



co-operative  
party

# a co-operative green new deal

Climate change, energy and the environment policy paper



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# Introduction

The fact that our planet is on course for destruction is not a new concept – our environment and changing climate have been on policy agendas and the subject of activism and protest for decades.

But it is only recently that it is being addressed with the urgency required. For many this is already too little too late. Communities across the world are already feeling the effects of climate change, especially those who have contributed least to global emissions and who are least equipped to dealing with its consequences.

Human-caused climate change has been behind a growing number of extreme and deadly weather events, from hurricanes in the US, to droughts in East Africa, heatwaves across Europe, fires in the Arctic and Amazon, and flooding in Bangladesh. As ice caps melt at a faster pace than predicted, the resulting rising sea levels are risking the lives, livelihoods and natural habitats of many coastal regions – some low-lying Pacific islands have already disappeared entirely.

9 million tons of plastic enter oceans every year – a figure expected to double by 2030 unless urgent action is taken. Every year more animals are added to the endangered species list as deforestation, pollution and global warming shrink habitats. Contaminants from agriculture and manufacturing are affecting global water supplies, and fumes from cars and lorries are making our busiest streets dangerous to breathe on.

Our window to tackle these problems is narrowing. In some cases, it is already too late, and we must urgently devise ways to adapt and protect lives and livelihoods, and in others it may be a matter of years or even months. Despite this, too many are turning away. From Trump's politics of climate change denial to French fuel tax protests, the hard-

won global consensus on the need to change is being challenged.

But the co-operative movement is not turning away – social responsibility and concern for community are hardwired into how co-operatives operate and we can see this reflected in the enthusiasm of community energy groups building solar and wind generation; in retail co-operative societies making it easier for their members to make sustainable choices and developing innovative materials; in co-operative farmers pushing for higher environmental standards; co-operative housing and community land trusts building sustainable, energy efficient homes.

# Foundations for a Co-operative Green New Deal

Current policy on climate change is failing to achieve the pace of change needed to prevent irreversible climate catastrophe and is failing to consider those communities most impacted.

The co-operative movement is guided and governed by its values and principles – including democratic participation, concern for the community, social responsibility, openness, equality and solidarity. These are no less relevant when considering wider policy questions and should be at the heart of proposals to tackle climate change and protect our environment.

These values and principles have helped to inform some foundations that we believe climate change and environmental policy should be built on.

## A just transition

Climate change and inequality are intertwined, both in cause and effect. The poorest have contributed least to its onward march – yet they already bear the brunt of its effect, and are most vulnerable to adverse impact from the policies designed to slow its progress.

Jobs in heavy industry and manufacturing risk being lost as we transition to greener technologies. Taxes on goods are not progressive, meaning higher fuel duties can disproportionately hit the cost of living for lower income households. And in the Global South, climate change is causing desertification, drought, and increasingly extreme weather events – driving an era of displacement and conflict for ever more

scarce resources.

Equally, done right, decarbonisation promises many opportunities too. A transition requires innovation and new green industry to replace our high carbon status quo – complete with new, green skills and jobs. Deprived neighbourhoods in cities with busy roads and poisonous air should benefit the most from a reduction in emissions from the cars clogging up their streets.

The co-operative movement is founded on the values of solidarity and fairness – and these must be at the heart of our approach to tackling climate change and dealing with its effects, as well as ensuring the opportunities of this transition are available to the many, not just the few.

The International Labour Organisation, the International Trade Union Confederation and the wider global trade union movement explore themes of job creation, poverty reduction, social protection, skills development, and community renewal.

Given these, this paper proposes that a just transition is one which leaves no one behind by:

- Ensuring the needs of the present generation are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs too;
- Securing the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities;
- Supporting the most vulnerable in society, ensuring they don't pay the price of climate change disproportionately, either in its effects or as a consequence of the policies designed to tackle it;
- Following the principle of subsidiarity – that there is no one size fits all to mitigate the impacts and benefit from the opportunities of the transition, and local workers, unions and communities should be

empowered and supported to develop locally relevant solutions;

- Giving voice and widening participation, recognising the potential and benefits of collective action as a force of societal change;
- Making the most sustainable choice the easiest and most affordable choice, so that social and environmental considerations aren't the preserve of the better off.

