



NEW GROUND

AUTUMN 2020

Campaigning for environmental change & social justice

BUILD BACK GREENER

Local action and leadership for a secure future

Cllr Tom Hayes

*Oxford's citizens assembly
on climate change*

Rebecca Newsom

Fighting for the green recovery

**Melanie Smallman
& Jake Sumner**

*A green recovery can
bring security and safety*

Welcome to our Autumn 2020 Edition

SOPHIE LETHIER

The following articles were compiled over the course of the last few months, while the world has reacted and adapted to the Coronavirus pandemic. Our aim for this issue was to shine a light on how this has affected environmental and climate progress, how Labour leaders are adapting locally, and hear from environmental voices on where they think Labour can lead on nationally.

So much has changed since the last edition of New Ground. Labour has badly lost a General Election, a right-wing government is in charge of the UK Government, we've welcomed Keir Starmer as Labour's new leader, and a pandemic has reshaped our lives, our economy and to some degree, climate action. We were set to face Mayoral and local elections in May too, but these have been put back to 2021 and the vital COP26 talks have been postponed to next year.

Before the pandemic, the movement for climate action had been building momentum, and while COVID-19 has shown that acting on the climate emergency is more important

than ever, we are now facing the danger of a carbon intensive economy recovery, which could permanently lock us out of the path to a 1.5 degree world. For Labour, our economy and our planet, 2020 must be about recovery. How can we heal our country, and reshape our economy in a way that creates a green and just society? And in what ways can Labour act now to make this happen?

The articles included in this collection draw on Labour's local accomplishments and the insight of environmental campaigners about where we go next. We hope these features can provide some optimism in this moment of acute crisis. Thank you to everyone who contributed an article, in particular to those who had taken the time to write a piece on the now delayed May elections, which we bring forward in a different way ahead. Much of our work going forward will focus on supporting next year's campaigns to ensure that Labour can win on and with an ambitious green and climate programme in 2021.

Stay well, and safe.



ABOUT

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The views expressed in New Ground are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the editor, SERA its executive or its members.

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SERA AT LABOUR CONNECTED CONFERENCE 2020

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A GREEN RECOVERY CAN BRING SECURITY AND SAFETY

MELANIE SMALLMAN & JAKE SUMNER
SERA CO-CHAIRS

At the start of the summer a wide range of groups, from environmental NGOs to trades unions, lobbied parliament to argue that the post-COVID-19 recovery must be green. Labour and SERA have urged this too. The climate crisis has not gone away, if anything the clock is ticking faster, but we've seen little that the Government has set us on the right path. The Prime Minister's infrastructure announcement and the Chancellor's mini-budget, failed to set out what is needed to meet the challenge.

This failure is not only concerning for our environment, as the threat of climate change becomes even more urgent, it is a failure to lead a recovery that truly focuses on jobs and on bringing the security that so many desperately need right now. The reality is that failing to address the climate crisis makes our economy and society weaker and more fragile - at a time when COVID-19 has laid bare the inequalities and insecurities that many people live with. A true green recovery is our best hope of an economy that offers security and safety in the future.

Even before COVID-19, polls showed that many people sought security and certainty. The recent IPSOS Mori survey of global trends has identified 'fear of the future' as a key trend in 2020. This sense of vulnerability has only been highlighted in the fragilities and weaknesses revealed by the COVID-19 crisis - the precarious nature of work and the frightening lack of safety and security many are experiencing, as well as the frailty of the services that we count on. If we are to build consent to act on the climate, we cannot ask people to lurch from one disaster to another.

The good news is that tackling environmental problems and increased security can easily come together. Although countless Tory Governments have missed this, claiming that the economy comes first and branding environmental measures 'green crap' that were too expensive, we know that moving to a low-carbon future is the best way to offer the stability and security that people are so desperate for.

There is no choice between growing and greening, because shielding businesses and countries from the vulnerabilities of the volatile global oil market is the best way to provide economic stability and secure jobs. Reducing household energy consumption by insulating homes stops people having to choose between heating and eating, reduces emissions and creates jobs. Low-carbon industries grew the fastest out of the global financial crisis and were the most resilient. Far from being a luxury that can't be afforded, moving to a low-carbon future is the only way to get our economy off the rocks. This is not simply about solar panels or wind turbines. There are many businesses - from cafes to manufacturers, financial bodies to food producers - that have green and low carbon products and services and a range of jobs in them from HR to design, sales to logistics.

There is another positive loop too. COVID has shown a desire from people not to return to 'business as usual' as they value access to nature, open spaces and their local community, the possibility of improved air quality, and even the potential of working from home.

To build this more secure future, we cannot simply dust down the policies of the past. We need an approach that is comprehensive, scalable, and rapid to tackle the looming climate crisis, and to give people the jobs and security that they need - and soon.

Nationally Labour has a role, making this argument, calling the Government to account and showing what leadership should entail. But, because Labour runs cities, regions and the Wales Government, Labour can demonstrate leadership and credibility too in office, making people's lives more secure now. Polling shows that people are cynical of political claims, but Labour in Government can show credibility and purpose of action.

Labour has been consulting on the best way to achieve the green recovery. SERA and Labour Business hosted an event with Ed Miliband, Shadow BEIS Secretary and Liam Byrne, Shadow West Midlands Mayor, exploring the national and regional response we need. This formed part of our green recovery policy thinking programme and supported our response to Labour's consultation (all are on the SERA website).

We need to think and act differently to bring about a green recovery that brings safety and security and here are four key areas:

Job opportunities and security

First, we need to recognise that it is no coincidence that job insecurity has come hand in hand with a lack of trade unions in large parts of the economy. Unions give people a voice and stake and anchor higher pay, skill levels, better conditions

“To build this more secure future, we cannot simply dust down the policies of the past. We need an approach that is comprehensive, scalable, and rapid to tackle the looming climate crisis, and to give people the jobs and security that they need - and soon.”

and job security. TUC research shows that for every £1 of government investment into the Union Learning Fund it generates a total economic return 12 times that. Many parts of the economy have too little trade union representation. Alongside, research demonstrates the importance of employee voice in driving innovation. Yet, the UK has one of the worst levels of employee engagement in the OECD. And while we need new skills for the future low carbon economy, our skills gaps are again far worse than most other OECD countries. One skills gap in the green economy for example is trained retrofit co-ordinators. The Government should therefore establish a New Future Skills Fund, that asks unions, sectors and supply chains to co-bid for funding to work with skills institutions to train workers to have roles in the green future.

Devolve powers and start the climate conversations

Government environmental leadership and direction is most definitely needed, although it is worryingly lacking. However, even if this was addressed, local and regional administrations are the leaders in their areas and make funding and change work locally. People also want decisions closer to them. Building on what Labour Councils are doing with citizen assemblies and forums, such as Camden, Oxford, Greater Manchester and North Tyne, we need thousands of climate conversations across the country to build awareness, understanding and consent. This can't happen at a Whitehall desk or at the dispatch box. A green recovery must therefore empower the most

appropriate local level for climate action and support the goals that many authorities have set which are more ambitious than those set by the Government.

“...we need thousands of climate conversations across the country to build awareness, understanding and consent. This can't happen at a Whitehall desk or at the dispatch box”

The environmental crisis is a health crisis

While COVID was much more than a health crisis, climate change is much more than an environmental crisis. The climate catastrophe is the biggest health crisis we face, and we must talk and act in this way - we have seen government action taken in unprecedented rapid and bold ways to tackle a health crisis and the public has given support for these changes. Extreme weather is already threatening lives and the impacts are getting worse. Toxic air contributes to underlying respiratory and health problems which have exacerbated COVID. And through the impact of COVID we face too a mounting mental health crisis. Studies show how important public space and access to nature is to good mental health. This must signal a

change in how we plan and build and give people a new right to clean air and access to quality public space and nature. To support this as the UK walks away from the environmental protection of the European Courts, we should establish a 'Green Guardian' body, to empower community action on local environmental concerns.

Reclaim Britain's place in the world

Lastly, we need to reclaim our place in the world - from global leadership on climate change to developing the low carbon technologies that will be the global exports of the future. This should be at the centre of hosting COP26 in 2021, but also run through the industries we invest in and the trade agreements we develop post-Brexit. In a changing world it is tempting to feel safest pulling up the drawbridge. But, tackling climate change needs international action and isolating ourselves will only make Britain more vulnerable.

