

The pandemic has highlighted many problems with urban and building designs. Public authorities must balance the various considerations, including mental health, reducing transmission of infection, and green elements. This is particularly important for buildings owned by the public sector.

After being cooped up for months, we are all taking a renewed interest in the value of parks and urban green spaces, as well as the public infrastructure of toilets, drinking fountains and, crucially, hand-washing facilities. It's important that local authorities respond to this by ensuring that public health, wellbeing and mental health are central to redevelopment, public transport and green spaces, and regeneration plans.

Public transport is one example where various competing elements need to be taken into consideration. There is a need to reduce current crowding levels, as these can easily spread diseases, and private vehicles may seem desirable for this reason. Likewise, much of the transmission of coronavirus is thought to be indoors, within households – making a reduction in housing density and more spacious housing design desirable.

However, this should be balanced against the environmental impact of cars, and the inevitable urban sprawl that reducing housing density would create. The obesity epidemic and the climate crisis are both exacerbated by sprawl – which dense, walkable cities can combat. Yet density may become

unpopular post-pandemic. A less dense city that is set up for walking and cycling would result in less need for public transport. Many people will move permanently away from conurbations to embrace the freedom of working from home, with reduced need for offices and public transport. The lack of access to green spaces for many self-isolating has become evident.

Over the last few decades there has been a move towards larger (and overcrowded) prisons, with people having to travel long distances to get to them. We should consider whether it may be more effective to have more (less crowded) prisons, allowing families easier access to prisoners and reducing population density inside them.

Even today prisoners have to share cells, at a time when other public institutions such as hospitals are considering how to socially distance in the workplace. Reduced overcrowding across many smaller prisons is not only better for their (and their staff's) physical health in terms of reducing infection risk, but also for wellbeing, mental health and equitable access for families who are often in a degree of poverty themselves and cannot often travel far.

**Liberal Democrats should call for new public sector buildings, such as schools, hospitals and prisons, to meet improved requirements on reducing overcrowding and unhealthy work environments.**

Liberal Democrats should call for new public sector buildings, such as schools, hospitals and prisons, to meet improved requirements on reducing overcrowding and unhealthy work environments.

The public sector has a key role to play in leading by example, because our buildings are where a substantial proportion of the population, be it employees, public servants or service users, spend significant parts of their lives.

### **Mental health, wellbeing and risk education**

As in physical health, there will be backlogs in mental health services as routine appointments have been delayed, meaning long waits to receive appropriate care, with increased demand on services. The lockdown, fear of coronavirus, health and job worries will be likely to push many people towards developing mental health issues.

Wider issues have arisen during the lockdown about balancing the acknowledged mental health risks with the need to reduce population and individual infection risks. This is particularly well illustrated by those considered to be at very high risk from coronavirus, who have been asked to isolate themselves completely and not to go outside. At what point do the drawbacks of this approach outweigh the benefits of reducing infection risk – and how do we weigh those risks, and explain them to those affected? How to help people make decisions around such risk is an issue that politicians have currently shied away from dealing with in a mature manner.

We see similar issues around competing risks and risk perception in other policy fields, such as terrorism or climate change. In formulating policy, whether as politicians, public health officials or even healthcare staff in clinics, officials must consider how they, along with professional bodies, can better explain such risks in balanced ways which avoid unnecessary or undue anxiety. The need to explain such risks to ill-health also touches upon the issues around making the case for why social care matters to individuals, as I outline in the social care section. Policymakers, whether at national or local level, must make the case for honestly educating the public repeatedly around various risks, and equipping them with the tools to make individual decisions.

## Conclusion

In the long term, the construction industry needs to work with regulators and the government to move towards greater (voluntary, or if these fail, regulatory or governmental) minimum standards for safe buildings and environments for us to live, work, and receive care in. Many of these will require gradual yet radical redesign. Liberal Democrats must be innovative in their thinking around this. We must be open to encouraging industries, local authorities, and central government to devise new ways to create healthier workplaces, hospitals, prisons, schools and cities to improve our health and wellbeing.

## Time to be loud and clear on social care

*Dr Mohsin Khan*

We know the problems. Older adult social care has been neglected for a long time, but the coronavirus crisis has particularly highlighted how the government has mishandled the sector, and the problems that still need resolving.

Our policies must balance tackling historic underfunding with the positive narrative of good practice across the sector. This is clear particularly when we celebrate the community-based ways in which people have been empowered to live their lives how they want to – a truly liberal goal. Simply merging health and social care is not a solution.

Despite decades of calls for a rethink, nothing has happened. The coronavirus crisis is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to garner support for a serious strategy to improve social care. Liberal Democrats must position themselves loudly as the champions of social care. We must make the case for far increased funding from the taxpayer, with a reasonable standard of care free for all.

### Improvements to social care

Priorities within the current health and care system are too focussed on hospital-based care – but how can we improve it, and how can these changes be implemented?

There are no shortcuts to improvement in a wide, disparate sector. The government's response to coronavirus around issues such as testing has highlighted the difficulties of enacting rapid, responsive change from the centre. Local government should have a greater role to play, helping to further decentralise social care. It must work with public health and primary care to head off the need for hospital admission.

Any reform should also address the needs of social care staff (which may also breed further electoral support for us as a new constituency of voters). The social care workforce needs to be increased in number and made more professional, particularly given the shortfall in staff and the effects of Brexit. Allowing non-UK staff to easily enter social care will be important.

### Funding: the Dilnot in the room?

Currently healthcare is largely free at delivery with 'risk pooling', while social care typically requires a substantial personal contribution. The current crisis has shown us that the public are willing

## When there is no social care set up – dial 999

*Cllr Humaira Ali*

One of my constituents, Rose, is 91 and lives in sheltered accommodation. She once told me that there are days when she wakes up and, ‘My body fails me from the waist down.’ Since, like many elderly people, she doesn’t live in assisted living accommodation, her only course of action is to dial 999. Rose told me that she felt utterly dismayed at having to take up the paramedic’s time but there is no alternative.

How do we have a society with limited care structures for those with ongoing living assistance requirements? At a time when paramedics are carefully handling those struck down by coronavirus, the risk to Rose is incredibly high. This small example not only highlights our flawed adult social care system, but also that when we reach older age, there really is nothing provided to take care of us. It’s to safeguard those like Rose that we must fund our social care and ensure that we ramp up recruitment and training of the right staff to cover her needs.

to support significant changes for the sake of overall health and wellbeing, even if that involves increased costs. Political parties need to show bravery in calling for a clear move forwards in reforming social care.

Introducing some risk pooling, where widespread contributions reduce excessive costs to individual, is essential for greater equity of access. This means improving access to social care through – at a minimum – extending the means test, and then providing a reasonable level of free care to those who need it.

### **Social care may suffer funding inequalities under the current system**

Social care funding will suffer as local authorities raise less income from parking fees, transport income, lower business rates and closed services, as well as further reductions in the central government grant. But the authorities that can raise least through Council Tax tend to be the most deprived areas which, on average, have the greatest need to spend on social care. Returning to a model of funding that more closely links financial need to the amount received is important. We need to map out how we get there, build the case, and use this crisis to leverage change.

People have shown that they are willing to pay increased taxes when the need for social care and the realities of funding are explained to them. However, this is a thorny issue. What is needed is not the solution, but the political will to bring it about. The same problem applies to trying to generate cross-party consensus – previous attempts around this have been thwarted due to fear of short-term political downsides.

There is promising evidence of a national consensus emerging to make older adult social care largely free at the point of delivery, funded through general taxation, like the NHS. Very few people want anyone to be forced to sell their family home in order to pay for care, and nor do they want a voluntary insurance scheme.

The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee's social care [inquiry](#) proposed a free-at-use system funded by taxation. The IPPR has also [proposed](#) that social care should be free at use, ensuring that no one would have to sell their home to pay for care (a pledge with 94 per cent public support). Independent Age [found](#) that 69 per cent of adults in England were prepared to pay more tax to provide free personal care for all.

It's time that the Liberal Democrats called for a reasonable standard of older adult social care to be provided free at the point of use, similar to the system used for the NHS. This would remove distinctions over whether someone needed care because of 'social' or 'medical' causes. We have shied away from this from the electoral fear at having to raise taxes – but public opinion has shifted over the last decade towards this solution. In time we can build on this and go on to make the case for all adult social care to be covered.

The pandemic has highlighted how the health of the NHS is dependent upon the health of social care. It has shown that the public is willing to accept sacrifices for the greater good. We have a rare opportunity to get ahead with difficult conversations around social care. We should seize the chance – and make the case for a reasonable standard of at least older adult social care being free, funded out of taxation.



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## Education

*Layla Moran, Humaira Ali, John Howson, Mathew Hulbert, Jo Owen*

### **Enabling the next generation to be world ready, not just exam ready**

*Layla Moran MP*

Education in a crisis is not something the United Kingdom is used to navigating. Unlike parts of the world with frequent exposure to disease, natural disasters or war, we take for granted the relative stability of our country. The last time on which we had occasion to close educational establishments en masse was the Second World War. By the summer of 1941, many of the schools in London had closed, about a quarter of children were in school with another quarter in part-time education and the rest being home-schooled or not in education at all. Some children went not just without education but also without food. The stark differences in resilience by class and community were laid bare for all to see.

All crises accelerate change. This is as true now as it was then: this crisis is our opportunity to transform education and make it fit for the future. First proposed in the Education Green Book of 1941, the great post-war reforms introduced by the 1944 Education Act were the answer to surging social and educational demands and the widespread desire for social reform. They laid the foundation for the education system as we know it today, legislating for the first time for mandated free secondary education for all.

To what extent do we find ourselves in a similar moment, and what does this crisis do to highlight the priorities for change? Is the plan simply to go back to how we were – albeit in a socially distanced way – or can we plan for a similar degree of widespread change as in 1944? If we accept that our education system has already changed, and will continue to do so as a result of coronavirus, then what can Liberal Democrats offer as our answer to the pressures for change that are likely to emerge in the months to come?

Schools, nurseries and higher education providers have faced major challenges in this crisis. They have been asked to stay open to teach keyworker and vulnerable children, but then found that numbers were far lower than expected, causing alarm amongst teachers, councils and the Department for Education at the possible impact on vulnerable children staying at home. The impact on the emotional wellbeing of children in this period are at the moment unknown, but the experience

of unplanned closures elsewhere in the world suggests that we should ready ourselves for an accelerated crisis in young people's mental health.

Coronavirus is a wake-up call for education. Parents have discovered just how hard the job of a teacher is. It is time to recognise their true value as professionals. Many schools have innovated at speed to provide academic and pastoral support remotely. We need to learn which innovations have worked and embed them for the future. The absence of exams calls into question their value. Universities are facing a funding crisis which will force them to focus on how they add value. Inequality is accelerating in an unseen crisis: the children of affluent families with space and resources to learn at home will move ahead of their counterparts in less fortunate families.

The technology point is an interesting one. Provision has been very lopsided. Anecdotally it is private schools and schools in well-off areas with well-resourced parents that have coped the best in delivering an online curriculum, while schools with more demanding populations have struggled. When teachers and heads are spending their time delivering free school meals to ensure that children do not go hungry, it is little wonder that they have less time to develop whizz-bang online lessons. This has left overstretched parents to pick up the educational pieces.

### **New technology – the double-edged sword of poverty and privilege**

Online technologies, rather than being any kind of panacea through which all children can access the same resources, is another magnifier of already existing inequalities. The educational experiences of children from more troubled backgrounds are already vastly different from those of their more well-off counterparts. In addition to the challenges they normally face, we see new ones: do they have a desk, a device and decent internet, let alone a quiet room or the motivation to learn at home? Poorer families, through no fault of their own, do not have the same ability to fund or facilitate these needs. Their circumstances are inextricably linked to wider societal inequality, made worse over the last ten years by swingeing cuts in public services and local government. The demise of SureStart and youth services has meant that more and more young people have fallen behind even before they started school, or have fallen through the cracks of the system with nowhere to rebuild. A culture of off-rolling – removing disadvantaged and struggling pupils from the school roll before they take their final exams so that their poor results are not included in the school's statistics – has become so bad that the government has called a review. This, as ever, misses the point. These young people were already in crisis, and the system is failing them. It's going to take more than tinkering around the edges. And then coronavirus happened.

You cannot separate the current crisis from the crisis that existed before. The difference now is that the stark realities of the system have become ever more exposed. Even in the 'old normal', we lived in a society where children were leaving education neither work-ready nor world-ready. Around one in three leave school without functional English or maths. Employers place a low value on the qualifications which children gain in the exam factory system. Poverty is linked to lower school attainment, turning education into a repeater of inequality. Online learning, the solution to isolation, is now magnifying the issue. Meanwhile, the love of learning is extinguished by relentless examination grind; this matters if it means that adults do not want to retrain in a changing world.

While functional literacy and numeracy are the basic building blocks of any good education, in a world of AI they are not enough on their own. If all we do is to equip children with basic literacy and

numeracy skills, we will be asking them to compete with algorithms. Instead we must equip children with essential human skills: teamwork, resilience, problem-solving, creativity, speaking, leadership and dealing with conflict – the skills robots struggle to emulate. We need to be far more ambitious for our children. We have to prepare them for a future which may be exciting, but is certainly unknowable.

### **Reforming the education sausage machine**

Change is not going to be easy. Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Education would describe the education system as being run by a ‘Blob’ – the scores of faceless teachers, heads, bureaucrats and unions set against the change that he and his sidekick, Dominic Cummings, were dead set on implementing. Gove missed the point. The profession, or the system, is not inherently hostile to all change and improvement, but the reforms Gove instituted were very Blob-like. The 2014 curriculum reforms harked back to nineteenth-century elementary learning; narrowing the curriculum and rote-learning content left little space for innovation. The Tories’ deep-seated suspicion of the intellectual incapability of the profession resulted in its increasing infantilisation by the state.

Where innovation happens in English schools, it is often thanks to talented heads and teachers, and almost always despite, not because of, the state system. This is the first area that must be addressed in our post-coronavirus world: innovation, and who does it. The wise woman, or man, in Whitehall cannot design the future, or even the present, to perfection. We need to unleash the talent and creativity of the profession and of schools. We should establish two mechanisms for discovering what works now and what will work in the future.

First, a National Centre for Education Excellence, which will identify and spread best practice. Our highly fragmented school system makes it very hard for good ideas to spread, and the cost is too high for innovative charities to spread their success. The myriad of think tanks may believe that they fulfil this role, but even if they do, it isn’t working. The government claims that Multi-Academy Trusts do this, but the Department for Education admits that it has no evidence that they drive improvement. Some MATs are so geographically disparate that even if they do stumble across something that works, the idea spreads only within their own ecosystem and not into surrounding areas. This is mitigated in some parts of the country by integrated learning trusts that break down barriers within the system on a geographical basis. And that geographical basis matters: each community with its sense of place is the village in which we are raising our children.

To help drive this innovation we should introduce Voluntary Improvement Partnership areas where towns and local groups of schools will have the right to test potentially radical plans to improve education in an area and across all schools.

Good is never enough. World class is achieved not by comparing ourselves to other countries but by comparing ourselves to where we are now and constantly getting better. Our proposals would be different to the current system in four ways.

First, accountability. Accountability should not focus on how well each school performs as an exam factory. Instead it should focus on how far each school is improving, and how robust its improvement plans are. This will make it more attractive for professionals to join schools which are currently struggling. It will also stop higher performing schools from coasting; even they will be required to improve. The focus will also be more on place, not just on individual schools. Each school can only

succeed if all schools locally succeed. This will drive schools to collaborate far more on helping each other improve and will ensure that no child is left behind. Focus on place means that a school cannot succeed by stealth selection of higher potential pupils, or by moving lower performers off roll. We will reduce competition and increase collaboration.

Second, we need to recognise that the teaching profession is an education system's most important resource. If we want a constantly improving system, then we need a profession which is constantly improving too. The government currently approaches the teaching workforce as something to be inspected, controlled and managed. We would shift the emphasis to having a teaching profession which should be supported, trusted and also held to account. Lib Dem policy already has a commitment to increase continuous professional development to 50 hours a year so that teachers can continually refresh and update their skills. However, this should be a lower limit and be fully costed to include more teachers to allow the time for teachers to engage and implement it.

In return for increased autonomy, and recognising that educational best practice will be innovating all the time, we should work with the profession to build a process of recertification of teachers every five years. This would have to be part of a grand bargain with the profession, including reducing the need for high-stakes inspections and league tables. If parents know that every teacher is a great teacher, the need for a heavy inspection regime reduces. We should make the profession fit for the twenty-first century by exploring how to enable flexible working and job sharing. Being a good parent and a good teacher should not be a binary choice.

Third, we need to move well away from the 'Govian' settlement in the curriculum. There needs to be an arm's length body that would independently manage curriculum changes. This should include representation not just from government but also from teachers, researchers, parents and students. Make the curriculum relevant to learners' needs; broaden it to enable learners to develop essential skills such as teamwork, creativity, speaking, problem solving and resilience. These skills are not a different curriculum, but can be embedded as part of the current one. A broad curriculum also means moving closer to a baccalaureate system and avoiding excessive narrowing at age 16. And we must allow those well-trained, innovative teachers more room to deliver the content in a way that is engaging to the school population in front of them.

We should also reassess what we mean exactly by 'curriculum' and challenge ourselves to think beyond just the academic. The system currently offers a false choice between vocational and academic education. Even the call for 'parity of esteem' between them is misleading. The proposed T-Levels are a gimmick. Schools should deliver a curriculum which has functional relevance; see further in Jo Owen's contribution below.

As young people get older, they shouldn't be encouraged to 'drop it' if they don't get it. The most likely students to go on to start new businesses are those with the creative ideas. How many are put off from doing so because of a basic fear of accounting? Likewise, science communication is a powerful and undervalued skill, yet in our system few who go on to do chemistry, maths and biology or physics also do English.

**We should work with the profession to build a process of recertification of teachers every five years. If parents know that every teacher is a great teacher, the need for a heavy inspection regime reduces.**

Fourth, we need assessment which supports the needs of the child, not the needs of the school. Assessment is currently geared to a teach-to-test learning where each child is focused on helping the school look good in exam league tables. This comes at great cost, especially to children who are allowed to 'fail'. Assessment should focus on helping the child learn, not seeing if they can pass an exam. Learners should gain certificates when they demonstrate different levels of proficiency in a subject (like music grades or judo belts). Assessment should reflect the abilities of the whole child, not just academic success, so that employers and others can see their full potential. Careers counselling and high-quality teacher-moderated assessment can replace the high-stakes exams to help students reach the next phase. Concerns over bias towards poorer students must not go unnoticed and independent moderation must be built in to ensure this does not happen.