## Ambition and urgency

The impacts of climate change are already being felt across the world, and every fraction of additional warming will worsen its impact.

The IPCC report shows that just the half degree between 1.5C and 2C warming will significantly worsen the risk of flooding, drought, extreme heat and poverty for millions. This half a degree is the margin of error for potential complete eradication of corals, the total thawing of the permafrost and irreversible loss of the Greenland ice sheet.

**“Our top priority should be to get universal acceptance of the scale and urgency of the crisis facing the planet”**

– Chelmsford Star Co-operative Party

According to its authors, time is running out to prevent this half a degree warming – requiring an urgency in our response.

It's no longer enough to talk about climate change. We are in a climate emergency and our actions should reflect this.

Cognisant of this urgency, proposals in this paper are only of value to our climate and continued existence if enacted quickly.

While, compared to other major economies, the amendment to the

Climate Change Act is welcome, the Government's net zero by 2050 targets are not ambitious enough.

**The Co-operative Party believes the UK should adopt a 2030 zero carbon target.**

**“The government should join other countries by declaring to be carbon neutral by, at the latest, 2030.”**

– NEMCO

## **Evidence-based policy making**

As the threat of climate change to our society and ecosystems grows, it is important that expert voices are heard in the development of the policies to slow its progression. Evidence-based policy helps people make well-informed decisions, making explicit what is known through scientific evidence.

There is an overwhelming volume of evidence and expertise on our climate and environment, and this should form the basis of any policy designed to prevent, slow down and mitigate climate change and protect our environment.

This should include whole-life carbon and environmental impact assessments – a principle well understood in many industries but often poorly implemented. Seemingly quick wins can have unexpected environmental consequences if not properly assessed and understood.

## **International co-operation & leadership**

The co-operative movement has always stood for an international approach to tackling the world's problems, and nowhere is this more important than in our approach to climate change and the environment.

The issue of climate change is too big to be tackled alone, and the UK must go back to leading the global fight against climate change

and continue to work with our nearest neighbours in the EU. 80% of the UK's environmental laws come from the EU16, developed collaboratively over the last forty years, and the government is answerable to the European Court of Justice should they not be upheld.

Without these laws or this accountability, Britain may end up with significantly weaker standards and a weaker system for enforcing them. This would be a betrayal of our obligations as a responsible global player. **The UK should continue to advance international action on climate change by playing a leading role in pressing for and delivering international agreements.**

## **An accountable, transparent transition**

Tackling climate change and protecting the environment are collective efforts, and require mutual trust and confidence for government-led top down measures and bottom-up and individual actions to find synergy. And beyond this, the scale of change and public spending required need the buy-in and effective scrutiny of communities across the country. Transparency and accountability must therefore be embedded in any policy response.

There needs to be a strong statutory body with the power to hold the government fully to account for environmental performance. It should be properly resourced, have full prosecutorial power, be coordinated across all four nations and be at full capacity before Brexit happens, if it is to be effective. Climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptations should be included in the watchdog's remit.

# A policy toolkit

There is no silver bullet policy to tackle climate change and protect our environment. This toolkit offers ideas which the Co-operative Party believes can help to achieve a just transition.

No single item below can do this in isolation. Instead, these are ideas which complement each other - creating a policy framework which seeks to balance incentives and sanctions, investment and fiscal tools, local and national action.

## A green industrial strategy

Industry accounts for 33% of all UK emissions, 25% from the direct use of oil and gas and 8% from electricity demand. Of this, manufacturing is responsible for approximately 60% - or a fifth of total carbon emissions.<sup>1</sup> Changing the way our industrial sectors operate should, therefore, be at the heart of the UK's approach to tackling climate change.