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LABOUR LEADING THE FIGHT ON THE CLIMATE AND AIR QUALITY EMERGENCIES IN THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION

COUNCILLOR LIAM ROBINSON, TRANSPORT & AIR
QUALITY PORTFOLIO HOLDER, LIVERPOOL CITY REGION

Like most Labour authorities, Mayor Steve Rotheram on behalf of the Liverpool City Region and our six Labour-led district councils declared a climate emergency with a clear pledge to be carbon and zero emission by 2040. This has become even more important as we now focus on 'Building Back Better' for the post-COVID era.

We know all too clearly how the climate emergency and poor air quality will particularly hurt our most vulnerable residents the most - and we are determined to deal with this challenge and build an inclusive and sustainable future for all 1.6 million of our residents.

A London style integrated transport system is at the heart of Steve's vision for the Liverpool City Region. For over 30 years areas like ours outside of London have been at the mercy of privatisations and deregulation in the transport sector that has prevented a truly integrated network of services being delivered. Devolution gives us a huge opportunity to fix this. Whilst COVID has significantly challenged our transport network with passenger numbers significantly reduced and the importance of safe social distancing further reducing capacity, we do know that it is vital that we have a safe and growing public transport network as part of our long term plans to 'build back better' in a sustainable way.

Merseyrail, as part of our local rail network, has been devolved to the region since

2003. With local control focusing on passengers needs such as fares only rising in line with inflation and fully-staffed stations we have been able to transform what was once known as 'Miseryrail' into the UK's best performing local network.

"For over 30 years areas like ours outside of London have been at the mercy of privatisations and deregulation in the transport sector that has prevented a truly integrated network of services being delivered. Devolution gives us a huge opportunity to fix this."

But, we're not prepared to rest on our laurels. We've invested £460m on a brand new fleet of the trains for the network that will be put into service this year and are in our own local public ownership to take services onto the next

level. Local public ownership has allowed local passengers to be at the heart of designing these trains including level access for wheelchairs from the platform and significantly improved cycle facilities.

But, just as importantly local public ownership of the trains has been shown to be 1/3 cheaper over the lifetime of the fleet than if we used the failed privatised leasing model for train procurement that most other parts of the railway still use. There are many lessons that the railway can learn from Merseyrail with devolution and investment at its heart, which is why Steve was leading the calls for Arriva to be stripped of the basket case Northern franchise and replaced with a publicly run, devolved and properly funded model instead.

However, as important as our local rail network is, over 80 per cent of public transport journeys are made on the bus. Whilst prior to COVID we have had success in growing patronage on buses, mainly with a new, reduced fares deal for all under 19s that has seen the number of young people's journeys double (in fact growing by 168 per cent), we have ambitions to make bus services much better for local people. That's why we are bringing forward our plans to utilise the devolved powers in the Buses Act 2017 - that returns many powers that Thatcher stripped from us in 1986 with de-regulation. London style bus franchising has been identified as the emerging leading option from the work we have done so far.

“The river Mersey has defined life in our region for centuries and with one of the largest tidal ranges of a river of its kind we plan to harness its potential.”

At the heart of the vision is a more comprehensive network with all routes operating from 5am till midnight and a number of 24 hour services, more affordable tap on tap off smart fares and true integration with trains and the Mersey ferries. To build on the first 25 hydrogen buses we are introducing this year we are targeting a completely zero emissions fleet to be introduced by 2035. Added to this we have plans to deliver a network of at least eight zero-carbon refuelling stations (hydrogen and electric charging) for other vehicles across the city region by 2025

Walking and cycling needs to be key components in all journeys and we want to ensure that active travel is at the heart of all of our plans. We already take 8,000 school children through ‘bikeability’ training each year, which is the largest programme of its kind in the country. However, we need to ensure we have the infrastructure to match, so we have a vision to deliver 600km of high quality walking and cycling infrastructure over the next four years with the first 60kms already being implemented. Much of this programme is being significantly accelerated and further complemented with ‘pop up’ infrastructure as we put in place measures to support walking and cycling in a socially distanced way to deal with the COVID pandemic.

However, if we are to deal with the climate emergency we can’t see this solely as an issue that just needs improvements in

public transport to deal with it. Through our air quality taskforce, we have recommended a number of measures to implement including working with our local authorities to harmonise taxi standards, develop scrappage schemes and roll out 20 mph zones to all residential roads across the region building on some great successes in both Sefton and Liverpool.

Equally, transport alone cannot solve this, so we are very keen to look at delivering a local boiler scrappage scheme that could particularly help our most vulnerable residents and tackle fuel poverty.

Our opportunities to invest in sustainable energy are a key component part of our exciting plans. The river Mersey has defined life in our region for centuries and with one of the largest tidal ranges of a river of its kind we plan to harness its potential. We have created the Mersey Tidal Commission with the express aim of developing and delivering Europe’s largest tidal power project by 2030. Allied to this is the plan to triple the volume of energy generated by offshore wind in Liverpool Bay, which already has some of Britain’s largest offshore wind farms, by 2032.

We also see hydrogen as a key part of our energy mix locally. Currently the chemical industry based in Runcorn in our region is producing hydrogen as a waste product from some of its processes. So, we see this as a huge opportunity in our energy mix and have

pledged to replace all methane with hydrogen in our local gas grid by 2035.

To coordinate our plans and approaches to the climate emergency we have also created the Liverpool City Region Climate Partnership, as well created a £500,000 fund to support more community environment projects to get off the ground, on top of our £10 million Green Investment Fund.

Think global, act local has been a long held adage for the environmental movement and as a world renowned City Region we are determined to be at the forefront of action on this. As the Tory Government drags its feet on this vital issue, we know that Labour in local areas can lead this agenda and show not just what we can achieve locally but how much more we could deliver with a Labour Government.

LIAM ROBINSON is the Labour Councillor for Kensington & Fairfield, Chair of Merseytravel Transport Committee and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Transport Portfolio Holder. Liam tweets at @liamrobinson24.



HOW YORK IS GOING CAR FREE

COUNCILLOR JONNY CRAWSHAW,
YORK CITY COUNCIL

It may already be a cliché, but it doesn't make it untrue - the Coronavirus pandemic and consequent lockdown has changed everything. Just exactly how remains to be seen. So, what does that mean for politicians at a local and national level who were already trying to reimagine the status quo? The goalposts have certainly moved - but not necessarily the goals themselves.

I've spent a lot of time these last few months thinking about what sort of world we will emerge into when lockdown is lifted. And in amongst the worry, frustration and difficult news I believe there are some real causes for optimism too. In York, as I'm sure is the case in cities across the country, communities have come together, things that were thought crucially important earlier this year seem insignificant now and new ways of being are already beginning to emerge.

One noticeable impact has been a dramatic fall in the number of cars on the roads. The resulting improvement in air quality has been equally dramatic with a 30 per cent reduction in York's Nitrogen Dioxide levels being recorded in just the first few weeks. It's not only the air quality that has improved though: the streets are calmer, it's less stressful to ride your bike and it's noticeably quieter. My Ward colleague who has lived in the city centre for 15 years discovered that his cherry tree continually buzzes from pollinating bees – something he'd never previously noticed.

It feels like a sneak-preview of some of the benefits that we hope to be achieving in York by 2023. Because back in early January – almost a lifetime ago now – York was making national and international headlines as the first UK city to propose banning cars from the city centre.

York Labour's opposition council motion - 'to reduce unnecessary car journeys across the whole city' and 'to develop and implement a plan to restrict all non-essential car journeys within the city walls by 2023' - was adopted shortly before Christmas with support from a couple of Independents and the greener parts of the ruling Lib Dem / Green coalition (all but one of the Lib Dems abstained). I hadn't thought of it as being a particularly radical motion in the wider context of our council's previously declared Climate Emergency - and we never actually said 'ban all cars' - but it clearly resonated with a far larger audience than I had anticipated; perhaps testament to an idea whose time had come.

The Lib Dems' abstention underlined an apparent lack of ambition and strategy in the council's delivery on the climate agenda - something we have found frustrating and confusing given the many people on the streets and at the doors telling us they are ready for change and optimistic about the city's new, low-carbon future.

