

## **The Time Is Now mass lobby / Environmental Forum 29 June 2020**

*Questions for Anthony Browne (in italics) and notes of his responses (non-italics; bold); also responses from Sam Hall, Director of Conservative Environmental Network (SH).*

Compiled by Linda Whitebread of 2G3S and Claire Mackenzie who took notes at the time (so may be partial and/or inaccurate) with additional notes by Darcy Simpson at the end.

AB read out each question before answering it. In all 20 questions were reached in the hour allotted; at least 4 previously submitted questions and 9 questions entered on the day were not reached; nor any follow up questions (*Supplementary questions/comments for each question written into Chat - not addressed - in green italics*).

HH (previously submitted)

*I would like to ask about attaching conditions to post-Covid bailouts/loans/grants to companies, that they publish plans of how they will contribute to the UK net zero by or before 2050, and how their progress will be monitored.*

*We need to "build back better".*

**Agreed; we shall ask major companies to commit to achieving net zero by 2050. Canada has done something similar, we could look to their examples. We need more press to encourage companies to publish their plans.**

*MK: Could it go further? - couldn't we also ask big companies to commit to binding targets for e.g. diversity at the same time. The SMF Think Tank have some good ideas on this - a new contract between people and the state.*

*HH: Thank you for saying you are happy to talk to Govt about conditions attached to bailouts of big companies. Airlines and Stansted Airport are local relevant cases.*

MH: (previously submitted?)

*Do you support an environmental watchdog to be setup as we leave the EU?*

**Yes - proposed in the Environment Bill. No point in having weak targets. We need clear targets such as for biodiversity & air pollution.**

SH: Environmental issues for conservative MPs to focus on should be in place by the end of the year as we leave the EU.

*KM: But will the Watchdog have real teeth?*

*MH: When will the Environment Bill return to the House?*

CM (previously submitted)

*I hope you support, as I do, the South Cambs District Council Zero Carbon Strategy that was produced last year, and has recently been reviewed to take into account the current situation. The Council leader, Cllr Bridget Smith, said "Climate change remains the biggest threat to the future of our world, even more so than COVID-19 or even any future pandemics." Now is the time to place environmental and humanitarian issues alongside the fiscal recovery of South Cambs.*

*My question:*

*In the light of the publication of the [CCC 2020 report](#) this week will you write to the Chancellor urging him to take note of its recommendations when he prepares his financial statement next month?*

**I have spoken to Rishi Sunak and he is committed to the green jobs agenda. Committee on Climate Change reported that there was a 3-4% reduction in emissions BEFORE the pandemic.**

*(LW: Note: p105 of report says: Total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions fell by 3.2% in 2019 to 480 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e. To achieve Net Zero, the UK needs to achieve an average emissions reduction of around 15.5 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e per year over the next 30 years, similar to the 16 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e achieved in 2019. – ie that we must continue reducing at the same rate to achieve net zero by 2050)*

*SH: more people need to be incentivised to retrofit buildings. We should include off-shore wind farms & green transport. These also provide good job opportunities.*

*TL: But the Committee on Climate Change's report from last week shows very little progress, particularly in the light of our impending chairmanship of COP26*

*H?: Green Alliance report today should feed into PM's statement on economic recovery*

*CM: To follow H's chat about the Green Alliance report, it cites that green jobs such as in retrofitting buildings and improvement of local cycle and walk ways will create many more jobs rather than other projects that the Government are citing to spend money on such as building roads.*

AP (from Chat)

*The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of 'local' and the environment, in decisions regarding where and how we want to work, shop and live. With parts of the South Cambs constituency inaccessible to its own local residents (for example, an eight mile journey by public transport can take the best part of three hours in parts of South Cambridgeshire; many villages have no viable commutable bus service to any employment hubs; many villages have no bus to take villagers to the next village), and the need to boost the economy following on from the pandemic, what steps will Mr Browne take to ensure green public transport is improved in the constituency as a matter of urgency?*

**I have been championing E-W rail with a stop at Cambourne, and the S Cambridge station. Bus services on major routes. We must make sure that all new public transport is low carbon.**

*AP: Thank you for answering my question. I would also like to highlight that job creation is important (I work in recruitment and am all too aware), but that we must ensure that people can actually get to work - hence my point about no buses to any employment hubs (for example, my own personal study showed no commutability for 22 out of 25 villages). I have much more info and will follow up after the meeting.*

CL (previously submitted)