The UK is underserved by its industrial strategy – the incentives that guide the way people invest, produce and consume are not accounting for environmental costs. The Co-operative Party believes there should be a new, green industrial strategy to recognise, capitalise on, and encourage further growth in green goods and services.

This industrial strategy should include the following themes:

## **1. Strategic and practical support for the co-operative movement to start up, grow and succeed in low carbon technologies and green industry**

The UK's transition should be to our collective benefit, rather than captured by a small number of private companies. The UK's old industrial paradigm was dominated by private interests, whose short-term profit motives offer little incentive to divest from the carbon-intensive technologies and fuels which are damaging our environment and future. Instead, collective ownership and participation ensures the transition is in the interests of today's workers and communities, as well as future generations.

Everyone should have a stake in the success of the transition, and as democratic organisations run by the workers and communities who own them, co-operatives are the best form to ensure this.

## **2. A focus on good quality green jobs**

The transition to a low carbon future should create good quality, well paid jobs. This means ensuring schools, colleges and universities are equipping the workforce of the future with the appropriate green and transferable skills to succeed, as well as ensuring the current workforce is supported, retrained and retooled so that they can fully benefit from the transition.

## **3. Rebalancing the economy and ensuring no community is left behind**

Manufacturing is concentrated in particular regions of the UK – presenting either risk or opportunity for those communities. Done without regard for workers and communities, a transition to a low carbon economy risks losing jobs or substituting them with lower skilled and lower paid alternatives.

## Learning from experience: Dearne Valley

As noted in IPPR's 'A Just Transition', "even where policies have been put in place to ameliorate the impacts of transition, their focus has often been on job numbers rather than job quality. The Dearne Valley is an example where the Enterprise Zone running from 1995 to 2005 was designed to regenerate areas which had suffered from deindustrialisation but instead created jobs with lower skills and lower wages than had previously been available"<sup>2</sup>

However, done right, the transition can create more resilient and prosperous local economies in those regions. A focus on green skills and job quality, with targeted investment and funding, can see those local communities benefit most from the new green economy – addressing regional imbalances should be an aim not a by-product of the transition.

Every region of the UK experiences its own intersectionalities and vulnerabilities, as well as its own unique path to sustainable development, and the best placed people to define and shape this will be those impacted by it and experiencing it everyday.

Therefore, the principle of subsidiarity should apply, giving communities, councillors and metro mayors the funding and powers that they need to shape their own low carbon local economies.

**“Action needs to be bottom up as well as top down”**

– Cardiff & Vale Co-operative Party branch

#### **4. Building on high environmental standards to become world leaders in green industries**

As set out in the policy paper on 'Britain's relationship with the European Union' agreed at the Co-operative Party's conference in 2018, the UK should aspire to be a global leader in setting and enforcing environmental standards. This means at least matching EU regulations, but also being an exemplar of innovation and future developments.

Our laws should remain aligned with or ahead of all future environmental legislation in Europe, and all future trade deals should ensure that environmental protection is incorporated.

#### **5. A focus on productivity**

When workers have a stake and a say in their workplaces, productivity improves. This isn't just a positive result for that industry and the country's economy – it is also key to tackling climate change. Combined with an increased resource efficiency, this supports manufacturing effectiveness by lowering inputs while improving the quality and/or quantity of output.

This dual focus of productivity and resource efficiency will contribute to rebalancing regional economies - manufacturing makes up 15-20% of the economy in lagging regions, and parts of the country with a larger manufacturing industry also have lower overall productivity – raising the performance of manufacturing will have bigger benefits in lagging regions.

## **Green investment programme**

Economic orthodoxy has relied on market forces to tackle climate change – including social costs of carbon in the prices people pay in an incremental way. This alone has not caused the step change needed to change our downward trend to ecological destruction. Global

temperatures continue to rise too far and too fast.

Economic activity therefore needs to be decoupled from carbon emissions and ecological destruction – through a public investment programme as significant in scale and ambition as the post-War Marshall Plan in Europe or Roosevelt’s New Deal in the States.

