

# Ending the UK's contribution to climate change | a briefing for Quakers

## The UK must show leadership and commit now to end its contribution to climate change.

The UN says that global warming must be limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels in order to prevent climate breakdown.<sup>1</sup> This requires states to cut greenhouse gas emissions almost entirely. This is no small challenge.

Meanwhile, 20 of the last 22 years have been the warmest globally on record.<sup>2</sup> Extreme weather events are hitting the world's poorest the hardest. The impacts fall disproportionately on people of colour, women and people in poverty.

### Head for 'net-zero'

In June 2019 the UK Government committed to a 'net-zero' emissions target for 2050. This is evidence of mounting pressure from the climate movement. Yet it falls short of what's needed. Many campaigners are calling for target dates ranging from 2025–45. The government has also permitted the use of carbon credits (a form of international offsetting) to achieve the target. The UK's Committee on Climate Change (CCC), the government's official climate advisors,

say this should be ruled out.

Net-zero emissions means cutting emissions almost entirely and accounting for remaining emissions by removing them from the atmosphere – most reliably through natural carbon sinks like forests and restored peatland. The UK now needs a clear path to reach net-zero.

In cutting the UK's climate impact, we can also build healthier places to live, invest in green jobs and services, and reconnect with nature. We must now demand that our leaders commit to transforming our economy to avert climate breakdown.

### Our Quaker voice

Quakers are no strangers to speaking out. Throughout our history, our worship and testimony have helped us recognise the injustices of war and oppression. With climate change driving hunger and injustice around the world, we must have faith in collective action.



Photo: Philip Wood for Quakers in Britain



In 2011 British Quakers committed to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. Addressing our own climate impact can be both joyful and challenging. Yet we know that climate breakdown will only be averted with bold government action.

## Investing in a sustainable economy

Investing in a 'net-zero' economy will require billions of pounds per year in the coming decades. The CCC estimates that it will cost 1–2 per cent of the UK's GDP up to 2050.<sup>3</sup> Public money is already being used to support high carbon sectors. For example, one recent estimate claimed that public finance for fossil fuel production at home and abroad, tax cuts for North Sea oil and gas, and cuts to household VAT on fuels totalled £13.3bn per year.<sup>4</sup> Redirecting this public finance to zero-carbon infrastructure, jobs and services could help

transform our economy. More regulations and incentives could also be used to redirect private investment in to zero-carbon sectors.

The transition to net-zero emissions can avoid creating new hardship but also address existing inequalities. Green investment could, for example, provide decent jobs, better housing and help address air pollution, benefiting low-income households the most.

There are big questions to ask. Can endless economic growth be sustainable? How can we truly account for the cost of damaging the planet? These and many other questions are explored in our 'New Economy' project (see [www.quaker.org.uk/neweconomy](http://www.quaker.org.uk/neweconomy)). Yet we must also see concrete changes now. The following is far from comprehensive, but it outlines some of the policy changes we need to see from our leaders in the near future.

## Transport for all

The government continues to back road building and airport expansion and minimise taxes on fuels. Fossil-fuelled cars should be phased out by 2030, instead of the current target of 2040. The cost of electric vehicles is falling, yet to support affordable travel, support for public transport should be a priority. By 2018 nearly half of all bus routes were under threat due to funding cuts<sup>5</sup>. More investment is needed to encourage walking and cycling. Airport expansion is surely incompatible with a net-zero emissions target.



Photo: Kk70088, Wikimedia Commons

## Powering the transition

The UK must build a zero emissions power electricity system while increasing supply. This will allow technologies including cars and heating to convert to electric power. Cost-effective renewable sources, including onshore wind and solar, need appropriate financial support and the removal of current planning restrictions. The CCC notes that while greater investment is needed to support zero-carbon energy, household energy bills need not rise thanks to efficiency improvements.<sup>6</sup>



Photo: Spielvogel, Wikimedia Commons

## Efficient energy

A revolution in energy efficiency could cut energy demand and tackle fuel poverty. The government should reinstate a zero-carbon standard for new homes (dropped in 2015) and set a date for extending this to older homes. Experts say that £1.3bn per year is needed up to 2030 to make over six million homes efficient.<sup>7</sup> With renters hit hardest by fuel poverty, greater responsibility for landlords could drive extensive efficiency improvements.



