

Countdown to COP26

Perspectives on UK climate action in 2020

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Contents

Shaun Spiers Executive director, Green Alliance Foreword	2
Dame Carolyn Fairbairn Director-general, CBI It's time to step up	4
Jim Skea Professor of sustainable energy Imperial College We are a long way from where we need to be	6
Ben Houchen Mayor, Tees Valley The UK could set an example to the world	8
Miatta Fahnbulleh Chief executive, New Economics Foundation We can transform the economy to work for everyone	10
Tim Page Senior policy officer, TUC Green jobs must be good jobs	12
Scarlett Westbrook Student climate activist We must act with urgency before we run out of time	14

Foreword

Shaun Spiers

“2020 must be the year of climate action, not promises”

The task ahead is clearer than ever: we must do more, faster, to combat climate change. For the UK, hosting next year’s UN COP26 climate conference should serve as an added incentive for action.

But while there is a good deal of welcome noise around climate action, with political parties competing to show they mean business, it is easier to talk than it is to act. The UK was not on track to meet its previous carbon budgets and is even further off course from achieving its new target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The changes we need are far reaching and, until recently, there was not a strong political mandate. But there is now. And the immediate action needed should not be too daunting.

Green Alliance has set out policies in five areas which would get the UK quickly on track to net zero. These are: make all new car and van sales electric by 2030; introduce an industrial resource efficiency programme; implement a major homes energy retrofit programme; support more onshore wind and solar (where they are wanted); and cut carbon from land use. Not only would these policies

cut carbon, but they would clean up our dirty air, improve productivity across the UK and start to restore our much loved nature.

2020 must be the year of climate action, not promises. The contributions in this pamphlet cover a range of perspectives and experience, but all agree on the urgent need to do more and quickly. In the words of Carolyn Fairbairn, “this is a watershed moment and the time to step up”. The next few months will tell us whether the new government is equal to the challenge.



Shaun Spiers
Executive director, Green Alliance

It's time to step up Carolyn Fairbairn



Business now needs to see a comprehensive strategy to help it target investment where needed.”

Public demand for action on climate change is clear. Climate strikes and protests throughout the year have made this an issue global leaders cannot ignore. But it is not a problem for governments to solve alone. The business community is acutely aware of its role in driving the switch to cleaner energy and low carbon technology. Nevertheless, the government does have an important role to play in setting targets and creating the environment for firms to invest and consumers to change behaviours and adopt new technologies.

Take the UK's net zero target for 2050. It demonstrates clear UK commitment to tackling climate change and I am proud that business has been in the vanguard of this ambition, rather than dragged unwillingly to the party. Firms across the country are rising to the challenge, and they recognise both the UK's opportunity and its responsibility as an economy that built its success on the use of fossil fuels.

We've made some incredible progress, including cutting carbon emissions by 40 per cent since 1990 while growing the economy more than 75 per cent, a feat not matched by any other G7 country. But to tackle the climate emergency in the time left, we need to go further and faster than ever before.

An important deadline lies before us: the UK is hosting the UN COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow next November. We need to use it to kickstart the UK's net zero plans and see how much we can achieve in the next 12 months.

In November 2019, the CBI launched the report, *The low carbon 2020s – a decade of delivery*, setting out the actions our members see as essential to the UK’s low carbon success in the next ten years.

We have to build on what works, such as the great success in generating offshore wind at falling prices. We now urgently need to replicate this success in onshore wind to deliver energy bill savings to homes and businesses. The lessons learned should also be applied to other technologies, including action to scale-up the deployment of emerging decarbonisation technologies, such as carbon capture, use and storage, and hydrogen-based solutions. Also, with over half of the UK’s nuclear capacity set to be retired this decade, we need to get on with a financing plan for new nuclear.

The going then gets tougher as we turn our attention to the harder areas. So a priority is for the government to turn the UK’s transport networks and heating green, sooner rather than later. The current government’s £400 million electric vehicle charging infrastructure fund was a step forward. But business now needs to see a comprehensive strategy to help it target investment where needed and deliver a national network.

Finally, as part of this year of action, let’s have an honest conversation about how we help the whole world make this transition a success. The UK has a strong story to tell on reducing the emissions we generate here at home. But we can’t solve the climate emergency simply by making it someone else’s problem.