### **Universities, further education and the pandemic: potential and pitfalls**

Universities are facing a funding crisis as a result of the pandemic. The value of their degrees is being questioned more than ever. This is painful, but potentially productive. If the outcome is far greater clarity over the value which each university can deliver, that will be positive. There is a high likelihood that universities will need to be bailed out, and if that happens there is a strong case to use the opportunity to get them to better demonstrate how they clearly create value, for example through outstanding research, or outstanding skills delivery for students and the community. Both the skills and research agendas need to be supported by outstanding teaching, which has to be given greater emphasis in the regulation and funding of universities. In a system where the vocational and the academic are more closely aligned, universities will need to review the relevance of the undergraduate courses they deliver.

Alongside the university sector, the need for a vibrant further education sector has never been more vital, not just for young learners but for adults as well. In a constantly changing economy, adults will need to keep retraining in order to stay up to date with their skills, and to acquire new skills to stay employable. We need to strengthen both the supply side and the demand side of FE. On the supply side, proper funding is essential, based on a comprehensive review of the sector's needs so that it can build the capacity to deliver the skills of the future to young learners and adults alike.

On the demand side, the Lib Dem policy of lifelong learning account for all adults should be implemented as soon as possible, so that adults can retrain when they need to. These learning accounts should be supplemented for any workers who find themselves made redundant in a declining industry or a region suffering from high unemployment. It is quite likely that our initial funding proposal of £10,000 per adult will not prove to be enough and will need to be re-evaluated once the economic landscape is exposed. Combine the inevitable downturn with the major transition needed to respond to the climate crisis, and we have a crisis of direction for millions of working adults.

Thatcher's legacy was defined by her government's inability to redirect the energies of communities worst affected by massive industrial change to the jobs market. The current government is about to face an even bigger challenge, and education for all may well be an important part of the way out.

Delivering all these changes is going to be the tricky bit. The education system will always be democratically accountable; central government must set out the core goals and design principles. Since education has very long-term effects, these principles need cross-party support, and also

support from the profession, parents and students. Change needs to be gradual and consensual, not ideological and short-term. For these reasons, we will set up a cross-party commission to set out the fundamental goals and principles for the education system of the future.

In studies by the OECD and others that compare national school systems, the strongest factor behind steady improvement is policy stability. The current direction in England, however, is far from settled, and it will take leadership to get us to the right point. Championing this cause, and making the case for a cooperative approach to education is a gap in the market for our party to fill.

Success should never be narrowly defined, however, as one party's ideas at the expense of all others. This principle should apply across a whole host of policy areas – but it is all the more important in education.

## Resilience and education

*Jo Owen*

Through the ages, the emerging generation has always been disparaged by the older generation. But the next generation will have to be as adaptable and resilient as any that has gone before: they have to be ready for a world which no one can yet imagine. It may well be a world of opportunity, but it will also be a world of challenge.

The coronavirus pandemic is a foretaste of the sort of uncertain world which the next generation will have to navigate. This has been an early test of resilience, especially for children isolating at home with no access to online education and an unhelpful domestic setting for learning.

The challenge is to equip the next generation with the resilience, skills and adaptability to cope with a world of unknown knowns. This will require a fundamental re-think of the role of education, which will have to address the needs of the whole child, instead of addressing the needs of the exam system and league tables. A resilient, world-ready generation has to be built on four foundations: mastery of key skills, positive relationships, a clear sense of purpose, and autonomy. All too often, the existing education system fails to provide any of these foundations.

**A resilient, world-ready generation has to be built on four foundations: mastery of key skills, positive relationships, a clear sense of purpose, and autonomy.**

*Mastery of key skills:* it is hard to achieve your potential in society if you do not have a basic grasp of reading, writing and maths. One in three children leave school with inadequate functional literacy and numeracy. The core is to make these subjects functional and relevant, not theoretical and academic. Trigonometry might have been relevant in the nineteenth century, but is not functionally relevant now. Numeracy should focus on functional skills such as financial literacy and a basic understanding of statistics.

*Positive relationships at school,* across the community and at home matter. Too many schools regard children with problems as problem children and quietly off-roll them or exclude them. Schools which fail children are failures. Schools need to ensure that each child has a positive relationship with an adult at school, and need to work with parents and the community to foster positive relationships outside school as well. Schools cannot become a surrogate parent or social service, but nor can they

be islands which only focus on league tables and exams. A child can only thrive academically if they thrive emotionally, with strong and supportive relationships.

*A sense of purpose* is vital for children and adults alike. Too many children do not see the point of education, of exams or of many of the subjects that they are taught. They then disengage. The curriculum needs to be made relevant to them. An engaged child who sees the point of what they learn will want to learn as a child and will want to keep on learning and retraining as an adult. Making the curriculum relevant can be achieved by more teaching which cuts across traditional subject areas. It can also be achieved by helping children discover their passion through activities like sports, music or dance. Clubs and extra-curricular activities can be vital gateways for children to engage in education and build vital positive relationships with peers and adults.

*Autonomy* is about helping children make good decisions for themselves and helping them believe that they can achieve what they set out to achieve and helping them self-regulate their emotions. It is about helping them to take control of themselves and their destiny. While some of the principles can be taught, much of it has to be discovered in practice. As with sense of purpose, this can come from extra-curricular activities with a positive relationship with role-model adults. These skills are valuable, and we need to learn to value those things which we cannot capture in a three-hour exam and publish in a league table. Resilience is not about competing to show that you are better than others, it is about being better in yourself.

Building resilience is not the sole purpose of education, but it is a vital component of helping the next generation become world-ready. Resilience is not a separate subject in the curriculum to be examined for the sake of league tables. Resilience can be built as part of a more ambitious education system which helps the next generation become world-ready, not just exam-ready.

## Teaching staff and coronavirus

*Cllr John Howson*

At the end of February, I wrote a blog piece about trainee numbers and teacher supply that ended with the words: ‘With increasing pupil numbers for 2021, when this cohort of trainees enters the labour market, just keeping pace with last year is to be heading backwards in terms of need for new teachers even at constant funding levels. Any increased funding for schools, if not absorbed in other cost pressures, just makes staffing issues worse.’

How different is the world we now inhabit? At the end of May, I was considering whether schools might not want to employ newly qualified teachers for September rather than take on more experienced classroom practitioners to fill any vacancies, or whether more experienced teachers would be available, even now, in some subjects. Some school leaders believe that trainee teachers, especially those whose training was not complete before the closure of schools came into effect, have less experience than might be expected at the point that a school would recruit them. Nevertheless, they will still have more experience at school compared to a direct salaried recruit and, in most cases, someone starting the Teach First programme.

## Making change that sticks

*Cllr Humaira Ali*

The inequalities in society laid bare by the pandemic have been discussed in Chapter 3 (Equalities). If we need to drive an equalities agenda in order to broaden a child's knowledge and horizons, educate them on the diversity and the normality of difference and negative influences in the community, why shouldn't we create an agenda that is socially minded in all aspects of what we do and what our children learn? Not a one-time visit to a care home, or a secondary school mock general election.

We should be focusing on early years civic education. This means civic and socially minded activities through day care, nursery schools and primary schools. At primary school, this means age-consistent and continued education on democracy, civic society and community activism. By secondary school it turns to classes on democracy, politics and economics, Britain's place in Europe, the world, the UN and how all these components interact with one another. It should be a normal, second-nature thing for any person to want to contribute to their community in any way they see fit.

Change is not something that happens quickly unless we are looking down the barrel of a gun. Enduring and lasting change will always need time, patience and relationship-building for trust. Many people who will read this booklet this already do this successfully – we need to do more of it and step forward with confidence, credibility and communication.

For undergraduate trainee primary teachers, they almost certainly will have had their full training time in schools, and should not be overlooked. They started training when demand for primary school teachers was buoyant and now find themselves in a very different world.

So, what is to be done? With smaller classes, schools will need more teachers. To help tackle this current crisis, the government must fund a scheme to allow for all trainees without a post for September to be allocated to a school, with paid employment, until the end of the autumn term. It would cost little more for such a scheme than paying and administering benefits to these trainees that started their programmes in a time when most could have had an expectation of a teaching role at the end of their courses.

Making them supernumerary would ensure that they can keep developing their skills and practicing in schools. New entrants have advantages in terms of their degree knowledge, if straight from university, and should be equipped to understand the advances in new technology and learning strategies. Using these trainees as supernumerary staff also has the benefit of ensuring that if there is a second wave of the coronavirus in the autumn, schools would have the staff to cover for absences due to other staff members self-isolating.

Additional teachers are likely to be found from the pool of unemployed that have registered for benefits. In past recessions, those that left teaching sought to return in large numbers, and it seems likely that this group will be a second source of additional staff to help schools operate in the new landscape.



Underlying whatever strategies are used to staff our schools, there must be an awareness of the need to prevent the attainment gap between those most deprived in society and those even of average incomes, let alone the wealthy, widen still further as a consequence of coronavirus. This would be a bitter legacy of the 150th anniversary of state education in England.

## Young people

*Cllr Mathew Hulbert*

Our young people have had a tough time of it over the past decade. For the most part, they did not cause the economic crash of 2008 and were not responsible for the austerity policies of the coalition and Tory governments post-2010. But they have paid the price of both. The Youth Service, once a staple of the social settlement, has been all but decimated. And that was all well before coronavirus hit.

According to a report produced by UK Youth towards the start of the pandemic, 31 per cent of those in the youth sector expected staff redundancies, with 17 per cent saying that the full closure of their organisation was likely. This will have had a devastating impact not only on the sector itself, and the talented, hard-working youth workers who staff it, but primarily on the young people they serve.

That same UK Youth report listed the likely impacts of young people of the lockdown. Increased mental health and wellbeing concerns, greater loneliness and isolation, lack of safe spaces, challenging family relationships, a higher risk of engaging in gangs, substance misuse, carrying weapons or other harmful practices, and a higher risk of sexual exploitation or grooming were just some of the issues raised.

As we come out of lockdown, the youth sector, along with many others, will need immediate and concrete action from the government to ensure that it remains viable and can provide targeted help to the young people who rely on it. The Lib Dem commitment to invest £500 million in youth services to help them deliver more services for vulnerable young people is an important start. I believe there are now three further actions that we need to take for the youth service to not only survive but thrive.

First, the government must not renege on its promise to invest in the service. They must not be allowed to use this crisis as an excuse to wriggle out of doing what will help some of the most vulnerable young people in society.

Second, we need to ensure proper respect for youth work as a profession. It has never been just about playing table tennis in a draughty hall. It is about fully trained youth workers being individuals that often-troubled young people can look up to and trust and who can help turn lives around to build confident people ready to face the challenges of the future. This means properly funding organisations like the National Youth Agency and the Institute for Youth Work, both of whom do incredibly important work in ensuring that youth workers are suitably trained and properly represented.

**Youth services, if properly resourced and respected, can be the social glue that ensures that all young people, whatever their background or present circumstances, can have the start in life that they need.**

And finally, the government needs to stop the political ping-pong of recent years, which has seen youth work be the preserve first of the Cabinet Office and now of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The youth service, as part of a holistic education, should clearly sit in the Department for Education.

Schools cannot and should not be expected to do everything. Youth services, if properly resourced and respected, can be the social glue that ensures that all young people, whatever their background or present circumstances, can have the start in life that they need. We owe them nothing less.

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# Digital technology

*Julian Huppert, Humaira Ali, Richard Allan, Tim Clement-Jones, Ian Kearns, William Wallace*

## A Liberal vision for digital technology

Over the last couple of decades, the world has been transformed in many ways by the growth of new digital technologies. The recent experience of the coronavirus lockdown displays attributes that were simply impossible not so long ago: working from home, using video calls to stay in touch with friends and family, ordering food deliveries online – all of this would have been unthinkable 20 years ago, and would have provided a very different experience of lockdown.

This change is likely to continue, and to continue to accelerate – new technology drives and enables more new technologies, driving a cascade. It is likely that when the next pandemic hits – hopefully many years from now – people will find it unimaginable that we coped without whatever provision they will think is essential.

It is important that as society we think about how to manage and control that technological change. There are a wide range of possible views. At one extreme, there is technological utopianism, often associated with Silicon Valley libertarians. If we move fast and break things, the argument runs, we will reach some wonderful digital world, where everything will be perfect. An extreme opposite view, perhaps a neo-Luddite one, would argue that innovation must only be allowed to happen in carefully controlled settings – a very statist approach.

Liberals reject both these approaches. We do not want to see free rein for any and all implementations of technology, and are concerned that an ultra-free market would cede control to a handful of ultra-powerful tech players, giving them immense economic, social and political control. Equally, we do not believe that the state or any other organisation can or should seek to manage and control technology and innovation – stifling human creativity and seeking, Canute-like, to prevent the inevitable.

Instead, Liberals seek to guide and channel technological innovation so that it empowers people, creating Aldous Huxley's 'race of free individuals'. We seek to support creativity and innovation among all, and ensure that the proceeds are used for societal benefit as well as private return. We aim to ensure that people are not left behind by technological change. Our focus should be on consequences for people and communities, not on details of particular technologies, systems or processes. We are unafraid to see large-scale disruption of organisations or approaches where there

are better options newly available – but disruption isn't a good in and of itself, and the consequences of disruption to people's lives must be tackled.

We must also maintain the longstanding Liberal commitment to equality. Society is all too unequal along many axes, including income, wealth, access to education, health and much else. As Liberal Democrats, we are committed to ending metaphorical and literal enslavement resulting from poverty. Technological innovation could entrench and magnify the constraints from which people suffer due to relative economic deprivation. One of the thorniest issue as we go forward at an ever-faster pace is ensuring that what we call the fourth industrial revolution does not simply repeat the economic inequalities of the first, which devastated so many individuals and communities. However, technology can also be a force for good, helping to close the existing gaps in society and building a better future.

**One of the thorniest issue as we go forward at an ever-faster pace is ensuring that what we call the fourth industrial revolution does not simply repeat the economic inequalities of the first, which devastated so many individuals and communities.**

In this chapter, we present some proposals and considerations that we consider crucial to delivering this liberal vision in the UK. It is far from comprehensive – this is such a key topic that many pages could be written on each of the paragraphs herein.

## Committee of the Future

Governments in the UK and across the world have frequently acted too slowly in responding to technological change. In some cases this has involved applying outdated and inappropriate regulations, slowing and distorting advances. In others it has involved doing too little, too late.

This is not new. When motorcars were introduced, action was taken to control them. The Locomotive Act of 1865 limited their speed to only 2 mph in cities, towns and villages (and a rapid 4 mph in the countryside), and required them to have at least three drivers, one of whom would carry a red flag 60 yards in front of the vehicle. However, little or no thought was given to how they would shape society. Just imagine how different our world could have been if there had been forward thinking on issues such as town planning, to produce human-centric urban spaces with good vehicular access, rather than surrendering space to motor vehicles in a largely uncontrolled way.

We propose the creation of a Committee of the Future, building on the work done on a smaller scale by groups such as the Cabinet Office Futures team. This would consist of independent experts, much like the Committee on Climate Change, and would have access to strategic planning departments throughout government. It would be charged with providing advice for the UK government and others about likely scenarios over a 15–30 year time scale. This would allow government policies to be shaped by responding to how things will be, rather than how they are seen to be now, which will be rather historical by the time large policies are fully effective. It could be parallel to a Commission for Future Generations, which would ensure that the interests of the people of the future are considered in legislation, and would build on existing models in Wales and elsewhere.

As an examples of topics where this could transform thinking, consider the ongoing discussions about universal basic income. This measure needs to be considered in the light of likely work patterns in the decades to come, not simply how they are now. To choose another example, information on

## Sensing the way forwards

Considering our needs in terms of the five senses helps us think about where technologies can and cannot be used well to serve the public.

Digital solutions are increasingly good at satisfying our senses of sight and hearing. The current crisis has demonstrated how these capabilities have matured, especially with the wide availability of video connections. They are not able to satisfy our senses of touch, smell and taste and nor is this likely in the foreseeable future.

We can look at different sectors through this lens to understand how far technology can meet people's requirements. We expect experiences in the hospitality sector, for example, to involve all five senses, so products that are only visual and aural will be inferior. In the banking sector, by contrast, requirements can very largely be met using sight and sound. Some of us may have a preference for human interaction that will also involve touch, smell and taste in services, but these are 'nice to have' rather than 'essential', as they would be for a hospitality service.

Our model for buying goods has been largely based on the idea that all five senses are needed to make purchasing decisions. We have a retail sector that enables this by bringing goods into spaces close to people, but this comes with significant costs. Online purchasing is likely to become the preferred model where the need to touch, smell and taste goods is not essential.

In contrast, there are important aspects of healthcare that absolutely depend on engaging all five senses. Remote services should focus on those aspects which only use sight and sound, which would still cover a large number of appointments, with efficiency benefits for both patients and practitioners.

As well as a thriving digital economy, we need one that is fair. This is likely to involve significant redistribution, through a universal basic income (see Chapter 4, Equalities), conditional basic income, or other measures, as well as greater controls on abuse in some parts of the gig economy. Flexibility should be used to benefit employees, not just companies.

future internet usage and demand will shape many policy areas, from education and employment to leisure and tourism. Rather than desperately trying to protect the BBC from the likes of Netflix and YouTube, the Committee of the Future would think about what role we want and need the BBC to play in the future, given that the entertainment world is transforming. Ultimately, a Liberal Democrat government would want to make sure that decisions taken now are informed by the future.

## Digital communications

The past few months have shown how crucial digital communications are to all of us. Many people were able to transition rapidly to work from home, relying on digital tools to work remotely. Social lives also transitioned to a virtual space, with video calls replacing physical interaction; online entertainment replaced cinemas. This could not have happened only a few years ago, and it is worth noting how impressive it is that throughout this unparalleled switch, our internet system has held up impressively; there have been no major outages.

There are advantages to this virtual connectivity that will be sustained post-lockdown. For many people, being able to work from home is a huge time saving; the average British commute is an hour per day, time that can be spent more productively. It is also much cheaper for many people to work from home, saving travel costs and not having to buy meals and drinks out. Many people have found themselves using video calls to talk to people they had previously not taken the time to stay in such regular contact with. For many who were physically isolated from friends and family, this has resulted in an increase in their social life and a reduction in loneliness. Many older people, previously reticent to move to video contact, have been forced to learn how to use it, and are now finding it enables more interactions than before. Much of this new behaviour will continue in the ‘new normal’.