That desire for change comes with good reason. The climate emergency provides the backdrop, but many York residents hold significant local concerns about poor air quality - an underappreciated public health emergency which is killing thousands of people annually across the country. In York, it is estimated that around 60 people die prematurely each year and we have several streets in or near the centre that - pre-lockdown - were illegally breaching WHO air quality limits.

To give some credit, the Council has belatedly launched initiatives including an anti-idling campaign aimed at motorists, a clean air zone (just for buses) and some modest measures to increase the uptake

of electric vehicles. These were welcomed and undoubtedly part of the solution, but with less than half of roadside air-pollution coming from vehicle exhausts - the remainder comprised of brake dust, tyre wear, disturbance of road-surface debris, etc - such initiatives will only ever tackle part of the problem.

Beyond pollution, the cost to the city's economy in lost productivity and delayed journey times resulting from congestion is thought to run well into the millions. Meanwhile, studies increasingly show that spending time in stationary traffic is bad for your health and well-being, with delayed commuters reporting higher stress levels and poorer mental health.

Streets with fewer cars are good for footfall-dependent city centre economies too, as places like Ghent in Belgium have shown. Concepts like 'sticky streets' and 'go-to' (as opposed to 'drive-thru') city centres have become increasingly popular in recent years. And post-Coronavirus people won't accept being corralled down narrow pavements or through confined spaces, so by turning over more space to pedestrians now we can help reinvigorate the high street of the future, making it more accessible to more people - not to mention a nicer place to work, shop and spend time.

It's not just about the climate emergency, public health or economic productivity though; some of York's most deprived and socially-isolated communities are located beyond reasonable walking distance of the city centre. Likewise, there are those for whom even a few short steps are impossible. By making it as easy as possible to access York without needing a car - and by clearing

“By making it as easy as possible to access York without needing a car - and by clearing the roads for those who genuinely do - York will become a more equitable city.”

the roads for those who genuinely do - York will become a more equitable city.

It is crucial then that we take a whole-city approach, ensuring public transport and sustainable travel options are as attractive and easily accessible as possible for as many people as possible. In doing so we can enable more and more people to make a positive choice not to use their cars, such that by 2023 the car needs no longer be the default travel choice for the vast majority of people.

There is understandable anxiety in some quarters, with particular concerns relating to displaced traffic. Rather than worrying about diverting cars from busy roads or shoppers from city centre car parks, we must be thinking in terms of diverting people from their cars - whilst recognising, of course, that there will always be those for whom the car is a life-line. No-one must feel they are being targeted, excluded or made to feel unwelcome. To be successful, we must not ignore people's worries or dismiss them out of hand. We must take people with us through dialogue and openness, whilst remembering always to keep clearly articulating the great many reasons why this is the right course of action.

I see many parallels with the introduction of the smoking ban back in 2007 (2006 in Scotland) which was controversial and seen by some as an attack on personal liberty. Yet, within weeks of its introduction we couldn't quite believe it had taken so long to come in and it would be unthinkable now that it could ever be reversed.

Lockdown has created opportunities to trial both small and large scale re-designation of space from motor-vehicles to cyclists

and pedestrians - we are already seeing some of the benefits informally. Such changes can begin as temporary measures but as the lockdown eventually eases, with each phase of reopening there will be an opportunity to see what temporary measures can be retained.

“I remain optimistic that the next years and decades will see us move away from individualised, car-dependent societies and towards more community-focused, people-friendly places and spaces. It won't be easy and we will need to completely rethink how our towns and cities work. But even small changes can have big impacts.”

So as politicians up and down the country consider our responses to the crisis - and the pre-existing challenges of 21st century living - I urge you to be bold: As more and more Local Authorities take steps towards low-car, low-carbon futures, we can learn from each other. Everything has changed and many people do not want to simply go back to how things were.

2019 was a year of political turmoil that ended disastrously for Labour, but it was also the year in which the climate crisis finally crossed over into the mainstream. 2020 will be the year of the pandemic, but it may yet prove to be the year that fundamental changes to the way we organise our cities and societies took place.

In York, we found that by taking advantage of the local mood, with careful timing and a little political opportunism, we were able to set a clear, bold, strategic aim for our city from a position of opposition. With the full impact of the Coronavirus pandemic still playing out, I remain optimistic that the next years and decades will see us move away from individualised, car-dependent societies and towards more community-focused, people-friendly places and spaces. It won't be easy and we will need to completely rethink how our towns and cities work. But even small changes can have big impacts.

At the turn of the year people were crying out for hope and optimism. Post-Corona we will need it more than ever before.

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WALTHAM FOREST MINI-HOLLAND BLUEPRINT FOR THE 'NEW NORMAL'

COUNCILLOR CLYDE LOAKES, *DEPUTY
LEADER, WALTHAM FOREST COUNCIL*

As I write COVID-19 and its lockdown are still dominating our lives. People are walking and cycling more as part of their daily routines - behaviours have changed albeit temporarily. In response councils and campaign groups are talking about temporarily widening pavements and installing temporary cycle tracks. However, why invest time and effort in temporary measures, when we already know such things are needed permanently? I want to offer you a blueprint for 'permanency'!

The 'Mini- Holland' programme was instigated before COVID-19 and whilst Boris Johnson was Mayor of London. It was a £100m Transport for London fund for the 18 outer London boroughs to bid for to help increase levels of walking and cycling, where short based and single occupancy car journeys are prevalent. All 18 bid, with Waltham Forest, Enfield and Kingston sharing the fund. Waltham Forest secured £27m.

Key to our bid was the concept of 'Villages', now referred to as 'low traffic neighbourhoods', as well as some major infrastructure interventions and a substantial and ongoing programme of complementary and behaviour change measures - all working to increase regular levels of walking and cycling, and reduce car use, amongst our residents.

The 'Villages'

The principles are not new, namely how to stop rat running through local residential streets in their thousands, bypassing traffic management controls on the main roads designed to manage and control such levels of motorised traffic. What was different

for us was installing the interventions that ensure the whole neighbourhood benefits, because as we know rat running is like water - it will find a way. Across our 'Villages' we have installed 51 'Modal Filters' (the opposition refers to them as road closures) which allow pedestrians, cyclists, cargo bikes and micro-scooters to go through, but prevents those in motor vehicles doing so. Residents in those areas can still access their homes by car too, just not always in the way that they had previously. We've more modal filters planned.

Across the 'Villages' and further afield we've created 31 new Pocket Parks with more planned, which are largely maintained by residents to Britain in Bloom standards! They're places where more trees have been planted, alongside planting to support our precious pollinators and are mostly created on Sustainable Urban Drainage System principles. We've tightened up junctions and introduced over 145 'Copenhagen' or 'Blended' Crossings that help reaffirm and reinforce the Highway Code Rule 170 around pedestrian and cyclist priority at these junctions - the entry points to our 'Villages' - and we have a huge number more in the pipeline. TfL monitoring of before and after driver behaviour shows a positive response in favour of the active traveller after these crossings have been introduced.

In the 'Villages' you can hear the birds sing again! This is one of the more interesting and often repeated pieces of feedback that we receive. It is coupled with a feeling of increasing levels of neighbourhood cohesion, as more people walk their children to school for example, walking with their neighbours and the parents of the children's friends. The

Pocket Parks and 'Modal Filters' allow play, conversations and other legitimate interactions to take place - you can now be, literally, 'stopped in the street'.

All of our 'Villages' sit within 20mph Zones and are resident permit parking only - these are the basics of establishing a 'low traffic neighbourhood' - removing - or at least reducing - the speeding traffic and the non-local traffic that does not reside in that area. These basics must be in place so that reducing the rat running can begin and you can civilise and return the neighbourhood to the people who live in it.

Despite the largest protests in Waltham Forest Council's 50-year history in relation to our Mini Holland programme, we have taken thousands of daily motor vehicle movements out of our 'Villages'. Clearly some has been displaced onto the main roads designed for that level of traffic, but much has evaporated. As you wander around these roads - as I do in my role as tour guide to councillors and officers from across the UK and overseas - you find yourself walking and cycling two, three or even four and five abreast along the roads that once took 3,000+ motor vehicles a day and if you do come across a motor vehicle it respects and understands you are the vulnerable road user in that interaction.