At the CBI, we believe it’s time for the government to include both production and consumption emissions in its official greenhouse gas figures, and to publish these alongside the UK’s regular GDP and productivity statistics. This would be a radically new way to measure growth and focus minds on the net zero goal with the fullest, clearest picture of our emissions footprint possible.

This is a watershed moment and the time to step up. At the CBI, we will continue to represent UK businesses on this crucial issue and work across sectors to ensure the right policies are put in place to reduce emissions as quickly as possible.



Dame Carolyn Fairbairn
Director-general
CBI

We are a long way from where we need to be

Jim Skea



The required ‘rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all systems’ are not without socioeconomic challenges.”

Three decades after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established and preparations started for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), there are encouraging signs that action is finally picking up pace.

The 2015 Paris Agreement set governments the challenge of stating their ambitions to tackle climate change, measuring the collective impact of their actions through a regular global stocktake and encouraging them to ratchet up their aspirations. Countries have now started to set net zero targets.

Many companies and sectors, notably the financial sector, have bought into the climate agenda and are taking steps. But, in spite of emerging action, the news is not all good. The IPCC’s special report on *Global warming of 1.5°C* and the regular UNEP *Emissions gap* reports show unequivocally that current government pledges do not set the world on a path to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels”. As the Paris Agreement also obliges countries to “pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C”, the implied gap between aspiration and planned action is even wider.

The IPCC’s report makes it clear that radical changes are required, including in energy, land, urban and industrial systems. The share of renewables in the energy mix would need to grow rapidly. Changes in energy supply have to be accompanied by large scale investments in energy efficiency, the electrification of energy

demand and, possibly, changes in patterns of consumption, including our dietary choices.

Whether through the IPCC or UNFCCC, countries have emphasised that climate action cannot be pursued in isolation. It needs to be “in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty”, to quote from the full title of the IPCC’s special report.

It is important to take all climate action in the wider context of sustainable development. Since Paris, the UN has adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. The positive message is that many specific actions, especially those relating to consumption and energy demand, can contribute positively to the SDGs. Most measures relating to energy supply and land management can also make positive contributions, as long as there is careful and measured implementation.

The required “rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all systems” are not without socioeconomic challenges. The 24th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the UNFCCC in December 2018 highlighted the importance of a just transition to gain social approval.

Unless managed well, a fast transition could have significant negative repercussions for some industries and communities that have been reliant on high carbon production. Attention to high quality jobs, skills and retraining, and processes which engage communities and the workforce in an inclusive transition will be vital in securing climate ambitions.

We are still a long way from where we need to be. Obvious steps to be taken at the next COP include establishing means for countries to share their climate ambitions. The next big test will come at the UK COP26 in Glasgow in 2020 when countries are urged to submit enhanced climate pledges. Then it may be clearer whether we are on the right path.

This article was written in a personal capacity



Jim Skea
Professor of Sustainable Energy
Imperial College

The UK can set an example to the world

Ben Houchen



The North East, in particular the Tees Valley, has already put itself at the heart of Britain's green revolution.”

Hosting COP26 is a great opportunity for the UK to build on its position as a leading nation in the race for global decarbonisation.

Away from the extreme fringes of Britain's environmental debate, the cause of tackling climate change is increasingly depoliticised. Businesses and their consumers are becoming more environmentally aware, and the issue of decarbonisation is now a case of when, not why or if.

In England's industrial north, where I have the privilege of representing almost 700,000 people, achieving the net zero goal could have two major economic benefits. First, the industrial scale rollout of carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) technology will allow our energy intensive manufacturing and process sectors to survive and grow.

In addition, with the right support from the government, we can develop and manufacture clean technologies, including CCUS and hydrogen, and create the high value jobs and economic growth that the North needs.

The North East, in particular the Tees Valley, has already put itself at the heart of Britain's green revolution. The hard engineering skills that built much of the world's offshore oil and gas infrastructure are now also used to build the offshore wind farms that provide an ever increasing amount of our energy needs.

This is not just my view. The North's energy sector strengths in electricity generation, storage and low carbon technologies, including offshore wind and bioenergy, have already been

highlighted in *The Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review*.

On its own this is a great achievement, but it can be so much more. By making the most of our chemicals and process sector expertise we can do the same for the hydrogen economy. By breaking down natural gas, separating the carbon and hydrogen, this would not only decrease the carbon cost of energy, it could breathe new life into the nation's gas networks.

For those who believe the 2050 target isn't ambitious enough, investing in hydrogen technology will give us opportunities to reach this goal even sooner, leading the way for other countries to follow in our footsteps.