But there are downsides too. While many can work from home successfully, for many others it is simply impossible given the roles they perform. This disproportionately affects manual workers and those often poorly paid ‘key workers’ that so much depends upon. Another divide is based on living circumstances. Working from home is much easier in larger houses, with spare rooms available to serve as excellent offices, than for those in crowded conditions, especially with children. The quality of IT equipment is also likely to follow a social gradient.

Work also plays a key role for many people in their social lives. If that is removed, there are very real risks to mental wellbeing for many people. There is no true replacement for physical human contact and presence.

There needs to be significant work to ensure that the existing economic divide is not simply exacerbated if the wealthier are able to work remotely with the benefits of lack of travel, and the less well-off are forced still to commute to work.

There are also many people who are excluded from taking part in the new digital world: those with no or limited internet access, which may result from rurality or economic deprivation. Many older people feel uncomfortable with using some of the newer digital tools, and this could lead to further isolation. And for some people with disabilities, moving online is simply inadequate.

To tackle this exclusion, we believe it is essential to push forward with two schemes. One is to continue to make high-speed internet connectivity available everywhere in the UK. This project needs to make use of the many small companies with ingenious ideas for remote connectivity, rather than being dominated by a handful of large companies, but it is an essential target as our world will, inevitably, become more online.

The second is aimed at helping those who are unable to afford to pay for internet connectivity – those who suffer from ‘data poverty’. Ultimately, we would prefer to use other financial methods to seek to ensure that there is no one who lacks the money necessary for what has become a necessity of life. In the interim, we would introduce a scheme targeted at providing connectivity for those in most need: parents eligible for free school meals, to ensure their children will be able to learn and study online; pensioners receiving pension credits; and anyone on income support.

## **Accessing services in a digital age**

Both public and private services are mid-way through a transition to being fully digitally enabled. Some tasks can now be done entirely online; others lag behind, although the coronavirus crisis has

## Envisioning digital communities

Technology allows us to build interactive communities online, e.g. across businesses, residents, schools, doctors, local authorities, volunteering and more. It allows us to do things online that previously had to be done in person, such as ordering repeat prescriptions, browsing restaurants in the high street or interactively comparing local schools. During a coronavirus-type crisis, where the situation is changing fast, this can be reflected by changes quickly made to an online community – people can have a near real-time view as they would do if they walked down their high street.

With local authorities connected, perhaps planning applications can be better accessed and discussed offering easier co-design, while feedback can be given on trials of road layout changes. Apps can be used for gathering data (such as opportunities for green spaces) or reporting things that need fixing (repairs or even dog poo). Community projects can be listed along with funding sources and opportunities for people to volunteer.

This could facilitate devolved democracy in ways we haven't seen before. While local authorities provide some services and have websites which give information (if you can find it), online integrated platforms that host virtual replicas of physical communities could provide faster access, greater community engagement and more inclusive decision-making.

What of the digitally excluded? This requires the creation of a physical presence that works in tandem with the digital community – for example, one-stop shops such as the Everyone Everyday programme in Barking & Dagenham Borough run by Participatory City, where people can walk in and do most things that they could do online. In coronavirus-type times, appropriate distancing can be applied or even satellite locations can be set up as part of the response effort in every neighbourhood, or even street so that everyone has a way of connecting, receiving tasks and seeking out an ability to contribute.

Through this, digital inclusion could be a priority for those unable to afford technology and those with limited interest or capacity to learn.

Humans aren't yet designed to be operating 100 per cent virtually. Coronavirus has demonstrated that people of all ages and demographics have struggled without physical contact. For the next few generations we must think about the duality of physical and virtual communities. One thing's for sure, though – we cannot continue our antiquated ways and not grasp the opportunities to connect with our communities using every available channel.

forced workarounds for some. This trend will continue, and we welcome it. There are efficiency gains for individuals and companies alike from reducing the need for paperwork, with the associated risks of error. Our vision would be one where all public services are fully digitally available unless there is a good reason why that is not possible, and we anticipate that more and more private services will do the same.

However, that poses a problem for those who cannot or do not want to use digital services. One approach would be to ensure that all services are also available in physical form, for those who

prefer to visit someone in person, or to fill forms out by hand. We are concerned that this could be expensive to provide, especially if it means that multiple locations have to be continually staffed. Alternatively, it could be ever harder for people to travel to more remote locations, especially if they live outside a major population centre. As bank branches close, it will be more difficult for people to travel to use the ones that remain.

As an alternative, we propose that there is an important and valuable role for intermediaries as a profession – people who would go to people’s homes and help those who cannot or do not want to work online themselves. They would need training and appropriate vetting, but could then help people access a whole range of public and private services in a single visit. This would reduce the risk of loneliness and isolation, as well as providing a better service and at a lower cost than other methods of provision to these individuals. This would also have benefits in healthcare, for example – while some 90 per cent of GP appointments could become virtual, for some of the other times, rather than bringing an ill patient to a GP, or sending a GP to them, an intermediary could take any necessary device.

We believe that other services could be transformed by the use of technology. For example, bus services, especially in rural areas, tend to be extremely infrequent, and often need very heavy subsidy. They present an essential lifeline, but at a high cost. Digitally driven alternatives could include enhanced car-sharing options, building on the Uber model (although in a non-monopolistic way), or enabling vehicles to take flexible diversions from their regular routes, such as the Israeli Sherut system. This would mean that a minibus could pick people up from wherever they live to take them into a town centre, rather than following a fixed route.

The state, in the form of national or local government, will need to ensure that the benefits of such transformations accrue to those most in need. It’s noticeable that in California, where much of this is being pioneered, those who are benefiting from easy access to transport and food delivery, for example, are the young energetic people, whereas older people, who need more assistance, are left waiting for poorer services.

## **Building a fair digital economy**

The population of the UK make great use of digital technologies, and we have one of the largest e-commerce sectors in the world. However, for too many this does not translate into their professional lives. The UK remains a laggard when it comes to digital adoption in the workplace.

While the UK might be home to some of the most innovative companies in the world, the gap between them and the rest remains huge. In the services sector, the performance gap between the most digitally transformed and least transformed companies is much larger here than in our international competitors. There is clear evidence that businesses that adopt digital technologies are more resilient and more productive, and we should encourage companies to do so, even if they do not perceive themselves as being in the tech sector. The government needs to act to support the transition to digital technologies, with some financial support, but more pressingly by providing networks or tools to make it easier for companies to do this, especially focusing on SMEs which are less likely to have the internal capacity for this transformation.



During the coronavirus crisis, many businesses have pivoted to digital for the first time ever, whether through using cloud technology and collaboration tools to enable remote working or by moving their businesses online and making use of new platforms and marketplaces. Digital transformations that would have taken years have happened in a few weeks. As the UK restarts the economy it will be all too easy to go back to business as usual, letting innovations wither on the vine and bringing people back into offices.

Early signs show that perceptions of digital adoption have changed and that for many, remote working has been a success, despite the additional stresses of childcare and restrictions on movement. How can government help businesses lock in these digital transformation journeys and build on them? We believe that the government should offer reliefs on government loans tied to investments made in digital in the immediate response or recovery phase, put more money into the Business Basics Programme to accelerate the trialling and rolling out of innovative ways to encourage SMEs to adopt digital, and create a digital business link aimed at providing tailored support in the adoption and roll-out of basic, new and emerging digital technologies across currently non-digitised SMEs.

The very concept of a workplace is being challenged. Companies were making increasing use of co-working spaces previously, and this should be facilitated. This is particularly important to encourage economic development and employment outside the major cities. If people can work anywhere, the pressure to live in a particular – often expensive – location is reduced, and the need for long commutes goes down. It also fits well with more flexible working patterns, particularly allowing people in appropriate jobs to work part-time for more than one employer, but from the same location.

Companies depend on having people with the right skill sets easily available to hire when needed. There are two ways to acquire these people – from within the UK, or from outside. For the former, there is a powerful need to invest further in training and in retraining in digital skills. This should start at school, but needs to continue through later life – lifelong learning accounts, as proposed in the 2019 Liberal Democrat manifesto, would be a good way in which to ensure this. There is also a particular pressure when someone loses their job; good-quality retraining support is likely to be very cost-effective for society, as well as helping the individuals.

Great Britain is an island, but our economy is not. We should be making it easier for people to come into the country, especially since we know that they contribute significantly to our economy, quite apart from the cultural and social benefits. A full review of immigration policy lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but if we are to attract people with the digital skills we need, we must change both rhetoric and action about immigration, and reduce the barriers, financial and otherwise, that immigrants face to come to our country.

It is essential that appropriate levels of funding exist for us to build our tech economy. Government can play an important role in continuing the existing schemes which steer investment into start-ups, but needs increasingly to focus on scale-ups: those companies which have survived the start-up phase and now need support to grow and deliver their full potential.

**We should re-design high streets to focus on human-focused social spaces – cafés, parks, and co-working areas, with freely available high-speed digital connectivity. They should be the heart of the social life of their area, not just the commercial life.**

While seeking to grow our digital economy and to expand the benefits of digital technology across businesses, charities, and government, we must re-evaluate how fair this new digital economy can be.

Technology fundamentally breaks the association between wealth generation and place, which is especially problematic when it comes to taxation and local economies. While a local shop takes money largely from local residents, and largely employs local residents, with taxes attributable to a local area, none of this is true for many digital systems. We need to find ways to attribute tax revenue to the country and local area where the customers are, not where the nominal head office of a firm is situated.

We also need to face decisions about the role of the high street (see further in Chapter 9, Community). Many goods and services that were once available on the high street are now increasingly being supplied online, jeopardising the future of traditional high street shops. One approach is to try to maintain the existing provision, but we feel that this is likely to be an increasingly desperate task. Instead we should re-envision what a high street is in a new digital age. Some services must still be provided in person, and these are likely to survive. We should re-design high streets to focus on human-focused social spaces – cafés, parks, and co-working areas, with freely available high-speed digital connectivity. They should be the heart of the social life of their area – not just the commercial life – and be free from high levels of traffic.

Councils should be strengthened and empowered to support local independent shops, giving them priority over chains. This may include supporting local community-interest delivery models, and reversing the existing bias in favour of chain stores.

## **Data, algorithms, ethics**

New technologies bring new risks as well as new opportunities; this is particularly true for artificial intelligence, and the use of big data and algorithms (ADA technologies). These can all be used to enhance services that we need, allowing better medical diagnostics, more targeted service delivery, and greater efficiency, as well as the all-important aim of working out what we should watch next on Netflix. We want to see competitive digital markets in all these areas.

However, they can also cause huge damage, entrenching and enhancing bias, depriving people of freedom, or leading to surveillance by public or private entities. We have already seen some of the damage that can arise through the scandal of Cambridge Analytica and Facebook.

Our challenge is to develop approaches that maximise the benefits while mitigating the risks. We need a strong legal and regulatory framework, based on human rights principles, that makes it clear to all what is and what is not allowed, that is more thoroughly enforced, and that is focused on helping individuals to be treated fairly and appropriately.

This legal framework needs to be strong enough to protect us all, but we also want to encourage organisations to go beyond any legal minimum, to take more advanced ethical positions. This would include principles such as transparency and explainability, accuracy, robustness and security, accountability, human values and fairness, ideally enshrined in a series of international ethical norms and subject to new, more responsive methods of audit and assessment. We would start by insisting

on higher standards throughout public procurement, using the power of government purchasing to incentivise organisations to aim higher.

We are particularly concerned about algorithmic bias. It doesn't matter if inaccurate tools are used to make shopping recommendations, but if they are used to assist with recruitment, or to assess criminal sentencing, or eligibility for state support, then biases are deeply problematic. We would require the use of any algorithmic tools in serious cases to be subject to independent audit to ensure that there are no significant biases.

Diversity is a crucial aspect of this. Too often technologies are designed by white men, tested on white men, and unsurprisingly then fail to work well on anyone who is not a white man. Alexa responds far more strongly to male voices than female voices, and struggles with accents that are not American. We continue to encourage more diverse workforces, and would require more appropriate testing of any algorithms to ensure they are usable by the whole population.

Access to personal data has become an ever-important aspect of many businesses. Although in principle this may be based on people's consent, in reality, almost no one truly consents. People don't read the legal agreements (understandably), and it is hard for anyone to envisage how their data may be used in the future, and the consequences that may follow. We therefore support the establishment of data trusts: bodies that would independently steward people's data and manage permissions and consents in their interests.

Some technologies are potentially highly problematic, and should be subject to detailed consideration before implementation. For example, we are concerned about the growing use of facial recognition technology, and algorithms in court proceedings. We believe these should not be used until there is a full public risk assessment, based on human rights principles, leading to tight regulation, specific standards, codes and oversight, and probably bans where their use would be inappropriate. Administrative convenience should not outweigh the interests of members of the public, especially those more at risk of discrimination.

Alongside the huge benefits of social media and other internet technologies, there are also serious harms caused online. We are very alarmed by instances of cyberbullying, stalking, and the levels of threats made online, especially those targeted at women and minority groups. We would seek to extend the same protections that apply offline to the online world, while ensuring that any regulations are proportionate, clear, and do not stray into preventing legitimate free speech.

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## **Government data**

British government agencies, central and local, hold a great deal of data – not just on issues such as the economy, traffic, crime and pollution, but also on individual health and educational records, driving and car licenses, tax and national insurance contributions, welfare entitlements, electoral registration and changes of address. They are held in different places and on different computer systems. During the coalition government the Government Digital Service attempted to rationalise

## A Digital Bill of Rights

There should be a Digital Bill of Rights, to safeguard all our digital rights. It would cover 13 key areas, the headlines of which are below. It is crucial that enforcement of the rights is firm, using civil and criminal sanctions as needed.

- 1 Control of personal data
- 2 Control of user content
- 3 Limits on the use of personal data
- 4 A free and open internet
- 5 Freedom of speech
- 6 Privacy
- 7 Surveillance
- 8 Consumer rights
- 9 Encryption
- 10 Right to unrestricted internet access
- 11 Right to access and use of publicly funded data and research
- 12 Digital literacy
- 13 Enforcement of digital rights

Whitehall's information systems, and to provide citizens with a unique identification checkpoint called 'Verify' – which ran into the sand of an attempted public-private partnership. Every ten years central government gathers detailed information on all the UK's inhabitants through the census, but then keeps the details secret for 100 years.

The digital transformation of government is nevertheless creeping forward. It should offer major advantages in the planning and provision of public services. We should not ignore the benefits this could bring for citizen's rights, if accompanied by careful safeguards and maximum transparency. The Windrush scandal, for example, would not have happened if these long-term residents of the UK had been able to access government records of residence, employment, tax and insurance payments. The Home Office did not even try to check whether other departments held such records. The introduction of Universal Credit has been plagued not only by deliberate delays in payments but also by incomplete data on the circumstances and history of claimants. Individual electoral registration leads to incomplete registers; automatic registration, as in some other democratic countries, would ensure that all entitled voters are included.

But the rapid availability of cross-cutting data for government analysis threatens individual privacy and raises the threat of detailed state surveillance. So far there has been only limited progress in constructing a network of independent regulatory bodies, or with providing citizens with the right to check the accuracy of their individual public data. Enthusiastic references in the 2019 Conservative

manifesto to transforming government through data science, without noting the potential risks to individual rights, have increased suspicions of what might be planned. After the 2019 election the Queen's Speech promised a white paper on data strategy before the end of 2020. That's likely to be delayed, but Liberal Democrats need to be ready to respond with demands for additional scrutiny of the proposals and for effective regulation of how data is used. Our party now has many talented data scientists among its members. Their expertise and advice will be valuable in crafting our liberal alternative.

## Tackling fake news

Tackling the spread of fake news is an increasingly urgent challenge. AI tools will soon be generating and spreading disinformation on an industrial scale. They will be doing so to such a high standard that 'evidence' portraying events that never actually happened will be largely indistinguishable from the truth.

At one level the challenge seems obvious. Disinformation campaigns by so-called 'anti-vaxxers' have already caused an increase in the number of deaths from infectious diseases around the world. More recently, we have seen acts of violence based on hoax stories about 5G telecommunications infrastructure being responsible for the coronavirus. In the United States, [one recent study](#) found that between 45 and 60 per cent of Twitter accounts discussing the coronavirus were automated bots spreading misinformation. Most of the accounts were created in a single month, in February 2020, and they have been circulating false medical advice, conspiracy theories about the virus's origins and campaigning for an end to social lockdowns ever since.

The challenge is far more profound than even these stories would suggest. The fact that so many populist politicians lie tells us not that they lack the moral fibre or integrity of the politicians who have preceded them – though a case could be made that many of them do – but that they believe they can get away with it. And they believe that primarily because they have understood the political significance and implications of a new reality in which the truth has only limited social reach.

In that context, they operate on the basis that what matters more than anything else is not what is true or false but whether they can persuade enough people to buy whatever version of events it is that they are selling. To all intents and purposes, the truth is being replaced as arbiter by a battle of competing narratives, largely played out on social media, in which there is no ultimate umpire.

To fully understand the terrifying implications of this development, consider this. If in political and social terms we have moved into a 'post-truth' world then it is a world in which actual events will rarely be shaped by the truth. It is a world made vulnerable to the chaos and sudden destabilisation wrought by whatever lie gains narrative momentum. And a world not running on truth, whether exposed through rigorous investigative journalism or the application of reason inherent to the scientific method, is a world no longer running on Enlightenment values. It is, instead, a perilous step back to something more akin to the Dark Ages.

# Community

*David Boyle, Keith House, Brian Paddick, Shelia Ritchie, Emily Smith*

## Power to people

*David Boyle*

Four decades or so ago, I remember one crusty old Labour councillor telling me, with some pride, that he put any letters from constituents addressed to his home unopened in the bin. They were not treating him and his position with sufficient dignity, he said. I can't believe the same thing happens in post-coronavirus Britain very much, and partly because we seem to have recognised – perhaps for the first time – just how much services rely on ordinary people and neighbours to make them effective, as volunteers in their own neighbourhoods.

Liberals have always regarded voluntaryism as vital to a civilised society, and the huge increase in volunteering during the first few days of the coronavirus crisis demonstrated that there is a huge frustrated demand among people to make contribute. Even so, that councillor was a measure of what local government used to be like – pompous, opaque, patronising, closed and inefficient. Those were the days when people were occasionally allowed into meetings to listen, but never to speak. Although the Lib Dems have never taken national power in their own right, they became the instrument by which local government was reformed – and places like Liverpool or Kingston are a great deal better as a result than they would otherwise have been.