Anecdotally driver and active traveller interactions have improved hugely since we started this work. In our 'Villages' the motor vehicle is now the tolerated guest, rather than the needy and prioritised; and because the driver of that vehicle is more likely to live in that area, they are more likely to be known and people interact.

*“In the ‘Villages’
you can hear the
birds sing again!”*



Air quality

We have seen dramatic improvements in air quality, with a reduction of households exposed to illegal levels of NO₂ from 58,000 to under 6,000, between 2007 and 2017. This is borne out by the research that we commissioned Kings College to undertake that also identified significant PM_{2.5} reductions. The conclusion from Kings is that a child born in 2013 in Waltham Forest, would live six weeks longer by 2020, as a direct consequence of our pioneering Mini-Holland highways interventions.

The ‘big infrastructure’ - build it and they will come

The conversion of Lea Bridge Road - our busiest road - into a ‘Street for Everyone’ has been a real challenge and has involved the removal of inefficient bus lanes, as well as the former Whipps Cross Roundabout and its replacement by the new Whipps Cross Interchange. We’ve planted 80 new trees, created a modern and future proofed bus interchange and handed back some 1800sqm of road space to Epping Forest to be reintegrated back into this ancient forest - the first time in the council’s history we have handed land back, rather than take for road expansions.

On Lea Bridge Road we’ve introduced new formal pedestrian crossing points, making it safer for pedestrians to cross where they want to cross, rather than where it was convenient for motor vehicles to allow them to cross, alongside Modal Filters on the side feeder roads and 8km of fully segregated cycle tracks into the neighbouring borough of Hackney. The result has been an increase in cycling of 118 per cent on Lea Bridge Road.

Complementary measures

There is a constant stream of activities to support, help and enable more people to benefit from what we have built over the last six years. These include: free cycle training in groups of peers, family or women only groups, or even one to one; and free bike loans and a growing fleet of traditional and e-cargo bikes to try out before your family or your business decides to invest. We’ve also invested in 430+ on street resident cycle hangars, complemented by a network of seven (so far) Cycle Hubs at our major train and tube stations, which help reduce the barriers to include cycling as part of the commute and everyday short based journeys.

Our Annual ‘Walking and Cycling Community Fund’ which provides local groups with small amounts of funding to help them set up walking groups or targeted and specialist cycle groups; helping break down some of the perceived challenges and barriers that some face.

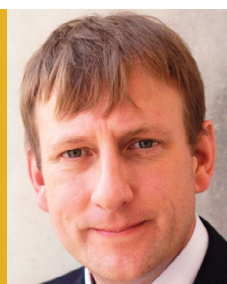
Conclusion

All the evidence over many years, from studies across the world, tell us that the interventions we are making with our Mini-Holland programme, are the right ones. If we are serious about reducing our dependence on the privately-owned motor vehicle and the societal, environmental, community, economic and health challenges that it has and continues to create, then the response needs to be big and bold. ‘Tinkering’ and traditional approaches - literally managing the status quo - no longer cuts it. It isn’t easy and requires a huge amount of political will and effort. Residents need to be won over and plenty of people will kick back and be very angry, but plenty of people will also be on your side.

*“I’m in no doubt our
Mini-Holland programme
should form the blueprint
to invest and embed
that newly forged active
travel appetite into
the UK’s recovery and
any ‘new normal’”*

History will judge whether (and when we still had the time to make a difference) we provided the political leadership and did the right things in Waltham Forest. As I write, the UK is grappling to identify any positives from a COVID-19 inspired Lockdown. Surely the emergence of a clear appetite and ability to embrace walking and cycling, as part of our daily routines during lockdown, is up there? I’m in no doubt our Mini-Holland programme should form the blueprint to invest and embed that newly forged active travel appetite into the UK’s recovery and any ‘new normal’.

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OXFORD'S CITIZENS ASSEMBLY ON CLIMATE CHANGE

COUNCILLOR TOM HAYES, OXFORD CITY COUNCIL
DEPUTY LEADER AND GREEN TRANSPORT AND
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Even as we change it, we must live in the world. Change can't be done to people; it must happen with, for, and by people; and just because climate action is recognised as scientifically necessary it doesn't mean enough people will truly accept it as politically required. That realisation fuelled Oxford's decision to hold a Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change.

Our climate problem is, fundamentally, a problem of time. Our present carries in it the entirety of our past. If today is the totality of human-created emissions, tomorrow must be the totality of our collective emissions reductions. Our ever-shrinking time horizon for meaningful action means the future really must be as near as tomorrow. Fixing what is broken will involve remaking in a very short time horizon. How do we build a shared faith that our future will be better than the present when people are feeling at their most powerless?

That Attenborough, Greta, and Extinction Rebellion have appeared should be celebrated; yet they came along when people have been feeling at their most disenfranchised.

Councillors ride the same buses, walk the same streets, and shop in the same places as those we represent. We know first-hand how the phrase 'Get Brexit Done' perniciously tapped into the collective exhaustion of our communities. While our place in the world hangs in the balance and everything feels too hard, our democracy, already

stretched to breaking point, now must deal with a planet that feels on fire.

At a local level, councillors are inviting the public into decision-making. There are going to have to be trade-offs in a world of austerity. Can councils spend more on climate action while ensuring nobody sleeps rough by funding homelessness services? Can we accept building fewer council homes if we make them zero carbon, and how do we explain our decision to those on our waiting lists?

That's not to say that progress hasn't been made. Oxford City Council has reduced its emissions by 40 per cent over the last four years. But, the ambition to go further demands widespread buy-in and co-production by our citizens. So when Oxford was passing our climate emergency declaration, I amended it to provide for a citizens' assembly. Our council began the work of making it the most insightful Assembly that it could be.

What did we do? We formed an advisory group of experts, campaigning groups including Extinction Rebellion, community representatives, and elected councillors from mainstream political parties. Excellently chaired by Oxford's Leader, Susan Brown, the advisory group designed the assembly and crucially, resolved a tension that had emerged.

Should the assembly focus on recommending the trade-offs that an underfunded council should make or should it use this historic opportunity to reimagine Oxford by focusing on

the social and economic 'co-benefits' of taking climate action? The advisory group determined it would be the latter, so we developed it to provide members with the chance to cultivate a love of place and people in it.

We discovered that the assembly's debate about climate action could be a way to learn about the values which underpin our society, and update and inhabit them, cultivate a new sense of belonging, and nurture a new patriotism for Oxford.

We held two busy weekends of discussion and deliberation to answer the specific question agreed by the advisory group: 'The UK Government has legislation to reach "net zero" by 2050. Should Oxford be more proactive and seek to achieve 'net zero' sooner than 2050 and what trade-offs are we prepared to make?'

We presumed that 2050 was everyone's new 'business as usual' position. But, precisely because we recognised the risks involved in waiting for Government to act, including 2050 turning out to be late and national decision-makers taking terrible decisions in the rush for the deadline, we sought to find out how much more proactive the council should be than this new business as usual position.

We followed guidelines set by Involve and the Government's Innovation in Democracy Programme, with Ipsos Mori recruiting 50 residents, broadly reflective of the profile of the city's residents. There was no option to directly apply to be a member of the assembly, although

many wanted to. The assembly was designed to provide unique insights into all groups in our city, not just the loudest voices on green issues. As the city's leading representative, democratic institution, the council reserved the final say on acting on the recommendations.

In the first weekend, we had presentations for members to question experts and build understanding of the five themes that make up Oxford's particular contribution to the global climate crisis, in line with a report commissioned on baseline emissions. The themes were buildings (responsible for 81 per cent of the city's emissions), transportation (17 per cent), waste management, biodiversity and offsetting, and renewable energy. Breaking the climate crisis down by theme, then further into bite-size chunks, helped the assembly to feel less daunted.

In the second weekend, members engaged in more deliberation, and voted on a set of ambition levels for each theme - low, medium, and high with each including a mix of co-benefits and trade-offs that were unique to that theme. Many members found it hard to choose, but facilitation helped draw decisions out. Assembly members were also asked to vote on certain statements to help guide the council's ambition.

When it came to waste management, members believed that it wasn't just about reducing, reusing, and recycling waste mattered, there should also be an onus on producers with 71 per cent believing they should have most responsibility for dealing with waste with 16 per cent consumers and 11 per cent councils.