*When I read the 2018 IPCC report last year I was terrified by the scope and scale of change required by 2030 to keep within the agreed limits of 1.5c global warming, and I am also devastated by regular reports on the loss of our natural biodiversity. I feel deeply saddened by how we disregard the ecosystems that give us life, and fearful for the future of my children and peoples of the world. I gained some hope when the government declared a climate emergency, and am proud that the UK sets its sights on being a world leader in combating climate change.*

*The UK Government has shown tremendous courage and compassion in how it has sought to combat the effects of Covid-19, and I would like to thank you for your part in those efforts. There is now tremendous opportunity to tackle both climate and biodiversity problems, whilst supporting our economic recovery and improving the health and wellbeing of people. The Climate Coalition's priority recommendations outline several important actions that can be taken, as does The [Committee on Climate Change's recent report](#).*

*Please can you tell me which of these recommendations you support and will work to help achieve, and what more can be done to ensure we meet our commitments to be world leaders in tackling climate change and natural biodiversity loss?*

**Net zero test to all spending/taxation – yes, broadly agree. We must consider everything through a 'carbon neutral' lens.**

**Pleased that no more fracking. We need joined-up government.**

**Tough decisions now. Can't keep kicking the ball down the road.**

**Insulate homes: yes.**

**Not every measure can be Net Zero, there are those who will not be able to achieve Net Zero but as a whole we need to make sure that CO2 levels fall.**

SH: drew attention to rec 8 re trade policy/high standards *(I can't find this – LW)*.

**AB: yes. We mustn't export our pollution or accept lower animal welfare standards. WTO has strict rules about disregarding these things but there are ways around this.**

*TL: Anthony, if that's the case, why did your government give £750M to oilfield exploration companies last month?*

*ZG: The issue with homes is not insulation but how they are heated. Can you support schemes to help home owners add green energy to homes.*

*JH: Trade deals and high standards must not undermine environmental standards in the UK too - a bigger set of issues than just welfare and food safety although they are of course important*

EW (from Chat)

*The Government has pledged £1 billion for rebuilding crumbling British schools. However, according the charity Teach the Future, to build new school buildings and adapt existing ones to make them fit to a net-zero specification, the figure would be closer to £30 billion. Will you personally speak to Boris Johnson, Alok Sharma, Rishi Sunak and Gavin Williamson and ask them to support this?*

**We will encourage more building of new schools and retrofitting of old schools**

MG (from Chat)

*I would like to know which of the transformative ideas that should be shaping the 21st century - ideas like the circular economy, donut economics, 15 minute towns, or the Drawdown project, are informing government policy on reaching net zero asap. If none of those, which ideas are shaping your policies?*

**Clamping down on fossil fuels; taxation. Increase electric vehicles. Circular Economy: government is 'rhetorically' committed to this.**

**The government has said it is committed to reducing fossil fuels, decarbonising vehicles, planting more trees. I visited Wimpole and talked to them about sequestration of soil in terms of carbon capture – I would like to see that happening in other farms.**

*J?: rhetorically committed? What does that mean? Lip service? Please explain how this government is 'rhetorically committed' to the idea of a circular economy? Your words, not mine.*

HG (previously submitted)

*'I live in Fowlmere - a village I believe you know well. The low water levels in recent years are a concern to many and I was very happy to see that you discussed this recently with the Environment Minister. Are you able to share with us any specific findings and actions that came out of that meeting?*

*This week you stated that 'The best way to help businesses is to get the economy going again. We should have three priorities: growth, growth and growth'. How important do you feel it is that this growth should be sustainable? South Cambridgeshire in particular, with its high proportion of technology, research and innovation-based companies, seems well positioned to benefit from investment in a greener economy. Is this something you would be willing to promote?*

*In February this year you voted against a motion to 'Eliminate Substantial Majority of Emissions by 2030'. This included measures relating to electric vehicle infrastructure, improved cycle ways and clean air zones. Did you vote against it because you thought the timeline unfeasible or were there one or more particular suggestions you did not agree with? Do you think any of the measures mentioned in this motion could be implemented in South Cambridgeshire in the near future?'*

**Water: yes, I am very concerned. Rainfall is remaining constant in this area but we are taking more water out. I have been consulting about this and hope to get some action.**

*TW: Met office predicts +5.4 C increased average temperature with 50% less rainfall by 2070, according to CCC report, this may be an underestimate. In June 2020, we are again heading for a drought, what can be done to ensure the future of our water supplies?*

BR from Chat

*£50M would go a long way to building a high quality Greenway between Oxford and Cambridge. The DfT (Jesse Norman) have already acknowledged that it could be built at a fraction of the cost of the Expressway or of East-West rail. The Greenway will bring major health benefits, tackling obesity related issues such as diabetes and heart disease. The Greenway will also be a wealth importer because it will encourage Green tourism and the development of future eco vehicles such as aerodynamic ULVs. Will you support this project?*

**Yes – I have written to the department but not heard back yet.**

*BB: In a follow up to the Oxford-Cambridge greenway question, do you support the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway? It seems that this project would not only encourage carbon intense travel but would reduce use of the new rail route (making it less cost effective).*

*BR: AB is on record as opposing the Expressway*

MH (previously submitted?)