Liverpool is a good example. It was Liberal councillors there who allowed the extraordinary growth of housing co-ops, starting with Weller Street – people building or refurbishing their own homes. It is a movement which provided itself with such momentum that it was able to face down the implacable opposition of Militant councillors when Militant took control of the city in the early 1980s.

One of the problems with community development is that there is no history, agreed or otherwise. Every government believes itself to be a pioneer, just as every interested think tank has their own pet experiment which usually lasts just as long as the funding. That has made the business of making communities more effective deeply dysfunctional.

We barely notice that the way in which we now fund community activity demands constant innovation. Those who are supposed to benefit gain little in the way of financial rewards but they are supposed to do the work voluntarily, until the end of the three-year cycle – when those who actually benefit wind the whole thing up and put in a new, and innovative, funding bid.

That is a cynical view. But for all the excitement about community development, precious little has stuck. It is hard, often, for political people to know exactly whose side they are on, at least when they are running cities. They fall foul of the two great democratic traditions that are built into the foundations of discussion when it comes to improving pretty much anything – and certainly when it comes to local regeneration. Both *representative democracy* and *participative democracy* have their own narratives, traditions and claims.

Sometimes they are a continuum, working happily and productively side by side. Sometimes they can be a source of conflict, of competing claims to legitimacy, struggling over shifting boundaries – the spark of revolution, just as they can also provide the basis of peace. Local government is the bastion of the former. Communities often provide the best examples of the latter. But when the boundaries are disputed between the two of them – or when one side invades the bastions of the other – there can be spectacular fallings-out. When the going goes right, and both sides can work together – both in their own legitimate spheres – then worthwhile things begin to happen.

What stands in the way of these small miracles working sustainably? The short answer is that both Labour and Conservative administrations tend to fall back on technocratic solutions. So, unfortunately, do some Lib Dems, who forget – if, indeed, they ever knew – that they are at their most effective as a political expression of countercultural anger at the technocratic establishment.

Part of the problem is this great divide between those two kinds of democracy. As Lib Dems progressed politically, they lost touch crucially with those community roots, and identified perhaps too strongly as representatives rather than as participants. There is nothing worse than councillors standing on their dignity. As I write, I have beside me an account of a local poll in Ledbury in 2005, where 800 locals queued to vote. The county council had already ‘decided’ the issue, but I don’t think that excuses the reaction of Ledbury’s county councillor: ‘I suppose you could say the referendum was an exercise in democracy, but it was an exercise in futility actually. So 10.3 per cent of the electorate turned out. Big deal.’

**As Lib Dems progressed politically, they lost touch crucially with those community roots, and identified perhaps too strongly as representatives rather than as participants.**

Not a Lib Dem, I think and hope.

The problem also works the other way too. I remember the community ‘representatives’ appointed by Southwark Council in 2000 as part of the Elephant & Castle redevelopment, saying similar things about anyone who tried to do anything at all without first kowtowing to them.

Pomposity is deeply unattractive, but it is a symptom, not a cause, of what happens when the two elements of democracy fail to work in tandem.

But there are other reasons, and the rest of this section looks at some of them.

### **Why the UK can’t hack it #1: centralisation**

Britain is still, despite devolution, one of the most centralised states in the world. We are steeped in that culture, which means that even those most enthusiastic about localism are stuck with the political language and accepted political solutions that derive from a centralised political culture. It is difficult for British politicians, however much they might want to, to find a new language that can genuinely break free from the old assumptions. Hence the narrowness of the current debate. Once

you take localism back to first principles – the ability of the people to challenge their political and economic masters – you realise how narrow the debate has become in Britain, and how stuck.

The problem was, and remains, the imperial mindset: British government does not believe it has anything to learn from the local, whether they are people or institutions. The result is that we are increasingly supplicants to the central state.

This has led over the decades to a devastating blow to local life in the UK, helped by punitive health and safety regulations, the products of a cabal of corporations, central bureaucrats and risk-averse insurers. It represents a slow emptying of our institutions, a destruction of our way of life as tangible as any terrorist attack, a rotting away of the nation of shopkeepers – of imagination, innovation and pride at local level – to a miserable, slavish acceptance of whatever narrow aspects of life our centralised systems choose to deliver.

This is impoverishing our culture and the services and institutions we rely upon. It is also a far broader problem than the current debate about localism would have us believe. It represents a shift in our status as citizens, a diminution of our individual power, a reduction to the status of supplicants to giant and distant organisations, public and private and often a mixture of both. The result is a massive loss of confidence in what local people or staff can achieve, and a growing frustration with the slowness of change. This frustration feeds back into more centralisation, more sclerosis, and more centralisation again, because it gives the illusion of change without actually achieving anything.

At the heart of all this is a decadent metropolitan snobbery. It is because the contempt that the City of London feels for industry and small business, and the contempt that Whitehall civil servants feel for their local counterparts, has been swallowed whole by Labour and Conservative governments alike. That is the heart of our Suppliant State.

This points towards a return to some of the themes that the Liberal leader Jo Grimond set out in the 1950s. It means a broader kind of localism capable of explaining why government is so ineffective, why prisons are so useless at reducing crime, why the NHS is so bad at preventing illness, why the welfare state fails to reduce poverty, and why Westminster is so plodding in its delivery of real change. It means that localism needs to go much further, and include measures to:

- Give real powers, mayors and budgets to parish councils.
- Mutualise public services so that they are owned and controlled by those who use them.
- Provide a Subsidiarity Act that gives the right of local people to manage their affairs.

## **Why the UK can't hack it #2: giantism**

Like so many other wonks, I've been racking my brains to work out why the UK has been hit so much worse than other countries by coronavirus – except, of course, Donald Trump's dysfunctional USA and Bolsonaro's Brazil. There are no reasons that I can think of why people here should be weaker or more feckless – but I do see that so many of our institutional support structures have disappeared or been reorganised, sold off or hollowed out.

We have seen successive governments determined that services should be managed by bigger and bigger units, and all in the name of efficiency, understood in the narrowest sense. But far from efficiency savings from centralisation, we are stuck with horrendous externalities – damaging



mistakes and hospital bugs in big hospitals, disaffection and failure in our huge factory schools. Communities need human-scale institutions if they are going to work as intended.

The journalist and author Simon Jenkins quoted a Plymouth NHS trust manager forced to spend £1,500 on a shelf which would have cost £100 at a local store, thanks to central regulations and controls. These extra costs are not, of course, recorded as a by-product of the centralisation that is supposed to be bringing ‘efficiency’, any more than the army of auditors is. Even without them, according to the economic historian Robert Dahl, there ‘is no evidence of any significant economies in city government attributable to larger size’.

In the same way, when you look at the evidence, small schools provide for less bullying, better results and more activities than big schools. Smaller hospitals are cheaper to run per patient than big ones, and small police forces catch more criminals than big ones do. Unfortunately, because big institutions carry bigger salaries, the tendency has been away from human scale. Among the things we need:

- A public sector watchdog like the Competition and Markets Authority, designed to keep our institutions small enough to be effective.
- A Right to Request Flexible Service Delivery. In each case, the provider would not be obliged to provide it if they claim it is impossible – like talking to consultants on the phone, or studying a different combination of subjects at school, or be put to bed by carers later than 5pm – but they would be obliged to explain why, and their letter would have to be posted on their website.

### **Why the UK can’t hack it #3: too much professionalisation**

It doesn’t work bringing government nearer people, or simply electing locals on to boards, important as that is. No matter how obsessed with meetings politicians are, most people will not take part in them unless they are engaged in other ways, supporting neighbours or delivering services alongside professionals.

The huge suppressed demand for a useful role was obvious during the coronavirus crisis, when 750,000 people signed up as volunteers in just four hours. This implies that, by the end of this crisis, with a bit of luck, we should have a cadre of volunteers who are integrated into the warp and weft of services, yet out of reach of their hopeless, dysfunctional [tickbox](#) systems. They are also people who will be helping others take the first steps along the same path to recovery as they are, and as part of their own treatment.

We might then be a little closer to the classic statement of the radical centre that John Kennedy never quite said: ‘Ask not what your NHS can do for you; ask what you can do for the NHS.’

What we need now includes:

- A right to work in public services as volunteers – as part of our own recovery – alongside, and playing as important a role as, professionals.
- An integrated preventive layer alongside services, made up of time banks and other ways of spreading the benefits of mutual support, whose task is to build supportive communities around services and help people get better faster.
- Contract services to reduce demand year on year.

#### **Why the UK can't hack it #4: fake localism and tickbox**

Some political measures are difficult to see clearly at the time. While the British government was devolving power to Scotland and Wales, it was also quietly tightening central control using KPIs and targets – a phenomenon known more recently as ‘tickbox’.

Most of us know precisely what is wrong with tickbox – that most of these measures or targets either miss the point or get finessed by managers. Those who can't see it tend to be the elite forces who run the world – and who believe what they are told by the frontline. And who dream of automated systems that can manage organisations without what they fear are messy human interventions or decisions.

The result is that officials tick boxes to allow them to move on but where nothing has actually changed, or we get tickbox targets which focus on the wrong things because what we really want – love, care, happiness – isn't measurable.

Or we find ourselves in a ridiculous complaints loop where it is impossible to talk to a real person who would understand our problem in seconds.

Or we get irritated by being asked on a five-point Likert scale how we would rate our latest minor interaction with the bank – where the rep ‘suggests’ that you might make it a 5.

It is an excellent example of how we take back control of the world – though tickbox has encouraged an administrative culture where nobody takes decisions.

What we might do about it:

- Borrow and adapt the bottom up method used in the Dutch healthcare system called ‘scrap sessions’, where staff get together to identify targets or tickbox bureaucracy that needs to go.
- End most targets and KPIs in public services after their successful dumping by the NHS during the recent crisis, and plough the resulting savings back into the front line.
- Let local institutions choose their own KPIs, as proposed by the system thinker John Seddon.

#### **Why the UK can't hack it #5: economic centralisation**

‘Be more expensive,’ the Liberal local government pioneer Joseph Chamberlain urged his fellow councillors in the 1870s. It was a demand not that they spend more but that they be more ambitious. That vision of urban pride and innovation is the basis for the libraries, art galleries, sewage and transport systems that remain of Britain's great Victorian cities.

The implication is that the engines of prosperous lives are at local level, which means building the institutions that can support entrepreneurs, or providing the local banking services they need, to recycle savings as investment. They need to work for people and be responsible to local people. We have long since lost our institutions for enterprise and we need them back.

I would suggest:

- A new generation of local banks, preferably mutuals after Lib Dem legislation in 2014 which made co-op banks legal (the Co-op bank is not actually a co-op).

- Organise a major anti-trust drive to break up the oligopolies – banking and energy, for example – and restore some diversity to regional economies.



Probably the most ambitious community development project happening in the UK is the Big Local network, run by the Local Trust, an offshoot of the lottery, which is giving £1 million to each of 150 areas over ten years.

The objective is genuine change, aware that this can only come from neighbourhoods which take their own decisions. When regeneration money has cascaded down from on high, with their batteries of targets, checklists and KPIs – and New Deal for Communities had £1.7 billion over eleven years – change has been extraordinarily elusive. There were jobs and crime reductions but, sometimes, all their efforts managed was to raise local property prices and drive out the very people who were supposed to be benefitting.

In the world of the conventional regeneration industry, of marinas and shopping centres, that would have been judged a success.

The Big Locals are not, like some regeneration projects, an attempt simply to raise property values – or any other single metric; it was not an outside agenda imposed on the locals, like outsiders imposing the economic equivalent of the missionary position. This is not a programme that is about checking people neatly off on spreadsheets.

Can it be done? There are examples around the world – the community banks of Brazil, the linked co-operatives of Mondragon – but not many, which seek out the entrepreneurial elements and set them as free as they can. There is an agenda that needs an alliance of interest between representative and participative democracy.

When the French government launched the *Total Fond d'Experimentation*, in 2009, it had a similar open-ended invitation. But the Hollande administration replaced it with the much more tightly controlled and regulated *La France s'Engage*. These two elements war with each other in ambitious schemes – open-mindedness versus focus, enthusiasm versus theory. It may be that, as the decade progresses, a similar shift takes place in the Big Local, perhaps more than once. If so, I hope the emphasis goes on using the broad experimentation and variety to produce a theory, rather than the other way around.

Liberals, it seems to me – at least in theory – have the possibility of understanding both sides of democracy. They have provided a huge personal commitment outside the town hall, over and over again. But they might also be in a position to extend the Big Local experiment by helping to set up a Community Wealth Fund to invest in the most 'left behind' neighbourhoods.

Recent research suggests that there is an urgent need for funding to improve social and civic infrastructure in these neighbourhoods and their connectivity to economic opportunities in the wider area. A Community Wealth Fund could provide this vital funding, by using the next wave of dormant assets coming on stream – about £2 billion from bonds, stocks, shares, insurance and pension funds, due during this parliament – backed

**It means believing that both the richest and poorest places can take decisions affecting their own lives and that this principle is more important than administrative neatness or worries about postcode lotteries or all the other codewords for centralisation.**

by larger companies. This would be used at hyper-local level, based on decisions by local people, plus support, to build their capacity.

Yet this agenda requires a shift in our understanding of politics, a broadening of debate beyond the obsessive, technocratic pie-cutting of budgets to something more fundamental and related to people's lives. It means believing that both the richest and poorest places can take decisions affecting their own lives and that this principle is more important than administrative neatness or worries about postcode lotteries or all the other codewords for centralisation.

It requires politicians to believe in ordinary people – not as ignorant or impertinent (Conservative) or as potential abusers or hopelessly damaged (Labour). It means recognising that people working through the most ferocious difficulties and making things happen for their families the whole time.

And it means a shift in political rhetoric, being prepared to devolve responsibility to the people as well as power. It means a radical new offer from politicians to the public. Not any more 'ask and you shall receive' – nobody believes that any more, least of all the supplicant voters. It needs to say: we can achieve these things, but not without your help.

## **Trusting councils, trusting communities**

*Cllr Emily Smith*

The coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on how our communities function. The lockdown has demonstrated that community empowerment works – but also the lack of trust that government has in local councils and communities, and that communities have in national government.

Having taken control of the council in 2019 with a landslide Liberal Democrat win, I represent the district that is home to Harwell, one of Europe's leading science and innovation campuses where international collaboration is key. When a vaccine for the coronavirus is found, Harwell will be ready to mass-produce it. In this international crisis, our international community is clearly key; but so too are our local communities with their sense of place – people's feeling of belonging to the place in which they live.

When we went into lockdown, in a matter of days my rural council had set up systems for buying and distributing food, and ensured that a network of volunteer groups were in place to provide food, medicine and support to their neighbours and vulnerable people. It was incredible to see how many people were happy to help keep their neighbours safe, and how much they seemed to be getting out of the new connections with their neighbours that were forged amongst the fear and sadness that this terrible infection has brought. Inhibitions about talking to strangers subsided. Far more people became involved in planning services and making decisions on behalf of their communities. The council and local volunteers were trusted partners in ensuring that support systems were in place, and in turn this seemed to generate a greater understanding and appreciation of council services.

During the crisis councils were freed from some national deadlines and targets so that we could focus on the coronavirus response: working with our diverse communities to keep people safe and save lives, while keeping frontline services running. I have received so many positive comments from the public about our waste collectors and other frontline staff, and I am convinced that this is

because local people are enjoying more contact with our officers and councillors, and now better understand what we do. Working with communities and trusting local people works.

This experience is in stark contrast to where the government has tried to control the response centrally. When the government's system of food parcels for shielded people came up short, my council organised additional parcels to feed their family members, and included sanitary products and catered for different dietary requirements. By the time the 'Good Sam' NHS volunteering recruitment app went live, the council had already identified or activated thousands of volunteers to support people in isolation. With 'Track and Trace', the government has acknowledged that tracing and outbreak control need to be run locally, while, at the time of writing, at the national level the government is still trying to get the national tracking app off the ground. Almost every national initiative during the pandemic has failed – and in each case our local communities have stepped in to make it work: police community support officers, councillors, health professionals, council staff, community groups and individuals doing what is best for communities, partly because they were asked to, but also because it makes sense. Local people are best placed to understand their local communities.

We are reaching out to communities in new ways. The use of virtual meetings and surgeries, the greater use of social media as well as more conversations with change-makers in our communities has helped develop new and existing networks.

Government should not only be empowering local councils because there is a crisis. This should be the norm. Councils need to be free to make decisions about and with their local communities to foster a strong sense of place and belonging. Councils should take more risks and to try out and establish systems that work for local places.

The planning system is a good example where national aims are hampered by a lack of power at local level. Despite national and international targets around carbon reduction, councils' local plans and Neighbourhood Plans are not allowed to include policies for low-carbon homes above what national building regulations require – so despite councils wanting to build zero-carbon homes they have to permit new building that we know will harm the climate.

Similarly, we would like to build more homes that local people can afford to rent or buy, but the government definition of 'affordable' is anything but in the south east – so trying to get developers to build the sort of homes we want is almost impossible thanks to national policy and viability tests.

It all comes down to trust. Councillors are accountable and responsible individuals elected on manifestos that address improving the lives of local people. Central government must start trusting us and the people who elect us: trusting us with more public money; relaxing the rules about which services are statutory or discretionary, so that we can work with communities to decide what local need is; allowing us to deviate from and go beyond national planning policy where doing so helps us to meet national and international environmental aims and improves the quality of life for residents.

Local councils and communities have proved throughout the pandemic to be nimble, effective and reliable and we should hang on to that and make the case for place-based politics and localism. Localism only works in the long term if communities are armed with the powers and the resources to act. Local collaboration can provide fantastic services that respond to local need, but this work must

be valued and prioritised by national government – both because it fosters a stronger sense of place, and because it works.

## The problem with housing

*Cllr Keith House*

Housing has been a political Cinderella for more than 40 years. Political parties and governments have recognised a fundamental problem – lack of supply – yet failed to will the means to address the challenge of meeting Britain’s housing needs. Governments of the right have prioritised market housing supply, with an ideological desire to boost ownership. Those of the left have mouthed support for social housing without boosting supply, instead creating a new concept of ‘affordable housing’ not subsidised enough to be affordable. Britain will emerge into a post-coronavirus world with these challenges unmet, with underlying policy failures more exposed and a crisis for the young, for the under-employed, for those with health and care needs.