When it came to buildings, as one member said: 'It seems a bit ridiculous with the new builds, in the near future you will have to go back and retrofit again, so it seems absurd that you wouldn't start there.' All members agreed that the Government should introduce a new national policy to require that new homes are built to net zero standards.

On transport, the view was to encourage behaviour change and modal shift away from private car use, a unified strategy among councils and public transport providers, and greater incentives for public

transport use, particularly for vulnerable groups. Should the Government bring forward the ban on the sale of new polluting cars and vans from 2040 to 2030 - 83 per cent of members said they should. Sadly, the Government has gone against this by recently announcing just five years would be shaved off.

Regarding biodiversity and offsetting, the assembly wanted more green space and tree planting, viewing as an 'easy win' and galvanising community action. There were tensions between land for green spaces or building new homes with 66 per cent wanting to prioritise planting more trees in public spaces, while 34 per cent wanting to work with neighbouring councils to secure land outside the city for large-scale tree planting.

When it came to renewable energy, there was surprise at how much Oxford is already doing with the council's setting up and funding the social enterprise Low Carbon Hub to install more community owned renewable energy capacity across the county. It was believed that there was too much emphasis on the individual to take the initiative (an issue across themes) and that local and national government should help households to make the transition. It was also believed that neutralising climate change was more important than the aesthetics of, say, installing solar panels on Oxford's historic buildings.

On the main question, 90 per cent wanted Oxford to reach net zero sooner than 2050 and be a leader in tackling the climate crisis while a majority voted for all of the most ambitious scenarios. Members wanted enhanced flora and fauna in the centre; more cycling, walking, public transport, and far fewer cars; improved building standards, widespread retrofitting, with more domestic and non-domestic energy met by sustainable sources.

However, a consistent one in three rejected the most ambitious visions. The assembly showed that the airing of differences gets you somewhere new and better by shaping and swaying opinion. Given the point was for people to encounter views they disagreed with without vilifying them, the assembly succeeded.

Our assembly showed that people are central to recognising the climate's plight and to consider the question what must I do to protect my loved ones now that I know what lies ahead?

Many members have now taken on leadership roles within their neighbourhoods and city. To create a net zero city, you need net zero citizens in every place, indeed every conceivable association of people. Heroes like Attenborough and Thunberg are great to get the movement going, but it's a network of zero carbon citizens and champions that will help us avert catastrophe.

Observing every hour of the citizens' assembly, I felt inspired. Carrying that inspiration into decision-making has been easy. With our new £19m climate emergency fund, my council will be net zero carbon by the end of this year. We're going further and faster on our zero emission zone to restrict polluting vehicle use, encouraging renewable energy growth, enhancing biodiversity, and preparing for an enormous programme of retrofitting of our council stock and homes.

As a progressive party, we believe that societies are capable of being made better, kinder and fairer. So, the climate challenge becomes how can our response restore that sense of community essential to happy lives? Oxford's citizens' assembly has shown the ways that we can establish new communities of common feeling and the sense of belonging to each other and places that we care about. Our response to the climate crisis will hopefully help cultivate that belonging and address the local character of our climate crisis. Our goal isn't just to address climate change, it's to go on strengthening community-led change, prompted by our new type of democratic discussion.

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FIGHTING FOR A GREEN RECOVERY

REBECCA NEWSOM, HEAD OF POLITICS,
GREENPEACE UK

For the issues on which we work - climate change, the advancement of the world's poorest people and the protection of the natural world - 2020 was always going to be a crucial year. It was the year of the UN Biodiversity Conference and the year Glasgow would host the international UN climate conference - COP26 - to name just two important moments that would indicate world leaders' direction of travel over the next decade.

However, in just a few short weeks, those and many other crucial events were postponed, struck by the force of COVID-19. With the pandemic impacting nearly every facet of normal life across the world, governments have, rightly, focused on rolling out the most effective strategies to save lives and world economies. But, there is still a right and a wrong way to do that to ensure a better future for everyone. Decisions made now will have enormous, long-lasting impact in the future that could either lead us to a cleaner, greener economy, or drive us deeper into climate emergency.

Keir Starmer and the rest of the Labour shadow team have a vital role in ensuring the Government's response to the health crisis doesn't make the ongoing climate crisis even worse.

To stand the best chance of shielding against the devastating impacts of climate catastrophe and global recession, the Government must increase job-creation, attract private investment and boost

demand through major fiscal stimulus and rescue packages that are net-zero compatible across the economy. Increased use of government spending, fiscal and policy instruments to attract and sustain private investment over the long term are some of the most powerful levers available at this time to reboot the economy and get the UK on track to delivering net zero as quickly as possible and way before COP26 next year. Now is a chance to address these critical environmental and economic challenges together, and to put a just transition at the very top of the Government's agenda. In the words of the UN Secretary General, we need to 'recover better'.

Lessons must be learned from the response to the 2008 crash, when vast sums were given to banks and high-emission industries, contributing to faster emissions growth in 2010 than before the crisis. Austerity, which pushed many into greater poverty and exacerbated inequality across the country, cannot be repeated. Rather than propping up big polluters, under-investing in our health, social and education services and side-lining or reversing progress on climate change, support for businesses and communities needs to lay durable foundations for a healthier, more sustainable and resilient society in the long term. That means job and wage security for workers in exposed industries, proper investment in the NHS, and stronger social safety net provisions for households struggling to make ends meet. Taxpayers

should no longer be expected to fund measures that jeopardise their children's futures. Instead, money that needs to be spent anyway on reviving the economy can be used to secure those futures.

Now that COP26 has been delayed, it does not mean we can delay getting our own house in order. As Yvo de Boer, the UN's top climate official from 2006-2010 recently said: 'It's very important that the UK has domestic policies in place that allow them to inspire confidence in other countries.'

The UK must be demonstrably on track to delivering net zero as quickly as possible. As a starter, this will require laying out plans to triple clean renewables by 2030, phasing out new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, massively increasing home energy efficiency, cancelling destructive new road-building and all airport expansion, and restoring and extending precious habitats like woodlands, peatlands, and seagrass meadows across the UK.

Done right, many of these vital climate investments and policy levers now needed will also help address many of the economic, social and health inequalities that currently hinder the lives of communities across the UK. Warmer homes will cut energy bills. Cleaner air will cut costs from air pollution and help save lives. Better public transport will ease congestion. Better urban design and increased investment in broadband will minimise commuting time. A better food and farming system will improve

“Warmer homes will cut energy bills. Cleaner air will cut costs from air pollution and help save lives. Better public transport will ease congestion. Better urban design and increased investment in broadband will minimise commuting time. A better food and farming system will improve people’s diets, improving physical and mental health.”

people’s diets, improving physical and mental health. Only through a recovery package that addresses these challenges as a whole can we create a more resilient and equal society in the long run. The real danger our planet faces is if we get the response to this virus wrong.

The Labour Party should be pushing the Government to do better and more at every level. This means local Labour Councils helping to set a strong track record for rolling out the green transition fairly and equitably on the ground. It means scrupulous scrutiny in Select Committees. It means Labour Peers in the House of Lords tabling and voting on amendments to help strengthen critical pieces of post-Brexit environmental legislation and ensure it is not forgotten. And it requires direct conversations between the Labour front bench and relevant Cabinet members to lobby for the strongest possible policies.

The Treasury’s Comprehensive Spending Review and National Infrastructure Strategy later in the year are two of the most critical moments for securing many of the changes required. Advocating for the best outcomes should be one of Labour’s top priorities.

Greenpeace, WWF, Green Alliance, RSPB, Friends of the Earth and over 30 other NGOs calculated that investment in decarbonising and restoring nature needs to be increased by an additional £25bn per year over the next three years - equivalent to five per cent of government

spending. Our figures have been backed by Cambridge Econometrics. Much of this investment will likely be required through direct government spending, for example in the transport sector. However, innovative policies to help leverage private sector investment will also be appropriate in other areas like nature restoration.

“Shadow Ministers must do everything possible to ensure Ministers steer us out of the current health crisis and away from the climate crisis that awaits us once this is over, putting a just climate transition and nature recovery at the heart of everything they do.”