Away from energy generation, hydrogen powered trains would be the biggest change people could expect to see on our rail network over the coming years. It isn't HS2. It isn't even Northern Powerhouse Rail. Hydrogen trains would solve several technical issues facing the rail network and the government's support would be essential.

As well as reducing pollution, these trains can be deployed much sooner than other major upgrades. Hydrogen trains can address the burden diesel trains have had on our networks and the uneconomical or impossible electrification, while simultaneously tackling the health and environmental concerns around the use of diesel.

By fully committing to hydrogen rail, backing the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative's Net Zero Teesside CCUS project – a clean power station

that will rival Hinkley Point C in terms of output - and supporting my plans for a National Hydrogen Centre in the Tees Valley, the government would go into COP26 with a portfolio of world-leading low carbon achievements.



Ben Houchen
Mayor
Tees Valley

We can transform the economy to work for everyone

Miatta Fahnbulleh



If the government is serious about climate change, it must commit to a Green New Deal.”

Climate change is back on the political agenda and momentum is building. Parliament has declared a climate emergency. The government has legislated to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. And whilst this deadline may be too slow, it is a welcome step in the right direction.

Legally binding targets are important for catalysing change. But it is action and tangible policies that really matter. And, so far, there is still no sense of urgency from the government. The Committee on Climate Change was clear that to achieve net zero in even 30 years would require a massive transformation of the economy and a huge investment programme. But we are nowhere near this.

If the government is serious about climate change, it must commit to a Green New Deal. The idea is simple: an unprecedented mobilisation of resources to decarbonise the economy at pace whilst creating hundreds of thousands of good jobs and lifting living standards.

As a first step to deliver this, the government should commit a minimum of two per cent of GDP to large scale investment in green infrastructure, technology and skills, alongside a package of incentives and regulation to bend markets that have been slow to act in response to the climate imperative. Alongside this, the Bank of England can play a critical role in guiding finance to support a Green New Deal. It has responsibility over large swathes of financial regulation and could – with support from the Treasury – heavily influence the move of private finance away from high carbon

investments towards activities that are Green New Deal compatible. To enable this, the government should explicitly build delivery of a green transition into the Bank of England's mandate.

Second, the government must focus resources, political attention and support on place. Not only does this mean implementing bold, industrial transformation plans for places, but it also requires putting local people, who understand the needs of their local economy and community, in the driving seat. A Green New Deal should, therefore, come hand in glove with a radical devolution of power and resources. Devolution of green taxes and property taxes could be combined with devolved funding and new powers over education, skills, employment support, energy, housing, planning and local transport.

But, to be meaningful, devolution will require strong new local institutions, tasked with driving a just green transition in their place. These city and county regional authorities would create the institutional architecture to drive change from the local up. They should work alongside reformed local enterprise partnerships that would bring together civic leaders, representatives from local businesses and trade unions in a social partnership focused on a just transition. And, to ensure investment flows into these local areas, the government should renationalise the Royal Bank of Scotland and turn it into a network of 130 local co-operative banks, owned by communities but with a clear green mission.

Finally, the government needs to deliver the green transition in a way that works for people. Through its investment programme, it should create better unionised jobs to replace those that will be lost from ending our use of fossil fuels. And the green economy that emerges must be owned by people and work in their interest. This will mean collective ownership of the green infrastructure and assets we will invest in, from renewable energy to public transport and electric car fleets. As well as more co-operative ways of organising the new industries that will spring up, from insulation companies to local energy providers.

The stakes are high. But if we get this right, we could respond to climate change whilst radically transforming our economy into one that works everyone.



Miatta Fahnbulleh
Chief executive
New Economics Foundation

Green jobs must be good jobs

Tim Page



Workers and communities most affected by the transition must have a central voice in how it is implemented.”

The move to net zero will bring challenges and opportunities. If we get it wrong, thousands of jobs will be lost and communities destroyed, as fossil fuel based energy and production sites close, with no alternatives for workers. If we get it right, we will bring great new jobs to those same communities, with the UK leading the way in green technology.

That is why trade unions are campaigning for a just transition to a net zero economy, bringing workers and environmental campaigners together in pursuit of a common goal.

The scientific evidence is overwhelmingly clear: we must decarbonise our economy. Trade unionists, including those in industrial communities, understand the urgency of winning the battle against climate change. But our history tells us that, if the transition to a green economy is left solely to the market, the economic and social consequences will be devastating.