Our new normal will be a demand side led by a rapidly rising need for homes at subsidised rent, and a supply side where smaller developers have been squeezed out of the market. The global financial crash of 2008–09, just as the recession of 1990–91, saw housebuilding fall off a cliff as money supply dried up, planning enquiries and applications declined and were delayed, and small firms failed. In an environment where local authorities were not developing social homes, housing need climbed as supply slid, fuelling longer-term pressures, pushing up prices and reducing affordability.

How do governments step in? Typically, by reforms to planning that pass the burden of community facilities and infrastructure from developers to under-funded councils, reducing environmental standards as a quick fix to boost building, and throwing lumps of cash at social landlords to buy completed but unsold new homes.

We can do better, with a more considered approach focused on people and communities.

Easy bits first. For the majority, the housing market works: secure tenants of housing associations and councils, mortgage payers with reliable incomes, post-mortgage payers in homes they want to live in for years to come, even some market tenants that want the flexibility of frequent moves and no liabilities.

This is still a majority, but it is now a shrinking one. The growing minority includes tenants of buy-to-lets where the landlord needs to sell, mortgage payers now redundant due to a changing economy, older folk wishing to downsize due to changing needs or declining pension investments, young couples seeking home ownership yet trapped in high rents into their 30s and beyond.

The post-coronavirus world that has fractured our economy requires a shift in approach. Lack of supply remains the underlying issue. There is no shortage of land. Interest rates are likely to remain low into the medium term, so that cash is available. Housing remains an investment with long-term value. The gaps are the political will to deliver homes at the local level, in a national culture of centralised government, and an industry concentrated on a small number of volume builders that can only ever meet the demands of a narrow part of the market.

A municipal revival in housing is needed to improve supply. This is not about resurrecting the monolithic council housing estates of the 1960s. It is about creating new communities of mixed tenures with homes to meet local need. By acting as long-term investors, councils and social landlords can develop zero-carbon homes for sale, for market rent and for social rent. They can be the catalysts to drive up standards in the housebuilding industry as a whole. Simple reforms to free this investment from the Right to Buy, yet with Rent to Own and shared ownership options allowing renters to transfer part of their rent into future ownership, can meet the aspiration for ownership while ensuring retention of investors' value for ongoing building.

The market itself will continue to play the major part in delivering the homes we need. With more people working from home, decent space standards and guaranteed fast internet connectivity are prerequisites for our new normal. Higher environmental standards and net biodiversity gain need to be the norm, not the exception.

A time traveller from 1910 would recognise very few aspects of Britain in 2020. Cricket and tea shops would be two. How we build homes would be a third. Construction remains slow and costly. It is environmentally damaging, puts unmet demands on transport and is hugely wasteful. Changing how we build is part of the post-coronavirus world. Off-site manufacturing with energy-efficient materials, including the greater use of timber, can improve standards. Thinking carefully about place as part of design can help shape communities people want to live in, not create identikit communities where a street in Cheshire looks the same as a street in Cornwall or Croydon.

Housing need will not be met until housing is seen as an opportunity rather than a threat by existing communities. People do not object to new homes because they don't like homes. Objections are primarily due to perceived threats: more traffic, lack of access to schools and doctors, loss of green space. Securing community infrastructure as part of long-term financing rather than quick wins for remote investors needs to be part of our new way of thinking about homes and communities, reducing conflict in planning and lengthy delays between concept and completion.

Municipal funding can help end the boom-and-bust cycle that makes housing an unattractive industry to work in, with an ageing workforce. Fiscal incentives can help support new small and medium-sized entrants into the housing market, improving supply-chain resilience and creating career paths.

Quick interventions will be necessary to start this journey in a time of national crisis. The immediate pressure of a fall into a deep recession, with rising unemployment and new pressures on homelessness, can only be tackled by the state. Guaranteed purchase schemes to bring builders back to sites, just as in 2009–10, should play a part. Councils can take a lead on these, understanding their places better than Whitehall, just as they can unblock stalled sites with bespoke solutions.

Demand for rented homes will spiral, with the most pressing need being for subsidised homes. Joint working between government and social landlords is essential as more of the market shifts tenure. Even with low interest rates, mortgage defaults, last seen at volume in Britain in the early 1990s, will require policy interventions to be considered, from longer payment holidays to government equity investment to keep people in their homes.

**The gaps are the political will to deliver homes at the local level, in a national culture of centralised government, and an industry concentrated on a small number of volume builders that can only ever meet the demands of a narrow part of the market.**

Support through the benefits system can tackle new family debt in the rented sector. That requires urgent reform to the local housing allowance system to put meeting need first, just as with mortgaged homes. The scandal of food banks in a leading world economy must be consigned to history. Tackling homelessness requires more intensive support from local authority staff as a new pressure on councils. But it can be linked, with innovation and some flexibility, to the initial low demand for newly built market homes.

It will be a struggle over the coming months to genuinely meet housing need and to give not just the majority of people, but all people, the security of a decent home they can afford not only now, but into the future. Housing cannot remain a Cinderella.

## **The High Street post coronavirus**

*Sheila Ritchie*

Monday was my birthday: day 56 of lockdown. Mid-afternoon, a nice man dressed in Lycra and a cycle helmet turns up at my door with a goodie bag of cheese, crackers and chutney: a birthday gift from my disorganised family, who had phoned the Inverurie deli that very morning. Patrick had cycled the six miles, all uphill, to deliver it to me on time, even though he was offering cycle deliveries only within the town.

The lockdown has demonstrated the support of our local shops for our communities. The greengrocer, the butcher, the closed-but-delivering deli, the local garden centres, the co-op stores in the villages, the pharmacies: community after community has stepped up to support them right back. No one wants to travel long distances, so local shopping has become a thing. Food miles have been reduced, and shopping once a week has, again, become the norm.

There have been insolvencies and tens of thousands of jobs lost; but online – especially, but not just, Amazon – has thrived. The reduced traffic has meant that it's been far more pleasant to walk to the shops. Air quality has improved. People – strangers – have stopped to chat. And we have managed fine without the betting shops.

How do we keep it like that, and, more importantly, how do we develop and grow the good? As Liberal Democrats we should, as always, start with community, and empower communities, mostly through empowering local councils, to create the high streets they want. We need to let the market do its thing, but instruments of public policy should be used to make things happen, not to stop them. We have to start with abolishing business rates on retail outlets.

Land value taxation is the key way to make the change. The Liberal Democrat proposal for the Commercial Landowner Levy (CLL) would remove the value of improvements (new shop fronts, better fit-outs, carbon-reducing solar panels and heat pump systems, improved turnover) from consideration, and tax only the land value of commercial sites, leaving landlords and tenants free to invest without fear of being taxed on the benefit they provide. Councils will not face the same pressures to allow out-of-town shopping centres when they will get no (or not much more) more rateable income than before. Local authorities should be empowered to provide CLL holidays to new businesses, to encourage start-ups.



The next big problem is landlords. The CLL would incentivise landlords to lease at lower rents, rather than to leave shops vacant, since the charge is on the land, not the business. Codes of practice for landlords and tenants should be updated and enshrined in legislation. Upwards-only rent review clauses should be abolished. Repairing terms should, of necessity, favour those who invest in improvements, not the passive absent owners. As landlords, there should be an assumption that councils may use their commercial stock to support their development plans, not only to get the best financial return.

Local authorities should have the power to require landlords to keep high street properties in good order, with an underlying power of acquisition and immediate resale. Landlords, of course, benefit from this, too. They will own property in more attractive neighbourhoods, thus enhancing the value.

The Planning Acts, and in particular the use classes orders, should be significantly refined. The retail and service use classes should be disaggregated. It should not be possible, without planning consent, to have clusters of bookies, coffee shops, financial services offices, or even charity shops. The plethora of charity shops – which exist because they don't pay rates – is dealt with by the CLL, which is paid by the landlord, no matter who is in occupation; but one still would not want to have them take over whole neighbourhoods.

There are other planning conflicts. Vibrant town centres are occupied and are lived in. People do not want to be wakened, or kept up late, by night-time deliveries, or carousing. Easy car parking is both desirable and undesirable. Local authorities are best placed to balance these conflicting needs.

Councils should be encouraged – maybe even required – to plan for the long term with their communities, to invest in high street environments, to make it pleasant to be there. Not much use in having pretty flowers in planters, if the pavement is so cracked that it impedes mobility.

How do we pay for all this? Tax the online companies properly. Use VAT on sales; Amazon can offshore profit, but not its customers. Stop the warehousing frauds which are avoiding billions of pounds worth of tariffs a year on imported goods. These two measures alone would level the playing field for retailers enormously.

And we need to act quickly to take early advantage of the beneficial changes in shopping habits the pandemic has created.

## **What coronavirus has taught us about policing**

*Brian Paddick (Lord Paddick)*

Policing in the UK is based on consent. We do not have enough police officers to effectively keep the peace, prevent crime and bring offenders to justice without the active support and cooperation of the public, whether it's complying with police officers' lawful, reasonable and proportionate requests, dialling 999 when they see something suspicious, or giving evidence in the criminal courts. Trust and confidence in our police service are essential if policing by consent is to operate effectively – something politicians seem to have lost sight of in recent years. The alternative, policing by force and weight of numbers, is illiberal and open to abuse.

The coronavirus legislation was badly drafted, rushed through without proper parliamentary scrutiny, and the lines between the law and government guidance were blurred. As a result, the role of the police in the pandemic has become confused between law enforcement and ensuring compliance with the guidance – leaving home without a reasonable excuse was the law, keeping two metres apart was only guidance.

General agreement on what is expected of our police officers, what their roles and responsibilities should be, and a wider understanding of what the capacity and capabilities of our police forces are, is crucial. Either the police must be trained, equipped and resourced to meet public expectations, or politicians must take responsibility for modifying public expectations of their police.

We have also learnt from this crisis and the ongoing terrorism situation about the lack of resilience within policing, and, as a result of the unreasonable and unrelenting pressure, the negative impact on individual police officers. Relying on cancelled rest days, extended tours of duty and deferred annual leave is not a sustainable or reliable way to maintain the health of policing or its officers. Expecting our police officers to be caring, patient and reasonable, when we do not appear to care about them, are intolerant of their mistakes and unreasonable in the way we reward them, is incompatible with policing by consent. The social contract between us and our police has become imbalanced.

At the same time as we remove the justifiable causes of their siege mentality, we need the police to be honest, open and accepting of the deep-rooted concerns many in our communities have about being over-policed and under-protected. There are substantial numbers of people who do not see them as ‘our police’, and as a result, the ‘policing by consent’ contract has broken down. Their lived experience and their disproportionate representation in stop-search, arrest, charge, and deaths in police custody reinforce their perception that the police are not there to protect them but only to use force against them. Whatever the cause, it must be identified, addressed and eradicated.

**There are substantial numbers of people who do not see them as ‘our police’, and as a result, the ‘policing by consent’ contract has broken down.**

The police service will struggle to represent the communities it serves if the experience of minorities in street encounters with police officers continues to be disproportionately negative. The less the police service looks like them, the less willing they will be to actively support and cooperate with the police. There may be fault on both sides, but someone needs to break this spiral of decline. The responsibility rests on police leaders to do it. We need to look again at the lessons from Lord Scarman’s report into the Brixton Riots of 1981 and this time, learn them.

Enforcing the law at all costs is not acceptable.

We have seen significant reductions in police personnel in the past decade – police officers, police community support officers and police support staff. Visible uniformed presence on the streets and in other public spaces has diminished almost to vanishing point. The heaviest losses have been amongst police community support officers, the most constant visible presence on our streets and the bridge between the police and communities. Police support staff have been replaced by police officers who should be on the streets, not behind desks. Even if the police address the concerns of minorities, they will lose the trust and confidence of the majority if the public’s emergency calls go unanswered, their crimes remain unsolved and their communities are blighted by anti-social

behaviour. Police officer numbers, above a critical level, may make little difference to crime. Below that critical level – as we are now – criminals feel they can act with impunity, community contact and intelligence is lost, and police forces and police officers are stretched to breaking point.

If we want to see policing by consent operate effectively, the police service needs the resources to invest in the technology, training, equipment and human resources necessary to meet the public's expectation of them, expectations managed, and resources provided by politicians. It is not a blank cheque, it is a balance, and with resources come responsibilities. In particular, in return, politicians must require the police to meet the expectations of all communities, without exception.

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# International relations

*Christine Cheng, Martin Horwood, Peter Frankopan, Whit Mason, Fionna Tod, Irina von Wiese*

## A liberal voice in a changed world

*Martin Horwood*

You might imagine that a common enemy in the form of the coronavirus would bring the world together as never before. Instead, the pandemic has sharpened and accelerated trends that were already alarming liberals and progressives the world over.

The crisis has triggered the sudden closing of borders, even within the EU's treasured free movement area, which was already under pressure from migration crises and the domestic politics of immigration. Hasty export controls on food and medical equipment have raised more barriers between nations.

State bailouts and stimulus, life-saving both economically and literally, are storing up debt crises and causing fights over burden-sharing. Nerves are fraying, from the IMF to the European Central Bank.

Relations between Washington and Beijing— already sour from trade wars and growing geopolitical rivalry— have descended into a coronavirus blame game full of nationalist rhetoric and misinformation on both sides. And both powers chose this moment to escalate rather than reduce tensions around the world. The US increased Iran's coronavirus agony and invoked the Defense Protection Act against its Canadian and European allies, while China sent troops over India's Himalayan border and ramped up its belligerent rhetoric on Taiwan as the world worried about face masks and PPE.

Populist hardliners worldwide have wrought varying degrees of havoc by denying the severity of the crisis— as Putin and Bolsanaro have done— or by seizing the moment for authoritarian power grabs, like Orbán and Duterte. At the moment where a coordinated, multilateral response was most needed, Trump pulled the US out of the World Health Organisation.

But it is not in the nature of Liberals to hunker down and wait for global economic collapse or escalating conflict.

As the contributors to this chapter spell out, the pandemic may yet give us the opportunity to fight back and use this crisis to make the case for new forms of global co-operation and long-overdue

reforms. Brexit threatens to leave the UK retreating into its shell. But there is also a moment here to champion global co-operation, defuse confrontations, and to learn from others.

Peter Frankopan underlines the need for Britain to abandon its outdated exceptionalism and construct new global alliances. Whit Mason wants us to realise that potential but spells out the need within British government for culture change and more strategic focus – and for a realistic understanding of our new place in the world. Irina von Wiese rings the alarm bells for human rights and democracy during the crisis, even in the heart of Europe, but argues for a fightback based on international collaboration. My own contribution accepts that the challenges for sustainable development have only been increased by coronavirus, and makes the case for more investment but also for shaking up the way we do development.

Fionna Tod exposes the systemic weaknesses that have characterised health policy worldwide, laid bare by the coronavirus. She warns that future global health challenges could be even deadlier so the need to invest in more resilient and equitable global health systems is more critical than ever. And Christine Cheng offers us a pathway to resisting Trumpian cold war rhetoric but answering the genuine need for a co-ordinated and strategic response to China's determination to fill the global power vacuum.

Coronavirus may have made the world an even more dangerous and daunting place than it was a year ago, but that world needs Britain to turn outwards, not inwards, and to actively seek allies to meet that challenge.

## The new order

*Peter Frankopan*

The UK 'has always taken a leading role in responding to global challenges' according to the government. This is not so much a debateable statement as a palpably false one, given that the United Kingdom did not come into being until the Act of Union of 1707. Taken over the long term, the UK's 'golden age' was both recent and highly unusual, the result of a particular set of circumstances and contexts that are often poorly understood or simply overlooked.

Amongst the many challenges facing the UK today is finding a place in the world of the twenty-first century. Framing the country's role in the context of the past is unhelpful, if not a case of wishful thinking. Statements that celebrate the centrality of the UK to global affairs perfectly encapsulate the dangers of over-simplification and, more importantly, underline a strong sense of entitlement that comes with embedded assumptions that the UK has earned the right to play a leading role.

Having a rich historical legacy is more complex and contentious than it might seem, as recent debates around race, slavery, inequality and imperialism make clear. The government's claim that the UK has always been outstanding at 'making the most of opportunities for our country' obscures the reality that wealth, influence and power were framed by the exploitation of peoples and materials all round the world. Empires function by resources being brought from the peripheries to the centre. They result in embedded elites, dramatic inequalities and uneven distribution of opportunities. The British Empire was no different.

The slogan of 'Global Britain' may therefore sound promising to those who take solace from the belief that Britannia once ruled the waves. The cold reality, however, is that the world today is not just very different for the UK, but for countries all round the world. It is a world that is changing fast, fuelled in part by new technologies whose powers, risks and fragilities are poorly understood, and partly by the rise of successful, resilient authoritarianism that is forcing naïve assumptions about the triumph of liberal democracy finally to be challenged. Then there are outlier events, such as the coronavirus pandemic that can, and will, have dramatic consequences not only for how we live and work, but also for the wider geopolitical picture because it has become part of a proxy war between the US and China.

In this context, the UK risks being squeezed out not only by the US and by China, but between the two. Brexit also means that however imperfect the EU was and is, the solace and protection of safety in numbers has been removed. Ironically, one area of real British expertise over the last century, as the age of empire finally passed, has been in navigating a way through building new alliances and partnerships. Some would call this the art of diplomacy. Others might even say that this is what practical liberalism is all about: finding areas of common interest where states can work together productively and proactively and building mutual trust to be able to listen and learn about points of view that do not converge.

It might seem nonsensical to withdraw from one political and economic grouping, like the EU, only to propose another. But one key area will be for the UK to develop more meaningful, more intensive and more practical relationships with other states where overlapping interests can result in common positions regarding geopolitical threats, future pandemics, adoptions of new technologies, responses to climate change and more besides.

Membership of the G7, a permanent seat at the United Nations and long-standing expertise provide a platform to look beyond the grouping of rich, Western states that the UK usually looks to for support and collaboration. The UK should therefore be looking to establish a new network of states: the 'Development 20', or D20. This should include countries in North and sub-Saharan Africa, in Asia and in the Americas to provide a practical forum for agreeing common standpoints and counter increasingly well-coordinated and effective positions between systemic rivals, to spend time, energy and resources on developing long-term visions for the future and on shaping working, practical relationships that are able to bear fruit.

Global Britain requires a wider perspective on the UK's direction of travel, its place in the wider world and the opportunities and risks that lie in the future. There is also the potential to recognise that we are not unique in facing these questions and that other states, including those that are emerging and will play bigger and more important roles in the future, are worth bringing to the table in a formal capacity to find ways to work together. This new D20 group cannot be based on the crude exclusivity of wealth and GDP, like the G20. Rather it should be centred on nations that are strategically important, developing countries that offer long-term potential and on partners that can in some instances provide much-needed expertise and leverage. This would include, for example, Nigeria, Jordan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Mexico, Chile, Argentina and others –

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including those whose political leaderships do not resemble our own, such as Thailand, Vietnam and several central Asian states.