Back in December, before the election we ranked the Conservatives at just 15 points out of 40 on the climate and nature pledges made in their manifesto. Labour was way ahead on 35 points. So the Shadow team is in a good position

now to uphold a high standard and push the government to recover better.

Many of the plans in the Labour manifesto are consistent with the measures needed now to create a resilient economy in the long run. In contrast, while the Conservative manifesto included some important pledges (for example, 40GW offshore wind by 2030), much of the detail and ambition was lacking in crucial areas, including aviation, sustainable fishing and trade protections. High standards in these areas remain as critical now as they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so we can stand a chance of a truly resilient future.

Labour must take their role in holding up the standard for necessary action. Shadow Ministers must do everything possible to ensure Ministers steer us out of the current health crisis and away from the climate crisis that awaits us once this is over, putting a just climate transition and nature recovery at the heart of everything they do.

REBECCA NEWSOM

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NOTES FROM A 1.2°C WORLD

LAURIE LAYBOURN-LANGTON,
RESEARCHER AND WRITER

The Coronavirus pandemic is a warning from the future. It has brought the fragility of our increasingly interconnected economic and social systems into stark relief. A health crisis became an economic crisis, a social crisis, a political crisis. The word 'resilience' now peppers the policy PDFs of governments, NGOs and multilateral institutions. Let us hope that this tragedy focusses the minds of those leaders who routinely ignore the great fragilities that threaten peace and stability, from inequality to financialisation - or precipitates their downfall. But, the pandemic also serves to remind us of the huge environmental threats looming on the horizon, which are set to shake our systems to breaking point, making Coronavirus look like a dry run.

Grave new world

The environmental crisis is already changing our world, making highly damaging events more likely and more severe. The devastation brought by storms and other extreme weather, the grinding hunger resulting from degraded land and dying crops - even pandemics - are all made more likely by our destruction of the natural environment.

These individual shocks ripple out through our interconnected economic and social systems. For example, a single destructive storm in an important food-growing region can cause localised damage, disrupting the area for years to come. But, the storm will also impact people who live far away, as globalised food supply chains are disrupted and prices rise, possibly threatening the stability of countries who can't absorb the cost and are already experiencing political and economic problems.

Now, imagine such events happening more often and with greater severity, crashing into a world not only reeling from the last shock, but suffering the consequences of the slow grind of higher temperatures, less water, and poorer soil. In all, the environmental crisis could be creating a world more destabilised than in living memory.

This trend is set to accelerate, as the destruction of nature is only increasing. This is a future in which countries are already struggling with the aftereffects of the pandemic - poorer, beset with unemployment and political polarisation - and in which the costs of environmental shocks begin to add up, pushing societies further into crisis. As these shocks get more extreme, so do the costs. The environmental crisis could change the very nature of risk, creating a world of ongoing, saturating destabilisation.

This is why leading scientists and international organisations now routinely warn that societies will simply not be able to cope in such a world, overwhelmed by the constant state of destabilisation and uncertainty created by the environmental crisis. Accordingly, militaries around the world are preparing for such a future, one in which, as the US director of National Intelligence has concluded: 'global environmental and ecological degradation... fuel competition for resources, economic distress, and social discontent.'

To doom or not to doom?

Nothing can be changed unless it is faced. But, conceiving of such a future can be scary, exhausting, even debilitating. Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg and many more have rightly railed against the failure of mainstream politicians, companies and even environmental groups to use language

that proportionately describes the threat. Until recently, narratives of emergency and catastrophe were often conspicuously absent from mainstream political narratives on the environment. Yet, this is a crisis.

A debate goes on over what balance is appropriate. If we go too hard on narratives of failure and threat, will people turn off, frozen by fear and demotivated by doom? Some have been inspired to action by books aggregating the worst-case scenarios and warnings of societal collapse, but others have experienced mental health crises. On the other hand, the situation is dire, so will placing too much emphasis on the positive examples of change or downplaying worst cases, however possible, lead to more of the dangerous complacency we've seen to date? Predictably, those who've often used denial are increasingly experimenting with arguments on either side. 'It's too late, so give up, protect yourself (while our company continues to burn coal),' or, 'sure, there's a climate crisis, but it's not that bad - cancel the apocalypse (so our company can continue to burn coal).'

Debates over which environmental narratives are most effective have often set up a dichotomy, between our response to fear and hope, doom and optimism. Going too far in one direction is surely misguided. But, the wider political context is a key but overlooked factor. Bluntly, it is hard to argue that any major political leader has ever been fully 'honest' about the environmental crisis and, consequently, built a programme of government action commensurate to the scale of the problem. Accordingly, it so often feels like the race to stem the worst of the environmental crisis is being run with a break on. No wonder some are worried about telling people the truth: it's almost too much to bear when we look at the complacency, mediocrity and chipper incrementalism of our leaders.

“The best way to predict the future is to choose it”

“...it is hard to argue that any major political leader has ever been fully ‘honest’ about the environmental crisis and, consequently, built a programme of government action commensurate to the scale of the problem.”

What’s missing is the combination of truth and leadership. The former demands we admit this is an emergency of an almost incomprehensible scale and severity; it is a planetary emergency. Facing up to its horrifying consequences is painful and it’s all too easy to slip into doom as we bear witness to China’s expansion of coal power or our government’s failure to meet environmental targets. That’s because leadership is missing. True leadership frees us from the fear of the truth by awakening our agency, giving us all a role in a great, collective effort to overcome a shared threat.

The best way to predict the future is to choose it

We felt this fear when we learned of the truth of the Coronavirus pandemic back in March, the accelerating death toll and the risk that the NHS could become inundated. While the Prime Minister bumbled through press conferences, we as a people provided our own leadership, rallying to assemble community networks,

building temporary hospitals, and signing up in our hundreds of thousands to volunteer. Ripples of inspiration and care coursed across the country, waves of emotion crashing down as we clapped for our carers in those dark months.

We should be scared about the environmental crisis. Ask those on the frontline. The increasingly dire consequences are already here and have been for generations, falling disproportionately on those least responsible for its causes. And as the recent Black Lives Matter protests serve to remind us, the environmental crisis is only one manifestation of wider systems of oppression and extraction; the frontline extends to those socially and economically marginalised across the world.

That shared connection, across the disenfranchised and the endangered, is precisely why to fall into doom is to fundamentally misread our current moment. Over the last few years, movements, many of which have grown over generations, are bursting into the mainstream. They demand what is often missing from mainstream discourse on the environmental crisis: a fundamental transformation in prevailing economic and social systems. Some of these ideas may seem radical, until you consider that the current trajectory, of catastrophic global heating and runaway extinctions, is the truly radical position.

Agency is everywhere. Future greenhouse gas emissions are one of the most important determinants of temperatures in the coming decades, so we will reduce them to zero, fighting against every fraction of a degree. Ecosystems can flourish again, so we will restore them. How we treat those who suffer from the environmental destabilisation we cannot

prevent will only ever be a political choice, so we will choose compassion and care.

Bubbling up from the wave of truth brought by campaigners and scientists is an emergent leadership that binds together a coalition of voices fighting against the inequities and failings of the status quo. The growing maturity of this cause is particularly striking in the US. There, an ecosystem of influence comprising upstart think tanks, such as Data for Progress, grassroots campaigners, particularly the Sunrise Movement, and a new generation of politicians, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are channelling the desire for change and rejecting the incumbent politics of 4°C and mass extinction.

Crucially, they do this credibly and, as a consequence, have built an effective power bloc, as proven by their influence over Joe Biden’s impressive climate plan. While not nirvana, it is clear that a Biden victory could further embolden this progressive turn. What is the UK translation of this turn? Can its constituents encompass school strikers and racial justice campaigners as well as unemployed youth and the wider victims of austerity and the bungled pandemic response? Who are the British AOCs? These questions should occupy our minds in the lead up to the 2024 election. Remember, that’s the halfway point between the IPCC’s 2018 report and 2030, when global emissions must have fallen by 45 per cent.

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GETTING WORK AND WORKERS INTO THE CLEANER AIR EQUATION

MICK HOLDER, TUCAN (TRADE UNION CLEAN AIR NETWORK)

Whilst climate change and pollution have risen up many people's agenda recently following noise and action from the school climate strikes and the likes of Extinction Rebellion and David Attenborough, the role of work, workers and their representatives hasn't risen as high or as fast. And that's despite the efforts of many campaigners and which is why TUCAN, the Trade Union Clean Air Network, was created to try and address those issues.