*What are you doing to ensure COP26 in 2021 is a success and to put pressure on to limit the global temperature rise by 1.5 degrees?*

**It will probably be easier to reach agreement next year than this, given the US elections this November. Both the Chancellor and the Foreign Office are keen to ensure that it will be a success.**

SH: There is a lot going on via international talks. Countries are being asked to increase their ambition and agree new pledges by 2030; not yet on target. Focus on getting private sector and subnational governments to commit.

**AB: UK is doing well in reducing thermal electricity. 67 consecutive days without using coal recently – this is a record. 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020: only 0.6% of UK energy use was coal-powered.**

*EW: “Report says Boris Johnson’s lack of climate leadership risks missing target and embarrassing UK at Cop26” - <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/25/act-fast-to-stop-uk-carbon-emission-rebound-climate-advisers-urge>*

MK (Chat)

*Hi Anthony, how do we go about ensuring that there are adequate school buses in place for when schools start again in September (given distancing expectations, if any), and how do we make them Covid-proof in the case of a second outbreak?*

**M has started a campaign to get all schools back asap. But the school buses present a difficulty re social distancing, and this is a real barrier to achieving this.**

TW (previously submitted? / chat)

*CCC said Support services for adaptation have been eroded over the past ten years and the Government ceased funding for the [Climate Ready support service](#) in 2016. (LW – it was set up by the coalition government in 2010 to support businesses in adapting to climate change)*

**I am not aware that this was cut. I would support its objectives. Send me an email about it.**

SH: we need more tailored support.

PF (previously submitted? / chat)

*Would Anthony support removing the planning block on individual on-shore wind turbines, especially on farms and community-owned turbines?*

**People in some areas are very opposed to onshore wind. I am not in favour of a blanket ban; we need to consider each proposal on a case-by-case basis.**

SH: the government has said it will hold a new auction or established renewable technologies. Wind is the cheapest form of renewable. But onshore wind companies will have to comply with strict planning regulations, including getting the support of local communities.

PK (chat)

*How would you make any Green New Deal and the Financial Sector compatible?*

**Mark Carney, ex-Bank of England head, is leading a group looking at climate change. Green investments: tend to be long-term, stable and could marry these with wise investments for pensions. The government is keen for more money to support green**

infrastructure. But green investment is quite new – need to educate investors. Barclays is leading on greener investments and on becoming carbon neutral – others need to follow. Is there a case for tax breaks? I will investigate.

SH: Green Finance Strategy published a couple of years ago.

*(LW: the government's [Green Finance Strategy](#) was published in July 2019 and 'recognises the role of the financial sector in delivering global and domestic climate and environmental objectives.')*

*TW: Bank of England is currently planning for 3.5 C by 2100, with their bailouts they may be helping us to achieve that, why are they even giving money to oil exploration, including support to the company that owns drilling equipment on Gatwick Oilfield (Western Gecko, owned by Schlumberger)*

HE (chat)

*One of the problems is that we measure 'success' of the UK by GDP. This is now outdated. Is there any consideration to review this and look at using other metrics, perhaps based on the Sustainable Development Goals?*

**I understand the problems of using GDP as a measure – eg it would count activity as a result of storm damage as a positive; conversely there are desirables it does not measure. David Cameron introduced a happiness index. But there are no other really suitable metrics. I am open to change if something suitable could be found.**

*TW: Increase in GDP in any case disproportionately benefits exceedingly rich people, very little benefit to low or even mid income people, we cannot grow our way out of poverty.*

*AP: GDP is appearing to be less and less relevant as a measure of how well we're actually doing*

*EW: "Bobby Kennedy on GDP: 'measures everything except that which is worthwhile'" –*

*<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/may/24/robert-kennedy-gdp>*

*George Monbiot 'Out of the Wreckage' is another good book on this topic*

*MG: Kate Raworth?*

*CM: Donut economy - look at Jacinda Arden's achievements looking beyond GDP*

KM (chat)

*What part do you see for nature and nature's recovery in the wider recovery package from Covid-19? You have mentioned climate change a lot but not the chronic ongoing decline in our nature, yet they are inextricably interlinked and indeed nature provides so much for people and many solutions for climate change.*

**We must bounce back better. We must bring forward things we want to do anyway which will be of benefit, eg carbon capture and storage.**

**I understand about the decline in nature, particularly the lack of tree cover. Cambridge is particularly bad in this regard, with less than 3% tree cover compared with 10% for the UK as a whole (European average of 30%).**

**I am massively supportive of attacking biodiversity loss (eg 95% decline in hedgehogs), both in UK and abroad.**

SH: we have seen the importance of green spaces during lockdown; and must protect eg peat bogs. Nature and Climate Fund set up by government.