The 'international rules-based order' is a wonderful thing if you set the rules, if you think you've always taken 'a leading role in responding to global challenges' and, above all, if you are convinced that the outcomes of that leading role have always been optimal. It might just be that with Brexit, a global depression, continued uncertainties around the pandemic, concerns about China, Russia, Iran and beyond that this could be a moment to be thinking hard about how to work with others, rather than on our own.

## **Breaking the cycle of neglect in global health**

*Fionna Tod*

For too long, world leaders have accepted a cycle of panic and neglect in response to major disease outbreaks, failing to invest in long-term pandemic preparedness and hoping to avoid the worst when disaster hits. Despite ever-more complex international supply chains and an extraordinary rise in international travel making the spread of infectious diseases like SARS-CoV-2 inevitable, most countries ignored repeated warnings from global health experts on the looming security threat of a pandemic.

At the same time, this global health crisis has tested our twentieth-century rules-based international system and, in the face of the nationalist populism so rampant across the world, it has been found wanting. Diplomacy is by its nature an act of compromise, yet many world leaders dismiss compromise as a weakness, undermining the diplomatic principles on which the United Nations is built. The World Health Organisation has become the battleground for a political tussle between superpowers, with only a superficial connection to global health.

The WHO faces an impossible task – it has no authority to compel nation states to act in a certain way – but it has shown solid leadership since the outbreak began, especially in low and middle-income countries, where its normative role remains essential. Calls to scrap it and other UN institutions and start again should be rejected. The UK must continue to lend its expertise to reinforce these organisations, with a renewed focus on strengthening their core capabilities and making them less encumbered by bureaucracy. US funding of WHO and other UN organisations has been disproportionately high from the outset, giving the country uneven sway over their policies. The pandemic has revealed an urgent need to recalculate countries' assessed contributions to the UN system. The global system can no longer afford to rely on unstable US backing, and the UK should lead the campaign for a more equitable funding system.

The pattern of tying WHO funding to specific diseases and projects is mirrored in the wider global health community. This siloing of funds means that activists advocate for resources on their single issue, which often results in vertical programming that fails to improve overall health systems. This funding pattern makes progress fragile and easily overturned by an epidemic or pandemic outbreak. A new approach is needed: the UK should invest its overseas development aid in programmes that yield measurable horizontal benefits, underpinned by a commitment to universal health coverage. There is also an urgent need for the interface between animal and human health to be better aligned,

given that almost all of the last century's pandemic pathogens originated in animals (see also Chapter 5, Environment).

Data is a critical element of global health that is notoriously weak. The UK should use its leadership position within organisations like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, to strive for better health data. Advances in technology such as GPS, cheap sensors and networked diagnostics, raise the prospect of truly verifying the impact of programmes. Governments and organisations that provide robust, verifiable data should be rewarded and encouraged, even if that means revealing that coverage of key services, like vaccinations, is lower than the current official data.

The next pandemic is likely to be bigger and deadlier than the coronavirus, and that is not the only looming health threat for which we need to prepare. Antimicrobial resistance is a creeping enemy with the potential to wreak as much, if not more, havoc than an airborne pathogen. One clear way of encouraging states to prioritise preparedness is to follow a [call made back in 2016 by a group of global health experts](#) to incorporate global health risk into macroeconomic analyses such as the International Monetary Fund's Article IV consultations, and ratings agencies' and risk consultancies' models. The coronavirus has demonstrated that pandemics can decimate economies around the world and we should not be afraid to use innovative financial levers to incentivise countries to prepare properly.

Yet again, we find our governments panicking in the face of a new disease threat. The urge to return to 'life as normal' will be strong, but life as normal created the conditions for this pandemic in the first place. We have an opportunity, and a responsibility, to invest heavily in building more resilient, equitable, and robust health systems and to ensure that the cycle of panic and neglect in global health is broken forever.

## Embracing and confronting China

*Dr Christine Cheng*

In 2001, when China joined the World Trade Organisation, no one imagined that in less than twenty years it would grow into the world's second largest economy and emerge as a global rival to America. Between 2001 and 2018, China's GDP per capita went from \$1,000 to \$9,800, pulling hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and disease and transforming the global economy. As Liberal Democrats, we should celebrate China's success as one of the greatest development stories in the history of the world.

Yet China's modernisation didn't lead to the political change that the West had envisioned. Instead of submitting to democratic reforms and allowing itself to be liberalised in a Western-friendly way, China created its own version of authoritarian capitalism and set up its own rivals to the big multinationals of the West. As China grew economically and politically more powerful, bringing African and nearby Asian states into its orbit of influence, Britain's relationship with it also changed. Whereas a succession of British foreign ministers used to routinely rebuke China for its human rights abuses, our willingness— as a country and as a party— to upset Beijing has declined significantly as China has become richer and more influential.



Under the coalition government, Britain was especially keen to deepen its trade and investment relationships with China— even at the expense of calling out the country’s human rights abuses. As George Osborne remarked in 2015, ‘Britain can’t run away from China. Quite the opposite. Britain should run towards China.’ Liberal Democrats too, have had an ambivalent relation with China— on the one hand loudly denouncing how Beijing managed the Hong Kong protests throughout 2019 and 2020, but on the other, arguing for Britain to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This is the pre-coronavirus landscape that structured the UK–China relationship.

As the coronavirus pandemic struck Britain in March 2020, the tensions that lurked beneath the surface of the relationship were forced out into the open: Hong Kong, Huawei’s 5G contract, Britain’s need for post-Brexit trade deals with both the US and China. Even today, with British lives hanging in the balance, the Prime Minister has yet to decide what kind of relationship he wants Britain to have with the world’s largest supplier of personal protective equipment.

If there’s one thing that the virus has revealed, it is that China can only be confronted when other democracies are willing to band together. Caught between the US and China, smaller countries like Canada, Australia, Japan, and Korea already know to be wary. Over the past 18 months, two Canadians have been held as hostages in the 5G wars between China and the US. More recently, when Australia asked for a WHO public inquiry into the origins of coronavirus, China retaliated by restricting some meat exports and slapping an 80 per cent tariff on Australian barley. In our case, China has already threatened ‘countermeasures’ after the British government offered Hong Kong citizens a path to British citizenship after China violated the ‘one country, two systems’ principle.

Unfortunately, this fine line between friend and foe will become more and more difficult to maintain as China becomes simultaneously richer, more militarily aggressive and more globally influential.

Britain, and by extension the Liberal Democrats, will be forced to choose between America and China. America’s China hawks will undoubtedly push Britain to make that choice sooner rather than later.

Yet there is a third way to deal with China: through Europe. Any world map makes this obvious. Whether we are inside or outside the European Union, only Europe is too big to be politically bullied into submission. Only Europe has the global economic leverage to challenge China as the world’s second biggest trading bloc. Only Europe has the moral authority to speak out and convince the Chinese to listen. Without the weight of Europe behind us, we are simply not powerful enough to challenge China by ourselves. The pandemic has made this abundantly clear. With the US distracted by its own internal problems, only Europe has the political heft needed to lead.

Liberal Democrats can continue to hope that China’s rise will be that of a friendly competitor, but right now, the British government needs to plan strategically for an increasingly powerful ‘frenemy’. In practice, frenemy politics translates into three policy principles: sincere engagement on common causes; continuing to stand up for our liberal values; and building redundancies and national resilience into mission-critical supply chains.

First, we must keep engaging China on all issues where we find agreement. Even as tensions increase, there is nothing that precludes enthusiastic British cooperation with China on common concerns

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such as the climate and debt crises. China is the world's biggest investor in renewables, as well as leading the world in producing, exporting and installing wind turbines, solar panels, batteries and electric vehicles. With its citizens clamouring for clean air, China is domestically motivated to reduce vehicle emissions. The Liberal Democrats can and should look for opportunities to deepen scientific and private sector engagement with China on green issues— while recognising that renewable technology will take on increasing strategic importance.

Second, we must continue to stand up for our liberal values. In the coming years, Britain and its allies will find it difficult to speak out against President Xi and the Chinese Communist Party. China's four 'internal' zones of unrest (Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan) will remain taboo subjects and the people of Tibet and Xinjiang in particular will continue to suffer the horrific consequences of internment and forced assimilation. Within this space, we are uniquely positioned to call out China in large part because we are unlikely to take power any time soon. We can afford to be honest and blunt in a way that other parties cannot.

Our liberal values are what distinguishes us, not just as a party, but also as a country. We must lean into these values and invest political capital in defending them. The most effective way to do this is to ally ourselves even more closely with our European friends in the first instance, and then to develop deeper ties with a new 'coalition of democracies'.

Finally, Liberal Democrats should support the re-routing of global supply chains where China is the chokepoint for components that are critical to national security. In this instance, coronavirus has revealed the world's reliance on China's PPE production capacity. It has also revealed that China is using its control of PPE supplies to curry favour for 5G contracts. Shutting China completely out of global supply chains is impossible and counterproductive. Instead, what the pandemic has taught us is that some supply chains are more critical than others and that we need to adjust our regulatory frameworks to deal with national security situations. Determining the specific adjustments that are needed will be a complex years-long national security and supply chains process that we should begin now, alongside the Brexit negotiations.

Along the way, we must not forget that the Chinese government and the Chinese people are not one and the same. Just as Liberal Democrats vehemently disagree with the Conservative government on many important issues, there are many Chinese citizens who want to nudge China towards greater internal transparency and accountability. After all, it was the Chinese people who exploded in anger when a Wuhan doctor, Li Wenliang, accused the government of covering up what was happening in the early days of the virus's spread. He contracted coronavirus from one of his patients and died on 7 February.

After the battering effects of Brexit and coronavirus, Britain's influence in the world will continue to decline. We will need to simultaneously embrace and confront China. And we will need to do so with friends by our side. For Britain and for the Liberal Democrats, it is the only way forward.

# Development will be tougher than ever, but change is possible

*Martin Horwood*

When the world gathered in 2015 to adopt the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals – a 'bold new global agenda to end poverty by 2030 and pursue a sustainable future' – Obama, Cameron, Gates and Bloomberg all spoke of global co-operation and the billions that would be mobilised from public and private wealth. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, a Korean, joked with World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, a Korean-American, that Koreans were taking over the world. The leading role of such global institutions seemed unassailable and Korea – open, internationalist and democratic – really was the model development story.

While the world still faced monumental challenges, this optimism wasn't entirely misplaced: extreme poverty had declined significantly and so had debilitating debt crises. Latin America, Africa and Asia all had their success stories. Hunger, child mortality and maternal mortality had fallen. Access to clean drinking water and to primary education— especially for girls— had improved. Even deadly epidemics like HIV finally seemed to be in retreat, as millions gained access to anti-retroviral therapies.

In the UK, the coalition had enshrined the UN's 0.7 per cent of GNP aid target in law, thanks to the Lib Dems, focused international development policy on the poorest people and most fragile countries, emphasised conflict reduction, gender equality and the environment. We took on female genital mutilation at community level, and pulled the UK's pioneering development investment company CDC back to its development roots. We increased accountability and transparency by establishing the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, and quickly adopting the International Aid Transparency Initiative, which tracks aid flows from donor to project, reducing waste and corruption. Data showed well-targeted UK aid reaching the parts private investment rarely did.

It was a world in which liberals felt at home, but it now feels like a lifetime ago – before Trump, Brexit, Johnson and now the coronavirus.

A pandemic-induced global recession will cast millions back into extreme poverty and undo those hard-won gains. The UN expects the pandemic to shrink global trade by up to 32 per cent, remittances to low and middle-income countries by around 20 per cent and foreign direct investment by 35 per cent. Nigeria's staple oil revenues have already plummeted and other nations face similar shocks with all the attendant risks of instability and conflict. One estimate puts the cost of the crisis to Africa at \$100 billion. Barriers have been thrown up around the world. The WTO reports 80 countries restricting exports, including food and medical supplies.

Far from 'leaving no one behind' – the SDG mantra – we have allowed minorities and migrants to suffer disproportionately, either from the virus itself or from clumsy government responses. In the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, more people died from the interruption of services and economic breakdown than from the virus itself. China's development offer— unequal but generous, and conveniently careless about transparency, human rights or the environment— was gaining ground before the coronavirus and may now look even more tempting to governments gazing into an economic abyss.

But amidst all this there is an opportunity for Liberal Democrats to push the positive reshaping of development cooperation. We should invest much more in and through CDC, and champion ‘blended finance’ that takes commercially sound *investment* (as well as aid) to communities that would not achieve that investment from the private sector alone. We should prioritise locally-driven, environmentally-friendly infrastructure and local enterprises that need help to make it through coronavirus. If like-minded countries jointly prioritise this approach, development financing would generate more desperately needed domestic resources too, and offer an alternative development model to compete with China’s.

Even before the pandemic, many UK Conservatives opposed the 0.7 per cent target for official development assistance. Now they have seized the moment to promise abolition of the Department for International Development (DfID), further muddying boundaries between aid and other national objectives and paving the way for them to emulate Trump and attack the aid budget. Subsuming aid within national security and foreign policy objectives will undermine the UK’s global reputation for trustworthy international development. A hard Brexit and a steep bill for our own coronavirus response will exacerbate these pressures.

In response, we must defend both DfID and the 0.7 per cent policy in law. Post-coronavirus we should argue for even greater emphasis on tackling inequality and insist on clear boundaries between development and security and economic priorities.

We should go further by pushing for even more effective aid delivery by questioning the growing role of consultancies as intermediaries, prioritising community-based and informal strategies, and giving preference to international NGOs with proven records on grassroots change which have themselves been hit by the pandemic.

We should break down artificial barriers between ‘humanitarian crisis’ responses and long-term development aid, at home and in global institutions like the UN. The coronavirus has demonstrated the futility of short-term responses without long-term development thinking in areas like education, public health and primary care.

But this is about more than aid. The standard World Bank Group/IMF recipe for struggling economies – take a loan but open up your economy, remove subsidies and tighten your belt – already had its critics but is appallingly inappropriate now. Reckless spending isn’t the problem; economic and political stability is. For a country like Sudan, emerging from decades of dictatorship and isolation, what is needed is a breathing space to protect livelihoods.

But the IMF’s short-term advice is double-edged: ‘do whatever it takes but keep the receipts’. The reckoning will come. Debt is back. Even in 2019, 64 countries, many in sub-Saharan Africa, spent more money servicing external debt than they did on health. The pandemic will hit earnings, remittances and domestic resources just as public spending pushes upwards. The IMF now believes that 40 per cent of low-income countries are in ‘debt distress’. Defaults are likely.

If poverty is not to kill more poor people than the virus, Britain must push the G20 to lead a co-ordinated long-term global response to the debt crisis. And here is an opportunity to engage China, the developing world’s largest creditor, and encourage it to abandon its fair share of doomed debts – a process it has already begun.

**We must defend both DfID and the 0.7 per cent policy in law. We should argue for even greater emphasis on tackling inequality and insist on clear boundaries between development and security and economic priorities.**

There are shafts of light in the general gloom. The mutual value of investing in other countries' health infrastructure is proven now. Indeed, the rapid response of some African countries with established community health networks and public health messages previously deployed against Ebola or HIV/AIDS has put the UK's dozy domestic response to shame. Faizel Ismail of Cape Town University has called for the African Union to take advantage of disrupted European and Chinese supply chains by accelerating intra-African free trade, starting with medical products and backed by high governance and transparency standards. Back in Europe, a joint Gates Foundation/WHO/EU initiative should mean that when effective coronavirus tests, treatments and vaccines arrive they get to those who need them most. Brexit Britain wasn't at the table.

We should re-commit to the shared Sustainable Development Goals but also champion agile partnerships like the new coronavirus initiative, GAVI, The Vaccine Alliance or the Global Fund (against AIDS, TB and malaria) while keeping the UN properly funded and involved as the only forum in which every nation has a voice and truly global strategies can be adopted.

In a global pandemic, 'boosterish' nationalism doesn't cut it. Openness and regional and international co-operation can still be the model as the world rebuilds. Just when others retreat and look inward, we must step forward and look outward. But the UK will need to work strategically with like-minded allies, including the EU, Korea, Japan, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and others to champion equality, openness and accountability, human rights, gender awareness and the natural environment.

As Mark Green, outgoing director of the US aid agency, said in his parting message to Donald Trump: 'The great lesson that we've seen from the coronavirus outbreak in some ways is strikingly similar to the lesson that we learned the hard way not so long after 9/11. We have to care about what takes place in the far reaches of the world.'

## **The pandemic and human rights**

*Irina von Wiese*

While most governments struggle to save lives, some are using the fear and confusion of the pandemic to dismantle democratic institutions and civil rights – even in the heart of Europe.

The European Union's image as a bastion of liberal democracy was already in question. In Malta, government allies were implicated in the assassination of an investigative journalist while the governments of Hungary and Poland were already accused of breaching democratic norms. Coronavirus has made matters worse. In Hungary, just days into the pandemic, Viktor Orbán used 'emergency legislation' to set aside parliament and rule by decree indefinitely – effectively abolishing democracy in Hungary. In Poland, Mateusz Marowiecki, known for his attacks on judicial independence and his denial of Polish responsibility for Nazi-era atrocities, tried to change electoral rules days before planned presidential elections, allowing only postal voting. Although the change was eventually declared unconstitutional and the elections postponed, it was a brazen attempt to use the pandemic for political gain.

The EU has the economic and political muscle to help resist a permanent encroachment on individual rights worldwide in the wake of the pandemic, but it must put its own house in order before lecturing others. The EU's pro-democratic majority has managed to rein in rogue members to a degree that no single country would have been able to. But it must redouble that effort.

If it can uphold its own high standards, Europe can still claim the moral authority to condemn human rights abuses further afield, and it has the economic power to make a real difference. The 2019 award of the annual Sakharov Prize to human rights defender Ilham Tohti focused the world's attention on the plight of one million incarcerated Uighur Muslims in China. But around the same time, and arguably with more practical effect, human rights clauses were inserted in a proposed free trade agreement with Vietnam, making it subject to freedom of trade associations and basic protections for workers.

Such practical defences of human rights will matter even more in a post-pandemic world. To control the virus, many governments are busy introducing new technologies such as geo-tagging and data mining which could also be used to stifle subversive ideas. Press freedom was already under attack in countries from NATO-ally Turkey (which imprisons more journalists than any other nation on Earth) to Bahrain to Venezuela to Ethiopia, but the epidemic has triggered further attacks on the media in all these countries.