For the last ten years, Greener Jobs Alliance (GJA) has been campaigning for action on climate change and pollution, effectively green jobs and a green new deal, all with trade union involvement. Whilst the Hazards Campaign, Hazards Magazine and many unions had been encouraging action on air pollution at the workplace it became clear that air pollution arising from work was an issue that should be singled out for a national campaign and TUCAN was created. Since then TUCAN has gained the support of many trade unions who have adopted the TUCAN Charter (see box). And then came COVID-19.

Air and health

The link between the quality of the air we breathe and poor health is well established and the news from science isn't getting better. Monitoring of spaces such as Oxford Circus in London's West End or The North Circular in Walthamstow, London give evidence to what we already knew, engine combustion by-products, tyre and brake dust etc. are at very unhealthy levels.

What has been news is the evidence that pollutants can cross to unborn children and through the nose into the

brain - and some of those pollutants are carcinogens and capable of affecting the growing child. Something many in the international hazards movement have been raising for many years. It is also further underlined by the quote from the UN's Baskut Tuncak in the New York Times: 'The people most likely to die from toxic fumes are the same people most likely to die from COVID-19' which can be added to concerns airborne dust is possibly a vector for COVID-19 and other viruses. The case for radical action is clear.

"The case for radical action is clear."

Air quality and climate change

Until fairly recently the link between the causes of unhealthy air quality and climate change was not made. This has now changed with the recognition that addressing air quality issues contributes to action against climate change - something TUCAN is happy to use as a lever for action.

Change - for good?

Historically, when societal change has had to happen it's difficult not to be cynical about the way it has been done and potentially will be done - those who can make money out of it or dodge the issue do, and those who can't struggle to deal with consequences, often with disastrous results.

With the recognition of the scale of action necessary on air pollution and climate change it's not unreasonable to raise that concern. However, there is a solution - just transition, a principle whereby the need for change is recognised and implemented with the participation of the workers affected in an attempt to eliminate or reduce the potential negative effects of those necessary changes such as retraining, loss of earnings etc.

(A free on-line training course on the just transition by the GJA is available on their website:

<http://www.greenerjobsalliance.co.uk/courses/a-trade-union-guide-to-just-transition-background/>).

What getting through COVID-19 has shown us - both good and bad

The first and most obvious effect of the COVID-19 shut-down is the clear and undeniable scientific evidence around the world that air quality has improved dramatically in industrial societies since the pandemic started and that improvement was quick and startling.

This evidence has rightly been used by many to argue that this is a massive opportunity to act for a safer and healthier future and must require any bail-out or post-COVID-19 plans to have action on climate change and pollution at their core. But, it has already been reported that industry's lobbyists have been actively seeking to avoid this. One example is the airline industry who has been accused of trying to dodge their responsibilities by saying any such restrictions now will affect their ability to survive post- C19.

“The people most likely to die from toxic fumes are the same people most likely to die from COVID-19”



IMAGE CREDIT: MICK HOLDER

Unions don't care

Oh yes, they do! Historically unions have been very active on many green/ climate change/air pollution issues, locally and nationally. Transport unions have campaigned for the electrification of the railways away from diesel, negotiated diesel train and bus anti-idling policies, and for new electric vehicles etc. Others include a union-led community campaign of air monitoring in town centres and monitoring on buses.

Whilst it is clear the elephant in the room are energy generation workers, notably nuclear and gas, whose unions strongly defend their work and employment, the rising climate and green issues will not go away and the recognition of a just transition by all involved as the best way to address these issues is now well established.

Unions CAN do something

Whilst ultimately action will be down to Government policy, businesses and employers, trade unions are in a position to push all of these for positive change following just transition principles - with many rights in law. Those trade unions recognised for collective bargaining by employers can apply 'The Safety Representatives And Safety Committee Regulations', law that allows for the appointment of trade union health and safety reps in workplaces and for them to request a safety committee be set up (if one doesn't exist already).

Safety reps have legal rights to inspect the workplace, talk to workers and to raise issues with their employer. It has long been argued that safety reps adopt green issues and raise them with colleagues and employers, and very many have.

COSHH and toxics use reduction

One of the main drivers for this was the advent of 'The Control Of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations' and the hierarchy of control contained within them. The hierarchy follows basic occupational health principles, i.e. if you can do work without using a hazardous substance then do so, if you have to use a hazardous substance then use the least harmful, contain or prevent the spread of any toxic substance by enclosure or extraction etc., and lastly provide any necessary personal protective equipment (PPE).

The hierarchy is meant to be followed strictly with change or substitution as the first option and issuing PPE as the very last one. Many union reps used COSHH to argue for employers to review and reduce the number of toxic substances they use. Examples such as moving away from solvent based substances to water based, removing or reducing the use of pesticides in construction and parks and gardens, and campaigns against diesel fumes at workplaces.

Campaigning for a healthier future

The result of last year's general election hasn't filled many climate and pollution activists' hearts with optimism. However, the equation of the Government listening to climate deniers and their perpetual lobbying vs. the unavoidable amassing of evidence of the need for action added to the COVID-19 world is yet to play out. With the Government's pledges on action already being called too little too late added to the urgency of the situation it's not looking great. But, there are opportunities for campaigners to make their voices heard. The Government has published a new Environment Bill.

Campaigners are pushing for tougher standards and action as the published bill does not meet current World Health Organisation standards and leaves the door open for weakening existing standards. And campaigners have been preparing to be heard at COP26 in Glasgow next year.

Post COVID-19, TUCAN will continue to use its contacts to get its message across with unions at workplaces, through trades councils, and regional, national and international conferences. We will also build links with local councillors, councils and regional bodies to find ways of using air pollution monitoring data to inform workers and employers and involve them in planning remedial actions.

We will also continue to work with other organisations such as the Healthy Air Campaign which is convened by Client Earth and supported by a number of NGOs and campaign groups. And we'll be watching developments arising from other initiatives such as the British Safety Council's time to breathe campaign.

We have teamed up with other air pollution organisations and will be using air monitoring equipment in and around workplaces to record and illustrate workers exposure and be helping safety reps and others raise concerns with employers, industry and government. There is much to do.

MICK HOLDER CMOSH,
is an occupational and
environmental health
and safety journalist
and campaigner

TEACHING THE FUTURE

MAX SMITH, *STUDENTS ORGANISING FOR SUSTAINABILITY*

It was Tony Benn who said ‘an educated, healthy and confident nation is harder to govern.’ He is right, 78 per cent of those with higher professional or university education say they are fairly or very much interested in politics, a stark contrast to the 28 per cent of those among the least educated (primary education) according to a background paper published by statistics Netherlands (CBS). Although please bear in mind this statistic is just a trend and should not be used to make assumptions or to focus on elitist talking points.

However, it’s not just political activity that is affected by education. A research paper published earlier this year in January at the University of California suggests that environmental education has a direct impact on emissions. When participants completed a course about climate change almost all made changes in their daily lives. The paper concluded that the average change in participants’ carbon footprint directly related to the course was 3.54 tonnes a year. This is a significant reduction considering the average Californian has a carbon footprint of 25.1 tons.

By this logic we should be putting more funding into education, especially on the climate crisis. Unfortunately, 75 per cent of our teachers feel unable to teach students about climate change. But, what should be done to address this? Among other things, the Teach the Future campaign (TTF) aims to empower students to be able to hold the Government to account on the defining issue of our time; the climate crisis. Its demands are:

1. A Government commissioned review into how the whole of the English formal education system is preparing students for the climate emergency and ecological crisis.

2. Inclusion of the climate emergency and ecological crisis in teacher training and a new professional teaching qualification.

3. An English Climate Emergency Education Act.

4. A national climate emergency youth voice grant fund.

5. A national Youth Climate Endowment Fund.

6. All new state-funded educational buildings should be net-zero from 2022; all existing state-funded educational buildings net-zero by 2030.

Only four per cent of students feel they know a lot about the climate crisis and 68 per cent want to know more. Our education is failing to equip our young people with the information they need on the environment and has been for decades. TTF will address that with radical proposals to not only address the climate crisis, but give the next generation the tools they need to be able to tackle it as well.