*(LW This was in this year's [budget](#): '£640m Nature for Climate Fund to plant more than 40 million trees and restore 35,000 hectares of peatland in England')*

*EW: The lack of tree cover is because of livestock and grouse shooting*

*ZG: Regenerative agriculture is the way forward, just tree planting is not the answer*

MG (chat)

*We are already using more than an entire earth's amount of resources every year. How is the endless growth going to be achieved, then?*

**Not sure I agree about using more than an entire earth's amount of resources every year, but yes, we must reduce. Some resources are limited in supply; but others are renewable. Growth need not mean using more resources or greater environmental degradation – eg the service sector uses fewer resources than eg manufacturing; and we can all use more renewable resources.**

*KM : See WWF's earth overshoot day for the point each year where we have used all the resources that can be sustainably recouped. So yes we do use more per year than the planet can cover - hence decline in nature and changing climate*

*MG: "In 2020, Earth Overshoot Day lands on August 22. Earth Overshoot Day marks the date when humanity has exhausted nature's budget for the year. For the rest of the year, we are maintaining our ecological deficit by drawing down local resource stocks and accumulating carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We are operating in overshoot."*

*<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/earth-overshoot-day/>*

*MK: Do you know if Government have looked at the Donut Model of economics proposed by Kate Raworth for Amsterdam? It's an interesting model of sustainable growth for cities which we could look at - a way of using less resources whilst maintaining a strong economy*

DS (chat)

*My husband, as part of his work as an ecological consultant, is involved in the HS2 rail project and from his experience so far considers it a waste of tax payers money as it is being delivered very inefficiently. In light of the net zero target wouldn't it now be better to re-route the £100 billion invested in this project into green jobs and habitat restoration? The same with the £27 billion recently invested in roads. What scope is there for revisiting this decision in Parliament?*

**We do need to improve public transport. The main objective of HS2 is not to reduce travel times, as many people think, but to increase capacity and connectivity. I am broadly supportive of the scheme, especially if the trains will be electric. People have complained for years that we don't have trains like the TGV. But it is not a big issue in Cambridgeshire.**

*AP: Re Darcy's point about HS2: I agree that it needs revisiting, in fact the importance of local has been realised during this pandemic, so not sure HS2 would really be used in the ways and numbers expected when it was first agreed. Would therefore be sensible for government to revisit*

*EW: Re HS2: Dissenting report by Lord Berkeley, deputy chair of the Oakervee report - <https://theengineer.markallengroup.com/production/2020/01/Lord-Berkeley-HS2-Review-FINAL.pdf>*

*DS: Anthony - thank you for answering my question about HS2. I agree that trains are better than cars but instead of increasing connectivity and capacity is there any way to encourage people to work locally and travel less?*

*MG: See 15 minute towns (Smarter Cambridge Transport (responding to Darcy))*

BB (chat)

*Are you supporting the Decarbonisation and Economic Strategy Bill (commonly called Green New Deal Bill) sponsored by Clive Lewis and Carline Lucas. If so, how? If not, why not?*

**We see countless new bills all the time at Westminster. I don't know of this one.**

**It is possible to support an objective without supporting the proposed specific means of achieving it.**

SH: The Green New Deal favours big public spending projects. Some Tories feel that it is better that the government encourage the private sector to do more.

The target zero carbon date of 2030 is too soon; 2050 is more realistic and is the official policy.

