



**Cambridge Green Party**

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Dear Baroness Brown,

The Cambridge Green Party welcomes the establishment of the Independent Commission on Climate and looks forward to your report and recommendations. As Greens we would wish to challenge the commission to think radically and to make recommendations that will really get to grips with the scale of the emergency.

We have submitted a document with our comments about the evidence available for developing your climate change report. With the closing of your consultation, we would like to raise the following questions with you, as these came up while compiling our consultation response. The answers to these questions will, in our view, act as indicators of the success or failure of the Commission's work.

**Question 1. What steps will you recommend to avoid widespread destruction caused by flooding and sea level rise?**

It is known that global warming will result in significant sea level rise in coming decades that will affect a large proportion of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area. *Will the Commission face up honestly to the scale of the threat?*

**Question 2. Will the Commission recommend the far-reaching changes to agriculture that will be necessary to address the problems of peatland in our region?**

The peatland in our region emits nearly as much greenhouse gas as all other human activity in the region, but, with the correct management, it can be turned into a huge carbon sink. *Linked with the issue of flooding, will the Commission consider recommending a widespread programme of managed re-wetting and the major changes to agricultural techniques that would be involved?*

**Question 3: How do you propose that development in our region be made truly sustainable?**

Enormous development is planned for our region in the coming decades. It is, to put it bluntly, fanciful to pretend that the number of houses being planned for this region can be built sustainably. *Will the Commission have the courage to say this in the face of entrenched and powerful political interests that stand to gain from development on this scale?*

Development poses a challenge to achieving sustainability in terms of both the buildings themselves and the transport links that they generate.

*Will the Commission recommend that all new houses built from now onwards in our region must conform to the Passivhaus standard?*

*Will you recommend the cancellation of the OxCam Expressway?*

We are members of the Green Party because we have come to realise that in the face of the looming Climate Emergency policy decisions at every level of government must be based on environmental concerns. Currently all political parties are talking in green terms and during the last election parties were competing to see who could claim to have the greenest policies. The Greens are the only party whose manifesto has always been drawn up in the spirit that the environment must be the starting point, and that if we face up squarely to that, policy decisions in other areas will naturally flow.

Whatever political party you belong to, green politics differs from 'normal' politics in a number of significant ways that the Commission will need to take into account in drawing up its recommendations.

*(a) 'Politics as the art of the possible' is not enough when we have to demand the impossible.*

The Commission has been set up as a political act and must make its recommendations to elected politicians. In normal times a body such as the Commission would calibrate its recommendations to this political context, recommending measures that it thinks are moderate enough to get a hearing, while asking for more than it thinks it will realistically get. These recommendations are then watered down by the politicians to whom they are addressed, and further watered down in their implementation. This approach is catastrophically inadequate in the face of the climate emergency because the steps that are needed are radical, far reaching and very urgent. Half measures lock-in failure. Some of the things that the Commission will have to recommend will seem to be impossible in policy terms, but they are, in reality, the bare minimum that will be required to avoid disaster. We see this in the three issues we have identified as key to the success of this exercise.

*(b) The horrifying objectivity of climate collapse – you can't negotiate with the environment.*

Politics involves negotiation, working to gain a consensus, splitting the difference between competing positions. The environment does not engage politics in that way. Phenomena such as sea level rise simply happen, often their causes long past by the time the effects become visible, and humanity must live with them. It is certain that the concentration of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere will have a warming effect. Uncertainty over exactly how much warming will happen for a given concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> should not be mistaken for flexibility. Previously unacknowledged sources of greenhouse gases (such as peat, for example) will inexorably contribute to warming whether or not we have a system for measuring them. The recommendations of the Commission need to take account of this, as under-recommending will have serious and unstoppable consequences.

We are certain, therefore, that the challenges of the Climate Emergency cannot be addressed within the constraints of business as usual. We urge the Commission to have the courage to recommend the radical rethinking that is necessary. Neither you nor we will get a second chance.