When YouGov surveyed teachers from primary and secondary schools it found that 69 per cent of respondents said they believe there should be more mention of climate change in the curriculum while 70 per cent of teachers agree that the current education system needs radical change for the times we live in. An even more recent survey in January 2020 said that of 2,579 UK adults, 77 per cent think climate change should be taught in schools. Our education system is failing us on this issue and everyone can see it.

Despite considerable demand from students and support from teachers and the general public there is still not enough teaching about the crisis

in our education system. One reason for this is that 75 per cent of teachers feel unequipped to teach about climate change. That is why we must train teachers on teaching about the climate crisis as mentioned in demand 2#. The flaws of our education system go deeper than this, total school funding has gone down eight per cent in real terms according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies annual report. That is why TTF demands specify ringfenced money for teaching about the environment, as specified in demands 4# & 5#.

As well as this we are calling for a Climate Emergency Education Act and a government commissioned review into how the English formal education system is preparing students for the climate emergency and ecological crisis to ensure the Government keeps environmental education a priority.

What is Labour’s role in all of this? It’s quite simple. The Labour Party has always been about people, it was formed to give ordinary people a voice. But, so far ordinary people have been betrayed by our media and education systems leaving them uninformed and without as much of a voice on the climate crisis. Labour should commit to this policy and campaign for it if they want to remain a party committed to serving the people of this country and mitigating the climate crisis and SERA should push for this. The facts are clear, if we are to tackle the climate crisis we must teach the future.

MAX SMITH
is a campaigner
formerly working
with the UK
Student Climate
Network and
Teach the Future.



WHAT IS LABOUR'S ROLE IN SAVING NATURE?

RUTH CHAMBERS, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY
AFFAIRS ASSOCIATE, GREENER UK

The Coronavirus outbreak has been rightly dominating parliamentary and the Government agendas since March. This brought a temporary halt to some of the important environmental domestic legislation that had been passing through parliament. These budding new laws, together with the negotiation of new trade agreements and global summits on climate change and biodiversity, means that the year and a half is going to be crucial for environmental protection.

The Government has promised to have a 'world-leading' ambitious environmental programme. The current state of our natural world means this ambition must be converted urgently into real change on the ground. Labour has a crucial role to play in helping to ensure that the crisis facing our natural world is tackled. The environment is one of the top three issues for younger voters, a core constituency for Labour. A comprehensive and credible plan for protecting and rebuilding the natural environment is an essential requirement for any would-be government and a speech from Sir Keir setting out his environmental vision would be very timely.

The crisis in nature

Last October, a comprehensive study by the RSPB of the state of the UK's natural environment, confirmed our worst fears

- the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, with more than one in seven of our native species facing extinction and more than half in decline. Hedgehogs, wild cats, hares, bats and butterflies are among the much loved species threatened. But, this is a global as well as a domestic issue. The IPBES global assessment, published a year ago, estimated that one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction.

Labour must be a ferocious guardian of standards

During the lifetime of this parliament, Labour must be a relentless scrutineer, challenging the Government to deliver on its promises to help set our natural world on the path to recovery.

While Ministers have been at pains to stress that environmental standards will have been maintained, they have so far neglected to put any such commitment into law. Unfortunately, any regression is unlikely to make the front pages. Instead, it will probably be tucked away in the small print of trade agreements, secondary legislation or detailed policies.

Labour members of select committees will need to be robust in helping to scrutinise high risk areas, such as chemicals and food standards. The

painstaking examination of statutory instruments by MPs and Peers will be more important than ever. Delegated legislation committees may sound dull but their work over the next twelve months will be critical.

Set piece parliamentary moments such as PMQs and oral questions, in which MPs can demand a response from the relevant minister, will be important in holding the Government to its commitments. We hope that Labour's team of Shadow Ministers, which includes many long-standing and passionate environmental champions, will rise to this challenge.

Setting up a dedicated team on standards could help to identify and respond to potential threats. This could be located centrally, for example in the Leader's Office, but with links to each of the shadow policy teams, so it can be strategic and cross-cutting. There may even be scope to do this on a cross-party basis.

Environmental justice should be championed

While Labour will not yet be able to progress its manifesto commitment for an Environment Tribunal, it will be able to keep a watchful eye on the setting up of Environmental Reviews in the Upper Tribunal which could be a step

“The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, with more than one in seven of our native species facing extinction and more than half in decline.”

towards this. This is where the new watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, will bring cases when it considers public authorities have failed to uphold environmental laws.

Our rights will be under intense scrutiny by the new Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission, which will also consider wider issues around the role of the courts. Making the case for environmental justice to be protected will be vital. A report published by Friends of the Earth and the RSPB last November is essential reading for anyone who wants to engage in these debates.

Also, Labour should demand that people should have the right to high quality, easily accessible green spaces, wherever they live - lockdown has brought these inequalities into sharp relief.

We must fight for powerful laws

The Environment Bill, the first dedicated environmental legislation for over twenty years, is in the middle of its parliamentary journey. Its importance at this point, with so much at stake, cannot be overstated.

We hope that Labour will support our efforts to improve the bill in the following three critical areas:

1. Although there is a proposed **framework to set legally binding targets**, it lacks the assurances of comprehensive targets for land and sea; binding plans for delivery; and independent expert advice
2. **The independence and powers of the new watchdog**, the Office

for Environmental Protection, need to be strengthened so that it can hold the Government to account.

3. A bill which does nothing to tackle the UK's global footprint can never meet its claim to be 'world leading'. The inclusion of **mandatory due diligence** provisions would help to tackle deforestation and other environmental harms in our international supply chains.

RUTH CHAMBERS leads the Greener UK unit's parliamentary work on environmental legislation at Green Alliance. Ruth tweets at @ruthmchambers



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Please consider making a donation to SERA, to help make sure we can keep the environment on Labour's agenda and promote the progressive environmental politics we seek.

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Connected events.



SERA AT LABOUR CONNECTED CONFERENCE 2020



COP26 Question time

DATE: MONDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER, 12 NOON – 1PM



SPEAKERS:

Mark Drakeford, First Minister of Wales

Darren Jones MP, Chair of the BEIS Select Committee

Dr Duncan Webb, Labour MP for Christchurch Central, New Zealand, Chair, Environment Select Committee

Dr Rebecca Willis, Professor In Practice, Lancaster Environment Centre

Karen Potter, Director, Sustainability Hub

Jake Sumner, SERA Co-Chair, (Chair)

Build it now: a jobs-led green future for young people

DATE: TUESDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER, 10AM – 11AM



SPEAKERS:

Liam Byrne MP, Shadow Mayor of the West Midlands

Nadia Whittome MP, Labour MP for Nottingham East

Melanie Onn, Deputy Chief Executive of Renewable UK and former Labour MP for Great Grimsby

Paul Nowak, Deputy General Secretary, Trade Union Congress

Mhairi Tordoff, SERA Youth Rep (Chair)

Growing the right food policy: plants, people, poverty, places and profits

DATE: TUESDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER, 3.30PM – 4.30PM



SPEAKERS:

Luke Pollard MP, Shadow DEFRA Secretary

Daniel Zeichner MP (Chair), Shadow Food & Farming Minister and SERA Executive Committee

Florence Todd Fordham, Senior Service Design Manager Soil Association

Tim Thorpe, Campaigns and Policy Officer, Vegan Society

Don't trade away our future: climate and environmental proofing trade policy

DATE: TUESDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER, 5PM – 6PM



SPEAKERS:

Emily Thornberry MP, Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade

Alex Sobel MP, Chair of Net Zero APPG and Environment Audit Select Committee, SERA Parliamentary network

Anna McMorrin MP, Shadow International Development Minister

Angela Francis, Chief Advisor of Economics and Economic Development, WWF

Ken Penton, SERA Executive Committee (Chair)

Join SERA

We've been fighting for environmental
and social justice for over 40 years



Founded in 1973, SERA is the only environmental group affiliated to Labour, and campaigns for the party to adopt ambitious environmental policies.

From climate change to community energy, we're passionate about tackling the most important environmental and social challenges facing Britain; challenges only Labour administrations can tackle.

We hold events, run campaigns, publish new things and ideas and work with partners across the environment movement to shape the political debate.

For the latest environmental news and views visit
www.sera.org.uk

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