**Suggestions for actions to tackle the climate crisis**

2G3S (Green Groups in the Shelfords, Stapleford and Sawston)

*Following ‘The Time is Now’ mass lobby of Parliament about the climate crisis on 26 June 2019 Heidi asked for ideas that the More United cross-party group of MPs could propose to the government for inclusion in the Queen’s Speech.*

*2G3S asked for suggestions via its newsletter and then discussed the responses, plus other ideas, at a meeting on 22 July. There follows a distillation of the ideas thus generated.*

**Introduction**

***Q What is the one achievable issue we should prioritise?***

***A Treat the crisis as a crisis. Because we can’t solve an emergency without treating it like one. We need to look at the full picture and do all that we can*.**

Greta Thunberg answering questions on climate change 21 July 2019 (i)

We need a change of priorities across all levels and areas of government to reflect the urgency of the situation. That means putting dealing with climate change at the top of the agenda on all the main committees - Treasury, Transport, etc. The crisis must also be addressed at an individual and community level, and here the government can help by using fiscal and regulatory measures to encourage responsible behaviour that will help sustain life on earth. Equally, some climate mitigation measures are more effectively applied overseas, so our overseas aid and other policies could reflect this.

Targets: Long-term targets are good but, as More United has suggested, interim targets are better – if they can be exceeded, this is a cause for celebration, but if they are not met (eg third climate change budget, Commons Committee on Climate Change) action can be taken. This means accepting 2050 as a first step long-term target, but bringing forward interim targets.

Our suggestions are listed under the following headings:

Reducing CO2 levels

* Lock up Carbon
* Phase out creation of new carbon

Transport

Buildings

Greening the financial sector

**Reducing CO2 levels**

Lock up carbon

* Increase the number of trees: in UK discourage tree felling other than on safety grounds; also help stop deforestation in other countries, eg ban import of non-sustainable tropical forest products
* Major programme of tree planting – popular policy, but need consistency and effectiveness of incentives. Everyone can help with tree planting; doesn’t have to be high density (eg a few trees can be planted on pasture; urban trees have multiple benefits, not forgetting in hedges and gardens) (ii)
* Give more encouragement for sequestering carbon in buildings. (The effect of tree planting peaks as the trees mature and so this is not a long-term solution unless the carbon in wood is locked up, such as in building materials)
* Also plant large grasses, eg miscanthus, bamboo - but need to hold carbon out of atmosphere or at least use as a substitute for fossil fuels. (Note that production of biofuels and biomass potentially impacts food security)
* Support planting in tropical countries (bamboo is more efficient than miscanthus at removing carbon; trees planted in tropical zones remove carbon from the atmosphere 11 times faster than trees planted here) (iii)
* Soil health – incentivise agricultural practices to retain more carbon in soils
* Greater use of biochar (charcoal that can be used in carbon sequestration; also helps soil fertility)
* Protect peatlands (carbon stores), perhaps by regulation – eg change land management practices in moorland areas to store carbon and help prevent flooding.

Phase out creation of new carbon: replace (not add to) energy from fossil fuels:

* Wind farms: restore priority for onshore wind. Current national policy framework says areas suitable for wind farms have to be officially designated – system not working – change default so that areas NOT suitable for wind farms have to be officially designated. Wind turbines take up less space than solar farms; so less impact on agriculture
* Restore councils’ power to ban fracking
* Solar panels: solar farms (but see above). Panels on public buildings. Also on industrial buildings: but must address issue that often neither landlords nor tenants will assume responsibility to install them
* Promote use of fuel cells, which have the potential to halve the gas needed to heat our homes (Japan going for this option in a big way)
* Hinkley Point: group was opposed; but may be too advanced to stop; still time to stop Sizewell C. However some in the group felt there may be a role for small-scale nuclear power
* Consider: Carbon tax / Carbon trading schemes / Tradable Energy Quotas (TEQs). (iv)

**Transport**

Aviation

Air travel is the most rapidly growing area of CO2 emissions, especially when airport access is included.

* Cancel third runway at Heathrow
* Tax on fuel (long overdue but difficult to implement without international agreements)
* Frequent Flyer Levy (escalating ‘airport duty’) (v)
* Fiscal measures to penalise domestic and short-haul flights and incentivise trains and buses
* Consider a tax based on emissions? And/or capacity of the plane?