We wish you all the best in your work.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Jeremy Caddick". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

For the Cambridge Green Party Policy Group

# Cambridge Green Party

## Evidence submitted to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate

December 2020

The Cambridge Green Party welcomes the establishment of the Independent Commission on Climate, thanks the Commissioners for their willingness to be part of this important work and looks forward to the Commission's report and recommendations. Given the climate change emergency, we trust the Commission will think radically and make recommendations that will really get to grips with the urgency of this issue.

We understand that this "Call for Evidence" is to enable the Commission to understand "the work already happening in our region" and that you want to receive "any evidence of the effects of climate change in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and also any examples of existing good practice."

The way in which this consultation is being undertaken is therefore of great concern to us. Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City Council and South Cambs District Council have all recognised the climate emergency:

- The City Council is undertaking a consultation on their strategy in parallel with that of the Commission's, which closes later this month;
- South Cambs adopted their Zero Carbon Strategy in May this year, following a consultation; and
- the County Council adopted a Climate and Environment Strategy in May of this year.

All three of these exercises involved the compilation of extensive data and information, and had the active participation of numerous individuals and organisations who provided their views on climate change and evidence to support proposed actions. A fourth consultation runs the risk of being perceived as a duplication of effort, and an unnecessary expense. We urge you, therefore, to take the broadest possible view and to have the courage to think as ambitiously as the problem requires, addressing your recommendations to all levels of government including national and international. All local authorities should be collaborating closely on such an urgent and key issue, and sharing their information. The Climate Emergency affects everyone and all organisations. There is no time for operating independently and in silos.

We understand that your report will include consideration of the following issues, and have organised our comments according to these.

### **1. Transport**

The Green Party considers that sustainable development requires a large scale transition to public transport. Merely substituting electric vehicles for petrol and diesel ones does not solve the problem because of the emissions embedded in the production of all vehicles. We expect the Commission to look at options for delivering a transition to public transport that is on a scale and with the urgency required by the climate change emergency. In particular, we hope that your report will call for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway that is currently 'paused' to be cancelled once and for all.

### **2. Development**

We urge you to fully address the question of how development in our region can be made truly sustainable, since the scale of emissions associated with development is huge. The medium option in the (interim) Greater Cambridge Local Plan Housing Delivery Study<sup>1</sup> estimates 2,000 houses a year, which equates to c. 42,000 houses to 2041. This would be the equivalent of four towns the size of Ely<sup>2</sup>. Proposals for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc involve a million homes being built over the counties of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. In many areas this involves doubling the number of houses that are currently standing. It is, to put it bluntly, fanciful to pretend that development on this scale can be carried out sustainably. We urge the Commission to acknowledge this.

Houses built now will still be in use in 2050. If they are not carbon neutral now, then they will be net contributors to global warming. It will be vital that the Commission recommends that all new houses built from now onwards in our region must conform to the Passivhaus standard.

### **3. Farming and, in particular, peatlands**

We recognise that you are aware of the key role of emissions from the Cambridgeshire fens, and we understand that there is a need to find a solution to the tension that arises from the fact that agriculture in this region is of significant importance to the UK. However, we are concerned at your decision, explained at your zoom presentation to the Cambridge Zero Climate Change Festival on the 8th November, that a review of and recommendations for this issue should be postponed until the second phase of your work because of the lack of an up-to-date UK peat survey and the sensitivity of the issue. We urge you to be proactive and consider this issue as a matter of urgency utilising the resources that are already available.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://greatercambridgeplanning.org/media/1388/gclp-strategic-spatial-options-assessment-housing-delivery-study-nov2020.pdf> (accessed 1st December 2020)

<sup>2</sup> Cambridgeshire County Council estimate that Ely parish has 9,110 dwellings, from data in <https://data.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/dataset/mid-2011-mid-2018-population-and-dwelling-stock-estimates-cambridgeshire-and-peterborough-7#{}> (accessed 1st December 2020)