*TW: NET zero by 2050 will not keep us to 1.5C, it is not Paris compliant, it is too late*

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/26/leading-scientist-criticises-uk-over-its-climate-record>

AP (chat)

*What can we do to encourage shops (independents and national chains) in South Cambs to use less packaging?*

**A plastics tax formed part of the recent Finance Bill; this should impact shops. We must make it easier to recycle plastic. I support government having a stronger role in promoting recycling. Consumer pressure is important.**

*EW: Adair Turner claims that we should ban all single-use plastic being sent to landfill by latest 2025*

## Questions not reached

Previously submitted (that we know about; there may be others)

DS: *I notice in the debate on the COVID-19: Support for UK Industries yesterday that you said, 'We should have three priorities: growth, growth and growth. Private enterprise has taken the brunt of this recession and private enterprise will lead us out of it. I urge us all to unite in supporting businesses as we move forwards.' Please can you tell me how you propose to support local businesses in diversifying and growing so that they can be financially stable, whilst also making the growth sustainable so that our planet is protected for the people and nature in South Cambridgeshire and will meet the UK's net zero target?*

ZG: *I would like to ask if he supports all the new housing developments surrounding Cambridge that are being built for short term profit, without sufficient transport infrastructure or green energy systems.*

*I also think the issue of growth is really important, any growth now is for extremely short term gain and will surely impact future generations adversely. Is his political viewpoint to only plan for the length of a parliament or will he consider futures for our children and grandchildren?*

LW: *The Environment Bill will set up a domestic body to replace EU regulatory authorities. It will among other things also provide a framework for setting targets in such areas as*

*biodiversity and air and water quality. I understand that the Bill has passed its second reading but is still in Committee. Can you seek the support of the Prime Minister in making sure that this crucial Bill is passed without delay and certainly before we finally leave the EU?*

*DW: There are many different benefits of measures to improve the environment. For example, investing in better home insulation and tree planting, renewable energy and electric vehicles all reduce carbon emissions and climate change, but additionally provide increased employment opportunities, reduce health problems related to hypothermia and air pollution, and reduce costs and strain on the NHS. To what extent will the government be prioritising these types of environmental improvements?*

#### New Questions from Chat

*EW: Mr Browne, in February you voted against a call on the Government to develop and implement a plan to eliminate the substantial majority of transport emissions by 2030. Do you regret this and, in light of the call for a Green recovery, will you support efforts - without exception - to cut emissions across all sectors?*

*NG: Do you support debt cancellation and an increase in grants to the world's poorest communities to enable them to build their resilience to both the COVID-19 and climate crises?*

*JH: If we have time, very keen to get Anthony's thoughts on the recent news that UKGov is looking to deregulate, particularly in planning (Operation Speed). This runs entirely counter to green recovery rhetoric.*

*TW: Heat proofing has been neglected, the temperature rises predicted for South Cambs may in any case have to be revised upwards according to CCC report, currently standing at 5.4C increase by 2070. Needs some serious adaptation*

*BB: Although South Cambs has large numbers of cyclists (well above average) the infrastructure is patchy and often not accessible to all cyclists. How do you plan to support active, low carbon travel in South Cambs and reduce the inequality of infrastructure in this constituency (particularly to villages a bit further out)? Would you agree to meet with Camcycle to discuss how cycling could be improved in South Cambs?*

*DS: We are lucky to have some lovely nature reserves in South Cambridgeshire, with a variety of habitats that are vital for wildlife and also store carbon. What opportunities are there to plant more hedgerows and trees (which I know you're keen on) to help these expand and join up locally specifically*

*DS: As you are probably aware we need to capture and store carbon as well as reduce emissions. What opportunities are there to incentivise or encourage local technology companies in South Cambs to get involved in this by monetising and commercialising this important industry?*

*BR: Hedge planting would be very welcome on the misguided busway to prevent cyclists falling onto the busway and dying as well as OAPs wandering onto the busway at night and also dying.*

*DS: With regards to farming, which plays a large role in South Cambs and I think you have a personal interest in, what is the national and local government doing to increase soil storage of carbon and biodiversity through encouraging farmers to rotate crops, sow cover crops and reduce ploughing and move to organic farming?*

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Darcy Simpson notes on Facebook

In case it adds anything here are some brief points I jotted down during the Environmental Constituent Forum with Anthony Browne MP at 4pm on 29th June when I wasn't typing in live questions (plus I missed the first 10 mins due to technical issues!):

Anthony Browne MP said that the government is committed to:

- taxing fossil fuels
- promoting electric vehicles (he mentioned electric buses and trains a couple of times)
- tree planting
- circular economy (reduce, reuse, recycle)
- off shore wind

He acknowledged concerns about water levels. He mentioned the Oxford to Cambridge Greenway. He said he'd written to the environment department about something (sorry I can't remember what!).

He said he is in favour of the HS2 Rail project as it increases interconnectivity and capacity and will have electric trains.

He said he is keen for the government to do more about plastic; supportive of the Net Zero test; pleased about the UK fracking ban; promoting insulation for all homes; pushing for high standards in trade deals - is in discussion with the Dept. of International Trade (although there are some restrictions imposed on certain things by the World Trade Organisation).

He said he is happy to raise with the minister for school builds/rebuilds to be carbon neutral.