In June 2019, the TUC published its flagship statement, ‘A just transition to a greener, fairer economy’. This statement makes four fundamental asks. First, we need a clear commitment from government, including financial resources, to deliver a net zero economy. The TUC is calling for a cross party commission to deliver a long term energy strategy, involving affected workers, unions, industries and consumers. Investment delivered through progressive taxation is necessary to support this change.

Second, workers and communities most affected by the transition should have a central

voice in how it is implemented. Greening the economy is a challenge in every country. However, in Germany, their social partnership system guarantees a voice for workers, giving our friends in German unions confidence that any change will be achieved in a fair and sustainable manner.

The TUC believes that companies and organisations moving to a low carbon model should implement Transition Agreements – agreed with unions – that cover a range of issues, including jobs, job security, pay and conditions, working time, training and skills, and equal opportunities.

Third, every worker should have access to funding to improve their skills. The opportunity for skills development is the single most important factor in determining whether workers will be able to access the jobs of the future.

The government should give workers the confidence to train by establishing individual learning accounts for all adults, so that everyone has a personalised budget for training, as well as a right to career reviews and face-to-face guidance to help workers access training. The benefits system must also support workers, so if they take time out of work to learn a new skill, they have the means to do so.

Fourth, new jobs must be good jobs. The ‘green economy’ must recognise unions and bargain with them to ensure high quality employment, with terms and conditions at least as good as those in energy and the transitioning carbon intensive sectors.

Taken together, these four asks can deliver a just transition to a low carbon economy. Addressing climate change is the biggest challenge we face. The choice between good, well paid jobs and a stable, thriving planet is a false choice; with proper policy support, we can have both. A just transition strategy is the way to get us there.



Tim Page
Senior policy officer
TUC

We need to act with urgency before we run out of time

Scarlett Westbrook



The voting age should be lowered to 16 as young people are playing salient roles in society.”

After years of not meeting carbon reduction targets and austerity we have reached the point where we are dealing with both a social and a climate crisis and, as such, they should be solved together through the implementation of a Green New Deal.

The Green New Deal is a ten year government mobilisation to rapidly phase out fossil fuels whilst also solving inequality problem in the UK. It also would protect and restore vital threatened habitats and carbon sinks, and create thousands of well paid, secure jobs, in addition to building a resilient society equipped with the mechanisms and infrastructure needed to cope with the inevitable effects of climate change.

As we live on a planet with finite resources, we should invest in the renewable energy sector, and place sanctions on big companies that are generating huge amounts of greenhouse gases.

By investing now, we shall save ourselves much more money than if we continue to delay progress. If we do not act now we will spend our futures repairing damage that could have been prevented.

As the world’s fifth largest economy, we have the capacity not only to protect our country but countries in the global south too. Being the

nation that sparked the industrial revolution, we not only have a carbon debt but also a historic responsibility to ensure that countries who will be disproportionately affected by the disastrous effects of climate change, and who have been held back by colonialism – a huge cause of the climate crisis – are also protected. We will not find a true solution if everyone is not included and, therefore, it is vital that we achieve climate justice.

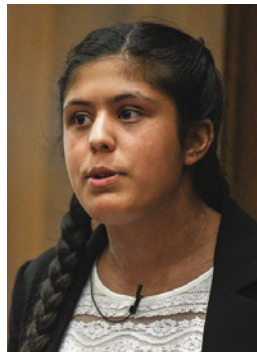
The school strikes for climate, which saw 350,000 people take to the streets in September 2019, have demonstrated the paramount importance of young people in our society and in achieving climate justice.

Yet, though the government can expropriate 16 and 17 year olds' wealth via taxation, they cannot protect their natural rights to influence the legislature. The voting age should be lowered to 16 as young people are playing salient roles in society, educating themselves on issues of global importance, but are still without the franchise and the means to have a say in their future.

The education system must also be reformed, ensuring all children leave school with appropriate knowledge about climate change and the altering world around them. In fact,

everyone should be equipped with this knowledge, through government information schemes, to prepare them for the future and its challenges.

We must act with the urgency that the climate emergency warrants, before we run out of time.



Scarlett Westbrook
Student climate activist

Green Alliance

Green Alliance is an independent think tank and charity focused on ambitious leadership for the environment. Since 1979, we have been working with the most influential leaders in business, NGOs and politics to accelerate political action and create transformative policy for a green and prosperous UK.

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