Research prepared for Cambridge County Council's Climate Strategy<sup>3</sup> indicates that the peatland in our region emits nearly as much greenhouse gas as all other human activity in the region. The good news is that our soil can, with the correct management, be turned from a massive emitter of greenhouse gases into a huge sink. If implemented across the world organic methods of agriculture and no-till cultivation could significantly reduce the atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub>, without the need for untested and expensive new Carbon Capture and Storage technologies<sup>4</sup>. The Global Peatlands Initiative estimates that properly managed peatland can contain up to 1,375 tonnes of carbon per hectare<sup>5</sup>. This is ten times the amount of carbon that mineral soils contain, and means that well managed peatland are among the most efficient terrestrial carbon storage ecosystems.<sup>6</sup> However the re-wetting that would be required would mean that current methods of agriculture could no longer be employed.

#### 4. Water and Flooding

Global warming will result in significant sea level rise in coming decades. This will particularly affect low lying areas, which include a large proportion of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area. New research published in *Nature Communications* last year indicates that the number of people worldwide vulnerable to sea level rise could be three times previous estimates<sup>7</sup>. The latest projections<sup>8</sup> predict that by 2050 large areas of the region will be under water. Water coverage is predicted to be continuous from central Cambridge to what is currently the Wash and from Cambridge to Peterborough, to Lincoln and northwards. The National Audit Office have produced a data visualisation on managing flood risk in response to the Met Office's UK climate projections show more extreme weather events and sea level rise resulting from climate change. This, when combined with increased housing development, will heighten flooding and coastal erosion risks<sup>9</sup>. The effects of these changes will begin to have an impact on asset prices (both of farmland and of domestic housing) in the coming years. Mitigation, whether in the form of flood management measures or of population movement, will be enormously costly. As already noted, a programme of managed re-wetting of the fens to mitigate the damage would require far-reaching changes to agriculture in our region, but may be judged preferable to disorderly inundation of no-longer economic farmland.

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<sup>3</sup> Cambridgeshire County Council Climate Change and Environment Strategy 2020 p. 25

(<https://www.mlei.co.uk/asset-library/Cambridgeshire-County-Council-Climate-Change-and-Environment-Strategy-May-2020.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> Natalie Bennett (2018) *Rich Earth. The benefits to our climate, human and natural health of agro-ecology, permaculture and organic farming practices as reflected in existing literature* Written for the Greens-EFA Group in the European Parliament. [https://mollymep.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/RichEarth\\_FULL-Feb19.pdf](https://mollymep.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/RichEarth_FULL-Feb19.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Crump, J. (Ed.) 2017. *Smoke on Water – Countering Global Threats From Peatland Loss and Degradation*. A UNEP Rapid Response Assessment. United Nations Environment Programme and GRID-Arendal, Nairobi and Arendal [https://gridarendal-website-live.s3.amazonaws.com/production/documents/:s\\_document/376/original/RRapeatland\\_revised\\_jan.pdf?1515398975](https://gridarendal-website-live.s3.amazonaws.com/production/documents/:s_document/376/original/RRapeatland_revised_jan.pdf?1515398975)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Kulp, S.A., Strauss, B.H. New elevation data triple estimates of global vulnerability to sea-level rise and coastal flooding. *Nat Commun* **10**, 4844 (2019). <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-019-12808-z>

<sup>8</sup> [www.coastal.climatecentral.org](http://www.coastal.climatecentral.org) (accessed 22 November 2020)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.nao.org.uk/other/managing-flood-risk-a-data-visualisation/?utm\\_source=LinkedIn&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=SocialSignIn&utm\\_content=Managing+flood+risk](https://www.nao.org.uk/other/managing-flood-risk-a-data-visualisation/?utm_source=LinkedIn&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=SocialSignIn&utm_content=Managing+flood+risk) (accessed 1st December 2020)