Will Britain be aligned with Europe in pushing back against these developments, or will Brexit Britain undermine the battle for human rights worldwide? Brexit has damaged the UK's own geopolitical role but also weakened the EU at a vital moment. Together with France and Germany, we could have strengthened the EU, counterbalancing interference from Russia and China. The latter has been driving an aggressive trade policy throughout Asia, legitimising human rights abuses along its new Silk Road, the 'Belt and Road Initiative'. The ports of Urumqi in Qingyang and Gwadar in Pakistan have been built on the broken backs of the Uighur and Baluchi peoples. In Hong Kong, the 'one country, two systems' agreement is being further eroded while the world is preoccupied and Britain, co-guarantor of Hong Kong's freedom, is vulnerable to Chinese economic pressure.

Britain has a historic responsibility in some of these regions, and refugees from them have relied on the UK to speak up for them in international forums. When we left the European Parliament, we lost one platform from which to raise human rights issues.

A new human rights partnership with the EU would go some way to offset this loss. But so far Britain has continued to spout anti-European rhetoric and seek the goodwill of Donald Trump's United States, already subject to mounting human rights criticism for its notorious southern border camps before the Black Lives Matter uprising further exposed the fragility of any American moral high ground.

Opposition MPs here barely managed to thwart Boris Johnson's attempt to make his Coronavirus Act – introducing drastic executive powers to restrict civil rights – last for two years. It is now subject to bi-annual review, and even this is a long period for 'emergency' legislation.

**The EU has the economic and political muscle to help resist a permanent encroachment on individual rights worldwide in the wake of the pandemic, but it must put its own house in order before lecturing others.**

Liberal Democrats must stand up for human rights and civil liberties worldwide, but we cannot do this alone and Europe remains our most obvious and effective ally. In a post-coronavirus world, we need to work together to hold governments to account and uphold human rights. This demands a many-pronged approach but, like the Vietnam trade agreement, the first and most important step can be a very practical one:

- In concert with the EU, the UK can take a lead in demanding that the private sector be regulated not just to report on its supply chains but to take real responsibility for its influential role in combating child labour, modern slavery and environmental crime. Mandatory due diligence of supply chains, a long-standing demand of many human rights organisations, would mean that British and European companies could not hide behind their overseas suppliers (see also in Chapter 5, Environment).
- Known perpetrators of human rights abuses with links to the UK should be subject to targeted sanctions such as visa denials and asset freezes, while victim of abuse, and human rights defenders, should be eligible for preferential access to UK visas, protection and asylum.
- At home we need to ensure that democracy continues to function. Any attempt to outmanoeuvre parliament must be stopped dead. And we should use all our remaining influence to encourage EU member states to uphold democracy too.
- In dealing with other countries, we need to follow the EU's lead and put human rights on the agenda throughout negotiations, ensuring they become an integral part of any trade agreement.

None of this can succeed without the backing of international partners – liberal democracies which share our values, and multilateral organisations such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In a world threatened by isolationism and division, co-operation will become more important than ever.

## The UK needs to reimagine influence

*Whit Mason*

It has now been nearly twenty years since Western leaders complained that we in the West were being out-communicated by terrorists hiding in caves. Why are the most liberal countries – which are also the most technologically advanced and include the powerhouses of global advertising – losing so many battles for political influence among global audiences?

Answering this question is key to defending ourselves from poverty, ignorance, and conformity. This is the essence of what it means to live in a liberal democracy. At the Lib Dems' spring conference last year, Ian Kearns said that 'Liberal democracy needs a shield.' This was the only line during that event that elicited universal applause. With illiberalism reigning in the US, Russia and China, as well as parts of Europe, liberals understand that our values need a concerted defence.

Under a liberal government, the UK could play a leading role as champion and defender of the standards of openness, civility and respect for truth on which human flourishing depends. In economic and military terms, the UK is a middle power. But the UK tops global measures of attractiveness to people around the world; we are a soft power behemoth. With the right sorts

of people, suitably empowered, Britain would be able to combine its reputational advantages and cultural institutions (the BBC, British Council, Premier League, Royal Family, world-class universities, think tanks and publishers) with its highly competent diplomatic service and military to play a leading role in resisting and reversing the tide of populist authoritarianism currently menacing freedom everywhere.

In order to play this role, Britain needs officials who understand the myriad sorts of human beings whose perceptions, values and behaviour will shape the future. Currently, government employs the wrong people in the wrong ways. It underfunds the Foreign Office and is probably about to starve the military. Most of the current government officials who have been involved in international influence and strategic communications have been crippled by the complacency that comes from having succeeded in a largely stable and successful system. They have been educated, trained, assessed, and promoted in ways that reward risk aversion. Their highest priority is to avoid a domestic scandal rather than achieve international influence.

Former New York Governor Mario Cuomo famously said that politicians campaign in poetry but govern in prose. The political elites who manage the UK's role in the world typically take British influence for granted. They treat Britain's role in the world as if we are entitled to it. The reality is that the quest for global influence is more akin to a never-ending campaign in an unceasing series of contests in which there are no safe seats. Our most effective global adversaries never forget this. And we need not only to campaign tirelessly but with an ear for the poetry of persuasion.

Despite collecting vast amounts of data on opinion and sentiment, Western governments are mostly blind as to why people abroad act as they do. When it comes to operating in the global influence ecosystem, we are inept. Though government has created some cross-departmental units, we remain largely stove-piped, process-oriented, cripplingly risk-averse and slow to respond. We are often blind to the gulf between our rhetoric and the lived experience of those we hope to influence.

What can be done?

We need a new cadre of influence strategists. They need to have the mentality and experience that enables them to understand diverse groups of people and what moves them. We then need to educate, train, empower and reward them not to avoid blotting their copybooks but to advance the conditions of freedom that enable people in the UK and others to flourish.

Government needs to employ the most emotionally attuned people available for this new Influence Strategy Team. The defining qualities of this group would be empathic imagination, creativity, personal experience of insecurity and a determination to achieve their objectives. We need to cultivate more expertise in parts of the world most important to the UK. Influence strategists need to be selected, directed, assessed and rewarded in ways that focus on success, which necessitates taking risks, rather than on avoiding mistakes. In order to steer the UK's influence activities, this body needs to sit near the peak of the foreign policy pyramid, reporting directly to the National Security Council, with its director fully engaged. This group should include people with backgrounds in social sciences, the humanities and the school of hard knocks. They need to be familiar with social worlds other than their own.

Moreover – and this really is crucial – the influence strategists who have these qualities need to be empowered to *lead* influence work, with officials whose main expertise is government systems and



processes supporting and subordinate to them. This is the reverse of the usual arrangement wherein generalist public servants oversee the work of experts and systematically skew their work away from stated objectives and toward avoiding risk and other internal priorities. This Influence Strategy Team also needs to have authority over people in the other departments, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, who will have a role in implementing campaigns. If the top team doesn't have this authority, officials meant to implement campaigns will often hinder, dilute or block them instead.

The UK has the potential to be a much more influential force for good at a moment when the partisans of human flourishing are feeling cowed by powerful authoritarian forces. To achieve this, we require a government with the vision and competence to play the UK's limited but strong hand to optimum effect.

# Politics

*Layla Moran, Duncan Brack, Mike Smithson*

## What the party needs to do

*Layla Moran MP*

What do Liberal Democrats need to do in the post-coronavirus era? Our first task is to make ourselves relevant again. Outright electoral victory would take us to that goal in a single stride. But that would be an astonishing achievement, bearing in mind that the last time the Liberal Party won an overall majority in the House of Commons was in 1906. Time and time again we have heard it from voters: ‘Why should I vote for you if you cannot win?’

The first-past-the-post system is an albatross around the neck of smaller parties. Our immediate objective must be to banish the notion that the Liberal Democrats are not just a minor party and to reassert our relevance to Britain’s future. But we also need to be frank with ourselves about where we are now. To do this, we need to avoid two traps: a belief that we are weaker than we are – and a belief that we are stronger than others think.

In last year’s general election, the Liberal Democrats’ 3.7 million votes amounted to more than those of the SNP, Greens, Plaid Cymru and all the Northern Irish parties combined. We came a clear third, with 12 per cent of the total Britain-wide vote. We should not sell ourselves short by neglecting our substantial voter base.

Taking a longer view, our traditions have not merely been theoretical; we have used our influence to change people’s lives. The past century has seen the adoption of Liberal ideas, from those of Keynes and Beveridge to the great causes of the second half of the twentieth century, such as internationalism, racial and sexual equality, and protecting the environment. Even during the politically and economically difficult times of the 2010–15 coalition, Liberal Democrat policies such as the pupil premium and equal marriage improved the lives of a great many people and families, and support for renewable energy helped tackle the challenge of climate change.

Institutionally, however, the past century has been one of failure. Britain has not had a Liberal Prime Minister since 1922. In the 21 elections since 1945, only six have seen the return of more than 20 Liberal, SDP or Liberal Democrat MPs. In none has our tally reached even 10 per cent of all MPs.

Twice in peacetime, we have had a share of power: during the Lib-Lab pact of 1977–78, and the coalition in 2010–15. We can point to important achievements in both, but on both occasions we lost

votes and seats in the subsequent general elections. We lost modestly in 1979, cataclysmically in 2015, and our loss in seats was only matched by the loss in trust, especially among Labour voters who we relied upon to vote for us in seats we could win from the Conservatives.

In looking to the future our mood should be pride, tempered by realism. This imposes on us three obligations – one specific, the two others broader.

### **Policies and the manifesto**

The specific obligation concerns our next election manifesto. It would be foolish to say now what should be in it. We cannot be sure what will resonate in 2024; with coronavirus and Brexit still playing out, we need to remain nimble. However, whatever may be in it, as a Britain-wide party fielding candidates in the vast majority of constituencies, we will be right to offer voters a complete, fully costed programme for government.

But while a Lib Dem majority is a theoretical possibility, we lack credibility if we pretend that it is our principal aim. Our *programme for government* should show that we take policy-making seriously. Our sums must add up. We must be frank about the trade-offs, especially for taxes, government borrowing and public spending. But our foremost *electoral aim* must be to elect as many Lib Dem MPs as possible. Our argument should be straightforward. For any given balance of forces between the other parties, the more Lib Dem MPs who serve in the next parliament, the greater our influence will be. If the electorate sees fit to elect so many of us that we could form a government outright, we have plans to implement and principles to uphold. But should we fall short, we should use that influence effectively and wisely. This means that in the next manifesto, we must continue to be ruthless in identifying our priorities and setting out our red lines. We need to continue to distinguish between the essential and the desirable. And the list of essential demands must be short and specific. A list of five is credible; a list of twenty is not.

That, then, is our specific obligation: to devise a manifesto and campaign which is, on the one hand, complete and rigorous, and, on the other, makes clear our priorities in the new parliament, whatever our strength in the House of Commons.

### **What are we for?**

But before we even get to the manifesto, we need to answer a deceptively simple question: ‘What are we for?’ We need to appreciate that the answer to this question isn’t solely about policy positions. We need consistency. To take just one example, in the last eight general elections our economic policy has gone from tax-raising to pay for education, to making tax fairer, to tax cutting and finally to raising tax to pay for health. And we’re surprised that people don’t know what we stand for?

Those of us actively engaged in politics take a great interest in detailed policies. And rightly, too: politics needs policies that work, right down to the devils in the details. Some voters will be concerned with such details, and we must be able to answer their questions. But most people want something different: reassurance that their politicians know what they are doing, rather than a full explanation of their complex plans. When we buy a smartphone, a car or a washing machine, most of us want to know that it works – not the details of *how* it works. We are concerned with brand, price

and, perhaps, general looks, not the precise engineering design or the organisation of the assembly line.

In politics, we need to distinguish between ‘positional’ views and ‘valence’ views. Consider the health service. People with positional views tend to feel strongly about the precise funding arrangements, the role, if any, of the private sector and the balance between national strategies and local accountability. People with valence views just want local doctors and hospitals that they and their family can rely on.

Our party is full of people with positional views, as evident in this collection of essays. But the voters we need to convince are valence voters.

This distinction holds important lessons. Carefully costed and constructed blueprints for a ‘brighter future’, however worthy and rigorous, cut little ice with most voters. They are vital, but not as campaigning tools. The currency of valence campaigning is not measured in policy details but perceptions of trust and competence.

It was what Paddy and Charles were so good at, and one of the reasons why we made great leaps forward in terms of seats under their leaderships. If you asked people why they voted Lib Dem in these periods, many might point to iconic policies like Iraq or Hong Kong, or the penny on income tax for education, but they will also mention the fact that they liked them, that they resonated with them as people.

They trusted them to keep their word, and they saw they had strong principles. It’s why a political party leader, while not being the whole answer to electoral success, is an important one. The leader translates positional policies into valence values. The leader does the poetry while the party does the prose.

Above all, we must learn from the great valence disaster of 2010, when we abandoned our loudly proclaimed manifesto commitment to fight for the abolition of student fees. We lost the support of those who felt passionately about this issue, as well as millions of others who came to the devastating conclusion that we could not be trusted to keep our word.

Our central task is to attract voters to the Liberal Democrat brand – and that means persuading them that we are on their side. That we tell the truth, understand their concerns, and will fight their corner. We begin by listening intently and deliberately to the electorate and taking our cue from them. In recent decades, that lesson has been learned and applied more effectively at the local than at the national level. We are already in government in 50 councils across the whole of the UK. We sometimes bridle at Lib Dem successes in council elections being described as victories for ‘pavement politics.’ We should not. Local successes have almost always been achieved because voters trusted us to listen to their concerns and tackle their local problems. In gaining more councillors, we build our relevance to local communities. Voters can see what Liberal Democrat leadership really means. Our national campaigning should apply the lessons learned locally, and the leadership needs to raise the profile of what we do well at these levels as examples of Lib Dems getting things done. To that end, we must not underestimate the importance of the upcoming ‘super-elections’ in May 2021. Take demonstrably liberal issues, action them, report back – over and over, within themes that the electorate tell us that they care about.

**Above all, we must learn from the great valence disaster of 2010, when we abandoned our loudly proclaimed manifesto commitment to fight for the abolition of student fees.**

## Plural politics

Our other broader obligation is to apply our commitment to plural politics consistently. We must always remember that in 2019 our voting system produced only 11 Lib Dem MPs, compared with 71 in total for parties smaller than ours, even though we outpolled all of them combined. Yet, however much we complain about the unfairness of our voting system, it is the one we must live with, at least for the time being.

The fight for a fairer voting system must go on, and we must be clear what this means: an end to what Lord Hailsham once described as the ‘elective dictatorship’ of all-powerful single-party rule in parliament. Voting reform will require us in the future to work together with other parties. The commitment to a fairer voting system is also a commitment to grown-up politics, to that deep-rooted liberal value of co-operation. Coronavirus has sharpened the appetite of the electorate for parties working together. I’d wager that this approach has increased in popularity as the voters long for parties to work for the common good and not to revert to the divisive tribal politics of Brexit. We have a choice whether we go back there in pursuit of ‘distinctiveness’ or if we decide on a different, more inclusive, more measured approach.

We should not be afraid of talking – locally and nationally – to other parties, especially if we have a common cause. For example, talking to Labour on fighting poverty, to the Greens on climate change, to SNP and Plaid Cymru on devolving more powers to Edinburgh and Cardiff – and, yes, to the Conservatives on how best to support dynamic, socially and environmentally responsible businesses that will be needed to generate jobs and prosperity in the years to come. Talking does not mean that we adopt their agenda, but it can show the electorate that we do politics differently.

We must be the champions of open-source politics – adopting the best ideas wherever they come from, as long as they are consistent with our values – and feeling joy rather than jealousy when others adopt ours. After all, if the party adopting it is in government, we can then lay claim to the win, bolstering the valence value of competence. The greatest recent example of this was Lynne Featherstone delivering same-sex marriage through the coalition. Bearing in mind that this policy was not in either party’s manifesto in 2010, it shows the importance of not writing off the possibility of Conservatives delivering societal change. Cooperative politics is not the sole preserve of ‘progressives’.

More recently, I led the party’s call for a coronavirus compensation scheme for frontline workers, and we won. It began with a text to a local radio station, where I was holding a virtual surgery, from a radiographer who was worried about their family should the worst happen. Gathering support from across the House of Commons, including stalwart Tories, it attracted the interest of the Brexit-loving *Daily Express* which took up the cause. Just a few weeks later in response to questioning by the paper, Matt Hancock announced a life assurance scheme worth £60,000 for any frontline NHS or care worker who dies as a result of coronavirus.

The story of this campaign demonstrates that coronavirus presents an opportunity in reaching parts of the electorate that many had worried might be lost to us over Brexit. By the 2019 election, pollsters were describing an extremely polarised electorate, more loyal to Brexit ‘tribes’ than to parties. As the unequivocal party of Stop Brexit and Remain, we had firmly tied our flag to that mast, leading to conversations on doors in which many Brexit voters felt that we had nothing in common.

Even though we will remain unflinchingly pro-European, winning back the trust of this portion of the electorate, and showing them we have more in common with them than they may think, was going to be an uphill struggle that has now arguably been made easier by the coronavirus crisis. And it matters because it means that even with 11 MPs Liberal Democrats can still get things done.

## Elections and cooperation

Pluralism should guide not just our policies but our actions. Our first-past-the-post winner-takes-all voting system discourages co-operation at election time, but does not prevent it.

In 1983 and 1987, the Liberals and the Social Democratic Party ensured – after, admittedly, often painful negotiations – that each would fight roughly half the seats in Britain in an electoral alliance. In 1997, Labour and the Lib Dems agreed to stand aside in Tatton, so that Martin Bell had a clear run as an independent against the disgraced Conservative incumbent Neil Hamilton. Last year, the Lib Dems worked with the Greens and Plaid Cymru, to select a single candidate in each of 60 seats to promote their shared progressive, environmental, pro-European agenda.

There is much to learn from this Unite to Remain experience. Top of the list is how we treat candidates and local parties: the ‘top down’ approach to cooperation stuck in the throat of our bottom-up organisation, and not a single seat on the Unite to Remain list was newly won. We need to learn from the experience and get smarter at it. Unite to Remain has now rebranded as Unite to Reform and is focusing on common policy goals, which in my view is a far better platform to build from.

Pluralism should guide not just our policies but our actions. Our first-past-the-post winner-takes-all voting system discourages co-operation at election time, but does not prevent it.