Photo: Zbynek Burival, Unsplash

## Supporting better choices

Whether it's their diet, travel or consumption choices, most UK citizens need to cut their climate impact. Yet the government could do more to support this. It must ensure that consumers are informed about the climate impact of what they buy. Greater support must be given to businesses and community groups that help households reduce their impact.



Photo: Dean Xavier, Unsplash

## Beyond our borders

Currently, the UK only accounts for emissions produced within its borders. Yet UK consumption and investment drives emissions produced around the world. The UK must account for and cut its aviation and shipping emissions, and the climate impact of its international trade. Investors based in the UK currently provide billions to high-carbon projects abroad. UK financial regulations could be updated to curb international fossil fuel funding.



Photo: VanveenJF, Unsplash

## Land of plenty

Post-Brexit farming subsidies should support sustainable food production. The CCC estimates that £2bn per year is needed to support agriculture in line with a net-zero target.<sup>8</sup> More support is needed for businesses supplying local, plant-based produce. Preservation and restoration of carbon sinks like soils, forests, peatland and wetland would cut emissions. The CCC recommends planting 30,000 hectares of trees per year up to 2050.<sup>9</sup>



Photo: Phil Dolby/colibrator1000, Flickr

## Take action

We can all speak out for climate action. You can join thousands of others calling on the UK government to act now to end its contribution to climate change. You could:

### Engage with your MP

Tell your MP that you wish to see the UK leading on climate action. Build a positive case for a sustainable economy and what it could mean for your community. You can write to your MP or, better still, meet with them. To find out who your MP is and how to contact them, go to [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com).

Please let us know how it goes using the contact details below.

### Divest from fossil fuels

Across the world, people and organisations are moving their money out of fossil fuels. Find out how you and your meeting can divest at [www.quaker.org.uk/divestment](http://www.quaker.org.uk/divestment).

### Find out more

For more information on taking climate action go to [www.quaker.org.uk/climatejustice](http://www.quaker.org.uk/climatejustice) or email Chris Walker, Sustainability Programme Manager, at [chrisw@quaker.org.uk](mailto:chrisw@quaker.org.uk).

- 1 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018). 'Global warming of 1.5°C'. IPCC special report. Available at [www.ipcc.ch/sr15](http://www.ipcc.ch/sr15) [accessed 9 May 2019].
- 2 World Meteorological Organization (2018). 'WMO climate statement: past 4 years warmest on record'. Available at <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/wmo-climate-statement-past-4-years-warmest-record> [accessed 16 May 2019].
- 3 Committee on Climate Change (2019). 'Net zero: the UK's contribution to stopping global warming' (p. 12). Available at [www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Net-Zero-The-UKs-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming.pdf](http://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Net-Zero-The-UKs-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming.pdf) [accessed 16 May 2019].
- 4 van der Burg, L. and M. Runkel (2017). 'Phase-out 2020: monitoring Europe's fossil fuel subsidies'. Report for ODI and Climate Action Network Europe. Available at [www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11787.pdf](http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11787.pdf) [accessed 23 July 2018].
- 5 Local Government Association (2018). 'Nearly half of all bus routes under threat because of funding cuts to local government'. Available at [www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-nearly-half-all-bus-routes-under-threat-because-funding-cuts-local-government](http://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-nearly-half-all-bus-routes-under-threat-because-funding-cuts-local-government) [accessed 15 May 2018].
- 6 See 3 (p. 29).
- 7 Deasley, S. and C. Thornhill (2017). 'Affordable warmth, clean growth: action plan for a comprehensive Buildings Energy Infrastructure Programme'. Report for Frontier Economics. Available at [www.frontier-economics.com/media/1108/20170927\\_affordable-warm-clean-growth\\_frontier.pdf](http://www.frontier-economics.com/media/1108/20170927_affordable-warm-clean-growth_frontier.pdf) [accessed 24 July 2018].
- 8 See 3 (p. 29).
- 9 See 3 (p. 177).

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