Cars

We need a mix of measures here.

Electric cars tempting but

* Still need power to be generated
* Peak grid demand at popular charging times may cause power outages
* Still cause congestion
* Installing charging points for public and private use to cover as many cars as we have today is likely to overload street distribution cables
* Many people cannot afford or do not wish to own a car
* Still some particulate pollution from tyres and brakes
* Insufficient lithium supplies for batteries. Suggest hydrogen power instead – electrolyses water using solar energy.

Support some encouragement for electric vehicles, but better to give incentives against car ownership:

* Better public transport: subsidies for buses and trains
* Better provision for walkers and cyclists: endorse recommendations of House of Commons Transport Committee ‘Active Travel’ report, 23 July 2019 (vi)
* Role of rented self-drive cars over next decade – will reduce number of cars on the road (but may increase per journey mileage as car comes to and from depot)
* Raise fuel tax; impose a tax on new vehicles
* Promote car sharing.

Rail

* Subsidise rail fares
* HS2: should go ahead. To reduce motor vehicle traffic (private car and freight) we require more rail capacity, especially for freight and local journeys. There is already freight overload on the existing network. Building HS2 will take virtually all long-distance express trains off the East Coast Main Line, Midlands Main Line, and West Coast Main Line, enabling those lines to run more frequent stopping trains as well as 'semi-fasts' and more freight.

**Buildings**

Energy efficiency

* Energy efficiency in older homes – make it much easier to get grants, or to borrow and pay back as you save on your energy bill (simpler scheme than the previous, discredited, ‘Green Deal’)
* Remove standing energy charges and increase the unit charge the more you use; generate a surplus and use it to support a rolling programme of renovating older properties occupied by those in fuel poverty
* In the forthcoming revision of energy efficiency standards required by Building Regulations Part L, upgrade them so that the energy efficiency of new homes needs to be at least 25% and preferably 35% better than at present. Note that Scottish building regs have required ~23% better energy efficiency than in England since 2015, with no impact on housing starts (vii). Developers will welcome having a common standard across the UK.

Zero carbon

* Ideally, reinstate the requirement for zero-carbon new homes, which was due to be in building regs from 2016. But certainly reinstate the ‘*planning policy statement 1 supplement on climate change’*, so that it is clear to councils that their Local Plans can require new homes to be lower carbon than is required by building regs (although councils used to be free to do what they saw fit, these powers have recently been stripped from them, so most are restricting themselves to requiring carbon emissions to be most 19% better than required by building regs. This is undemocratic and ridiculous, as government policy says that we need to halve the energy use of new homes by 2030).

Building standards

* Enforce building standards: There is a 40% performance gap between the claimed (and required) energy performance of new homes, and the actual average “as built” performance. This is outrageous and unfair to purchasers and occupiers. Something should be done to compel developers to build to the required standards: maybe by making them legally liable to rectify the faults, or where this is not economically viable, to pay compensation to the owners for the excess energy bills (say over 30 years) and pay compensation for the excess carbon emissions to a local authority run carbon offset fund. This money could be used to pay for enforcement and to undertake compensating carbon emission reductions elsewhere (eg retrofitting council homes).

Resource and background for this section here. (viii)

**Greening the financial sector**

* Introduce financial regulation and taxation measures to reduce the use of fossil fuels. The ‘Green New Deal’ is a phrase that already has currency (including in the US), and it sums up the new approach and policies that are needed. Summary of the original 2008 New Economics Foundation report here. (ix)

**Conclusion**

We need a change of attitude so that the climate crisis is recognised for the existential threat it is. We British are fond of harking back to the glory days of WWII, when the country pulled together in a time of adversity and won through against all the odds. An arguably even greater threat now demands a similar response. Such a challenge can result in fear and apathy – instead we need to talk about excitement and opportunity. If we can catch the public imagination by appealing to the ‘wartime spirit’, we might not only address the climate crisis but also recapture that sense of national unity sadly lacking in today’s political climate.

PS -TED talk

You may be interested in a very lucid and compelling fifteen-minute TED talk in which the speaker, Chad Frischmann, looks at a prioritised list of things we can do to address climate change, most of which are already being done somewhere in the world and all of which are affordable. (x)

References

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