However, cooperation is invariably more authentic when it is arranged locally. In Oxford West & Abingdon we overturned a nearly 10,000 Tory majority in 2017. This resulted from weeks of negotiation between Lib Dems and the local Greens. The initial stumbling block was deep mistrust, especially on their side, but they also recognised that unless we did something like this there was no chance of defeating the well-liked Tory minister Nicola Blackwood. Initially the Greens asked for a quid-pro-quo arrangement with other Westminster seats, but this was not within our gift as a local party. Instead we focused on drawing out commonality in policy and principles. We organised a hustings where Green members had a chance to grill me and vote on whether they should stand down. After what may have been one of the most intense no-holds-barred questioning in my political life, they agreed. Then a local Progressive Alliance group further scaffolded the campaigning effort and we took pains to include soft Conservative voters as part of the progressive movement. It worked. We won by just 816 votes in 2017, and it was repeated in 2019.

This trust and cooperation between the Lib Dems and the Greens has endured beyond Westminster elections. It led to combined tickets in council elections and the surprise taking, in 2019, of South Oxfordshire District Council, which is now run by a Lib Dem – Green coalition. This model may not work everywhere, and it is far too early to consider what kind of co-operation, if any, will be appropriate at the next election. But we must not rule it out.

We must also be cautious. The ‘Nat or Not’ dynamic of Scotland means that any kind of suggestion of weakening in our pro-United Kingdom credentials would be devastating to us there, not least

because it would be seen as a betrayal of our voters in seats where we fight the SNP – which is all of them. We stand to lose more than votes; we would lose trust too. Working with Plaid Cymru has a similar problem – how can we work with them if they want independence and we do not? The answer in 2019 was recognising that we had common foes, the Brexit Party and the Tories. As demonstrated in the Brecon & Radnorshire by-election in July 2019, cooperation did not in any way mean endorsing their position on independence or them ours. But it worked in that local context. Clarity with the electorate in those positions is crucial to success, if such cooperation can be achieved.

As for Labour, unless Keir Starmer enjoys an enormous surge in popularity, given the Labour Party's weakness in Scotland it is highly unlikely that he would be able to form an outright majority without the Liberal Democrats taking a significant amount of seats from the Conservatives. And there are 91 seats where we are the main challengers.

Does it not follow then, that Lib Dems and Labour should be standing down for each other? The last election showed us that it isn't that simple, notwithstanding, of course, Labour's constitutional barriers to any such pacts. In Labour/Tory targets, it is often in the interest of Labour that the Liberal Democrats *do* stand a candidate, as we can often take more votes off the Conservatives than Labour alone. In Tory-facing Lib Dem marginals, and without the fear of an unpopular Labour leader, much of the desired effect can be achieved with well-coordinated tactical voting messages.

The best example of this is 1997, where quietly, in many parts of Britain local arrangements ensured that neither party wasted resources by fighting energetically where the other had a real chance of gaining seats from the Conservatives. These informal deals, enhanced by tactical voting, helped the Liberal Democrats to more than double our tally of MPs, from 20 to 46. But this was not just a one-off electoral arrangement; it built on years of careful cooperation. Duncan Brack looks at this below.

The emergence of tactical voting websites – not available in 1997 – should make this kind of outcome easier. But in 2019, in seats where the various tactical voting websites disagreed, all the non-Conservative parties lost. There were significant differences from 1997: the Corbyn-led Labour Party was feared and distrusted in a way which Blair never was, and there was a recent history of antagonism between Lib Dems and Labour that was very different from 1997. Nevertheless, even strongly anti-Tory voters were left confused when different sites told them different things, and the anti-Tory vote ended up split. Many seats reported that the lack of clarity also stifled momentum on the ground.

Next time we should not leave such efforts to the last minute. And given that there is little sense in Labour or Lib Dem activists aggressively fighting each other in Tory-facing seats, we need to find a way for activists to target their energies. In 2019 there were faults on both sides. Many will remember the hundreds of Labour Party activists who poured into places like Wimbledon, Finchley & Golders Green and Cities of London & Westminster, where the Liberal Democrats were the challengers. But many Labour Party activists will remember the floods of Lib Dem activists in Kensington; our vote went up by 4,500 and Labour lost to the Tories by 150. Were those activists on both sides happy to have helped Boris Johnson to victory?

Some within Labour see the Lib Dems simply as 'yellow Tories'. The vitriol in some parts of the country is palpable; some Labour activists have been investigated for sending death threats. I do not doubt there are Lib Dems who may not have covered themselves in glory, either, and while I am

## Cooperating without pacts: the Ashdown – Blair ‘project’

*Duncan Brack*

Electoral pacts are not the only way in which opposition parties can combine to defeat incumbent governments – as demonstrated by the ‘project’, the strategy that Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown and Labour leader Tony Blair followed to ensure Conservative defeat in the 1997 election.

After his election as leader in 1988, Ashdown had been open to cooperation with Labour, but he had to wait until Blair’s election in 1994 to make progress. Although the idea of electoral pacts was floated, Ashdown never supported it. He preferred to lay out a few key positions on which the two parties agreed and to make it clear that they would cooperate on them in government. This enabled the parties to retain their distinctiveness in other areas while at the same time promoting an atmosphere of cooperation which could encourage tactical voting at the next election.

Discreet cooperation developed between the two parliamentary parties: they avoided major rows and on occasion coordinated their attacks on the Tories, helping to reinforce the impression that the government was an increasingly beleaguered minority. Talks helped each side understand each other’s positions and paved the way for cooperation over policy on constitutional reform, led by Robin Cook for Labour and Robert Maclennan for the Liberal Democrats. In March 1997 this led to a report arguing for wide-ranging reforms including freedom of information legislation, devolution to Scotland and Wales, an elected authority for London, removal of the hereditary peers from the Lords, proportional representation for European elections, and a referendum on voting reform for Westminster. All these proposals, except the last, were introduced by Labour in government after 1997. Although Labour would have devolved power to Scotland by itself, most of the other proposals would probably not have featured in the Labour manifesto.

As the 1997 election approached, Ashdown argued for overt collaboration, campaigning together to get rid of the Tories, even to the extent of appearing at joint rallies with Blair. But polling in the party’s target seats showed that while those who had voted Conservative in 1992 were open to the idea that the Liberal Democrats could participate in government with Labour should the Conservatives lose, they strongly disliked the idea that the Liberal Democrats should actively campaign for coalition with Labour, and any hint of this would drive them back to the Tories.

Covert cooperation, however, paid dividends. The two parties avoided devoting resources to each other’s Tory-facing target seats. During the campaign they fed information to the *Mirror*, which published a list of 22 seats where, if Labour voters backed the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives would be defeated. In the event the Liberal Democrats won 20 of them.

The 1997 general election saw the Conservatives go down to their worst result in 150 years, losing a quarter of their vote and half their seats. Their losses were exaggerated by tactical voting, which was far higher than in any previous election. As a result of tactical switching to defeat Tory MPs it was estimated that Labour gained 15–21 seats, and the Liberal Democrats 10–14.

Although before the election Ashdown and Blair had contemplated a formal coalition, in the event the scale of the Labour landslide victory undermined any case for it. But in terms of defeating the Tories, after their four election victories from 1979 to 1992, the ‘project’ worked spectacularly well.



certain that such tactics were not sanctioned by the Labour Party as much as they weren't by ours, it underlines a fundamentally broken relationship between the two parties.

If we accept that the fate of one party may well lie, in part, in the hands of the other, we must start the process of winning back trust and respect. I am certain that it will take time and may be easier in Westminster than in some constituencies where elections at all levels have been hard-fought, but we must try. We must send a signal to Labour activists and voters, especially the younger generation, that our party is renewed since coalition, with over half of our membership new since 2015, and with a policy platform that is clearly progressive and centre-left in approach. We can remind them of the many examples of Liberal Democrat – Labour cooperation: the Lib–Lab pact in the 1970s, the coalitions in Scotland from 1999 to 2007, and in Wales the Progressive Agreement of 2016 which resulted in Kirsty Williams serving as Education Secretary and delivering superb leadership in the current crisis. Our two parties are not adjuncts of one another, but we do have a common cause and a common foe.

We can work together with them on particular policies, in the same as the Cook – Maclennan exercise on constitutional reform. We know that the only reason that seat-by-seat cooperation has to be considered is because of our current voting system. Voting reform must be the common cause of progressive parties and the cornerstone of any kind of electoral cooperation, overt or covert. We shouldn't have to do this. Each party should be able to put their best foot forward and the country should be glad of the vibrant political differences between them; but until we have electoral reform, turning our face away from cooperation risks letting the Tories in again.

It is right to remain relentlessly optimistic for Liberal Democrats prospects in the future and we should never apologise for being ambitious for our party. But this needs to be tempered with pragmatism. Nothing has ever come easy for us, and we cannot expect it ever will. However, lurching from election to election without an overarching vision and plan is the equivalent of the being a dinghy in a political storm, thrown from issue to issue, spinning around and always risking capsizing. We need to build our party into a sleek modern sailboat with a strong rudder to navigate the dark swell of the seas. We will occasionally be knocked off course, but it will become easier to correct as we grow in strength and confidence.

We now need to work on where we are going, together. Our guiding light can be found in answer to this question: what will best help us to advance our party and our beliefs – to deliver the radical reforms that our country so desperately needs?

I am more than sure that our resilient party will be able to pick itself up and start again. The plan for renewal, unshackled from the past with a hopeful, positive vision for the future, needs to start now if we are going to defeat Boris Johnson at the next election. For the sake of our country, we have no time to waste.

## Polling and prospects

*Mike Smithson*

An interesting period with which to compare the current political situation is the 1992–97 parliament. After the Tory shock victory in the 1992 election, the party saw a huge decline in its position following Black Wednesday in September, as John Major's government grappled with the crisis over sterling's ejection from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

Like the Cummings affair, this happened exactly 23 weeks after the Tory election victory. The Conservatives had enjoyed small but almost constant leads in the majority of polls in the weeks leading up to Black Wednesday. Afterwards these almost disappeared; there was just a single Tory poll lead in the hundreds of surveys prior to the 1997 election, when Blair won his landslide and Paddy Ashdown's Lib Dems jumped from 20 seats to 46 seats on a reduced national vote.

The point about the 1997 result is that voters seemed to be looking for the best party to defeat the then-discredited Tory party; the Lib Dems made gains in areas where they were clearly positioned as the best party to beat the Tories.

The similarities between the 1997 general election and the current political environment are strong. In 2024, when the next election is due, the Tories will have been in power for 14 years, compared with 18 years in 1997. Like then, Labour now has a new leader who presents a difficult challenge to the Tories whose standard general election strategy is to so demonise the opposition leader that their campaign is all about stopping Foot/Kinnock/Brown/Miliband/Corbyn from entering Downing Street. Like Blair, Starmer will be much harder to portray in that way.

Like John Major in the final quarter of 1992, Johnson has suffered a huge ratings collapse over his handling of the Cummings lockdown drive to Durham. Whether this will be as catastrophic for Johnson's party as the ERM for Major we will have to wait and see, but it could be. What Cummings did is to belittle the 99 per cent of voters who strictly followed the lockdown restrictions, quite often at great personal cost to themselves.

The opportunity for the next Lib Dem leader will be strong in those 120 plus seats where the party came second in December 2019, particularly the 91 where it is second to the Tories. These will form the new baseline, and there is little doubt that the party will be in a better position than the last election to exploit the opportunity.

From Starmer's perspective, what will matter is reducing the overall number of Tory seats, and he will be focused mainly on regaining many of those seats lost to the Tories last December in what were traditional Labour areas. My expectation is that Labour will be less concerned about those seats where the Lib Dems look best-placed to unseat the Tories. The opportunity for the next Lib Dem leader is there, and the party needs someone who is able to seize it.

This is a big challenge. By any standards the polling performance of the Liberal Democrats since the 2019 election has been poor. The party finished the election with a GB national vote share of 11.8 per cent, well below what it was polling only three months earlier. By the second quarter of 2020 it was at barely half its general election share from six months earlier. The sheer volatility of the Lib Dem poll share is quite extraordinary.

There are several reasons for this. There's the lack of profile that the Lib Dems have suffered from in the post-election period, particularly when the pandemic has completely dominated the headlines. The temporary joint leadership put in place after the general election has added to the difficulties in getting attention. And another factor that has really hurt the Lib Dems is that there has been very little going on at a local level. The May 2020 local and mayoral elections have been put back to 2021 and there have been no local by-elections.

Additionally, since the start of April the party has had to contend with a new and very different form of Labour leadership. In the aftermath of the 2019 election victory the Conservative poll share moved up quite sharply. Since then things have been going downhill for the party, and the main beneficiary has been Keir Starmer's Labour. While Labour secured a GB vote share of 32.9 per cent, and then dropped to the high 20s, since the new leader has been put in place it has been making significant progress. At the end of May, *Opinium* for the *Observer* put Labour on 39 per cent, just 4 points below the Conservatives. *Opinium* is the pollster that got the general election most right.

All the experience over the decades shows that the national Liberal Democrat poll shares are very much driven by the amount of attention the party is able to achieve. The first task of the new leader will be able to attract attention and raise the profile of the party. It has to look like a serious proposition again.

# Contributors

*All contributors have written their pieces in their own individual capacity. Their inclusion in this booklet should not be taken to mean either that they agree with every proposal in it or that they are supporting Layla Moran's candidacy for the Liberal Democrat leadership.*

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Richard Allan (Lord Allan of Hallam) was MP for Sheffield Hallam from 1997 to 2005 and has been a member of the House of Lords since 2010. He has worked in information technology in both the public and private sectors, and is currently a visiting Fellow at Oxford University.

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Helen Belcher fought Chippenham for the Liberal Democrats in the 2017 and 2019 general elections. Recognised as one of the most influential LGBT+ people in the country for three years running, she gave evidence to the Leveson Inquiry on press standards and ethics in 2012. She has run her own successful business and is looking for her next opportunity.

David Boyle is a writer, publisher and think tanker, the author – among other titles – of *Tickbox* and *Nor Shall My Sword Sleep*. He was a member of the Liberal Democrat Federal Policy Committee for 14 years, until 2012, and also stood for Parliament. He was an independent reviewer for the Treasury and Cabinet Office on barriers to choice in 2012/13.

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Sir Vince Cable was Liberal Democrat leader 2017–19 and Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills for five years in the coalition government. He was MP for Twickenham for 20 years and retired in 2019. Currently he is a Visiting Professor at the LSE and St Mary's University and a newspaper columnist.

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Ade Fatukasi stood in Lewisham East in the 2019 general election and is currently the youngest GLA list candidate as well the GLA candidate for Lewisham & Greenwich in the 2021 London Assembly elections. Professionally he works as a management consultant and specialises in digital transformation.

Lynne Featherstone (Baroness Featherstone) was a government minister throughout the coalition. She is the originator and architect of the same-sex marriage law and introduced and spearheaded the government campaign against female genital mutilation. She was Leader of the first ever Lib Dem Group on Haringey Council, a member of the London Assembly for its first five years, and MP for Hornsey & Wood Green 2005–15.

Peter Frankopan is Professor of Global History at Oxford University, where he has been Senior Research Fellow at Worcester College since 2000. He is the author of *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*, and most recently *The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World*.

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Cllr Keith House has more than 30 years' experience as a local councillor and has been Leader of Eastleigh Borough Council since 1994. In his third term as a Board Member at Homes England, in 2015 he co-authored a major government report into local authorities' role in housing supply. He is an Honorary Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

David Howarth is Professor of Law and Public Policy at the University of Cambridge, where he is also Head of the Department of Land Economy and a Fellow of Clare College. He was MP for Cambridge 2005–10 and before that, Leader of Cambridge City Council. He was for a decade a member of the Liberal Democrat Federal Policy Committee and chaired the party's first policy working group on economic policy.

Cllr John Howson is Liberal Democrat spokesperson on Oxfordshire County Council. In his career he has been teacher, lecturer, government adviser and business owner and an adviser to several of the party's education spokespeople. He is currently Chair of TeachVac, the free vacancy service for schools. He has been a magistrate for 20 years, and a Vice President of the Magistrates Association.

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Dr Mohsin Khan is an NHS doctor in forensic psychiatry. He has past experience in the Department of Health, the House of Commons, and in health think tanks. He has frequently appeared in national TV and press. He is a member of the Federal Policy Committee and is vice chair of the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Race Equality.

Tamora Langley chaired the party's health and social care policy working group in 2018–19. She was the party's parliamentary candidate in Lewisham Deptford in 2010, and vice chair of the Campaign for Gender Balance. Professionally she is Head of Policy, Media and Public Affairs at the Royal College of Surgeons.

Whit Mason is an associate fellow at the security think tank RUSI. He worked as a journalist in Russia, Hong Kong and Korea and reported from the war in Bosnia. He has been a research fellow in Istanbul, worked on UN communications in Kosovo and has published books on Afghanistan, Kosovo and Islamism. He founded Mason Change Communications in 2014.

Layla Moran has been the Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West & Abingdon since 2017, defeating the Conservatives by just 816 votes. She was re-elected in 2019 with an increased majority of 8,943 and is currently the party's education spokesperson. Before Parliament, she was a maths and physics teacher with over ten years' experience.

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Brian Paddick (Lord Paddick) is a Liberal Democrat peer and former party spokesperson on Home Affairs. He was the party's candidate for Mayor of London in 2008 and 2012. During a 30-year career in the Metropolitan Police he was the Borough Commander for Merton and then Lambeth, ending his career as one of the most senior police officers at New Scotland Yard.

Jannah Patchay is the founder of Markets Evolution (a consultancy specialising in financial markets regulation and innovation), a director and regulatory advocacy ambassador for the London Blockchain Foundation, and a freelance journalist covering financial and technology innovation topics. She is the chair of Bermondsey Community Nursery, a voluntary position. She is also a member of the Liberal Democrat Business and Entrepreneurs Network.

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William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire) led the manifesto drafting team for the 1979 and 1997 elections. He taught politics and international relations at Manchester and Oxford Universities and the LSE, with 12 years as director of studies at Chatham House. He was a Lords minister and government whip in 2010–15, and is now the party's spokesman in the Lords on the Cabinet Office.

Irina von Wiese was a UK member of the European Parliament and vice chair of the Human Rights sub-committee from May 2019 to January 2020. She also served on the Executive Committee and Board of Governors of the European Endowment for Democracy. She is a qualified German lawyer and UK solicitor, and holds a Masters in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School.

# Build back better

Britain after coronavirus:  
policy ideas for  
Liberal Democrats

Edited by Layla Moran MP