This investment should align with a new green industrial strategy and seek to achieve a rapid and just transition to achieve zero carbon by 2030 through:

- Rapidly decarbonising industry through investment in new low carbon technology;
- Creating good quality, well paid green jobs;
- Investing in modern 21st Century infrastructure, including low carbon and public transport, water and energy;
- Initiatives to improve energy efficiency of homes and businesses;
- Building resiliency against the impacts of climate change.

## **Rapid decarbonisation of where our energy comes from**

Waiting for the market to decarbonise our energy sector has not worked. We remain over reliant on coal and gas – in 2018 gas accounted for 39.4% of electricity generated, while coal made up 5%. Renewables, at a record high in 2018, still only generated a third of our energy.<sup>3</sup>

Rapid decarbonisation requires accelerated Government-mandated phasing out, with thought not just for what technology we don’t want, but also what technology should replace it. Commitments to phase out coal by 2025 are right, but government must guard against this being replaced by gas-powered stations – as is happening in North Yorkshire

where Drax plan to convert two coal stations into the UK's largest gas power plant. If approved, this new gas plant would be responsible for as much as 75% of the emissions budget for the entire UK power sector, once fully operational.<sup>4</sup>

**The Co-operative Party believes there should be a gas phase-out target so that there is no post-coal dash for gas.**

To meet zero emissions, consideration must also be given to the fossil fuels currently in the ground. To meet current 2050 carbon targets, most of these need to remain unexploited. It is concerning that the amount of oil and gas found has increased from 83m barrel of oil equivalent in 2014 to 175m in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

**Meeting more urgent targets requires stricter government limits on exploration and production, including an end to fracking and shale gas exploration.**

The frustrating thing is that alternatives to fossil fuels already exist – the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) estimates that additional low-carbon generation in the 2020s “could be delivered at similar overall system costs to high-carbon pathways” and possibly cheaper if gas prices rise.

Community energy is an important part of the UK's renewable sector – and its growth and the thousands of volunteers mobilised, when the policy environment was enabling, have more than demonstrated communities' ability and eagerness to be part of an energy transformation in the UK. In community energy, the investment in infrastructure comes from a community share offer, meaning local residents are investing in, and benefiting from the success of, the technology.

Consumer, local government, community and employee ownership models have been shown to offer behavioural benefits, as people who are more involved think about their energy use. As a trusted

intermediary it has shown to be much more effective at getting buy-in to changes, be they energy audits or smart meters, than the commercial players.

They also offer economic benefits, with returns remaining in the locality to be reinvested in energy efficiency or for other social impact. Ensuring that the benefits of local energy generation remain in the locality is fundamentally important to many local economies in the UK - it has been shown, for example, that for Cornwall the value of energy services to the county far exceeds the income received from tourism.

The Government should recognise the role that communities are already playing in the transition to a low carbon economy, and the value that community energy brings to future decarbonisation. This includes:

- The reinstatement of Social Investment Tax Relief for community energy;
- Greater funding for new projects, including funding for urban areas to mirror the recently introduced Rural Community Energy Fund;
- Zero or below-market interest loan facilities for community energy projects;
- A Community Smart Export Guarantee;
- Energy efficiency funding, designed in a way to ensure it delivers for the most vulnerable customers;
- Reversing the recent VAT increases on Energy Saving Measures,

**“Can we democratise, manage operate and own our energy system? If people have a stake in their energy they are more careful with it, reducing emissions.”**

– Midlands Regional conference

including solar panels and battery technology, ultimately reducing VAT on these to zero;

- A Community Feed-in Tariff, giving long term investor confidence in schemes;
- Removing punitive business rates for roof-top solar;
- Reforms to enable community energy groups to become energy suppliers.

As the energy system transitions to public ownership, this sector will produce a greater and greater proportion of the UK's energy mix. To enable this, a new Energy Security Board, as set out in 'Ownership Matters' should have targets for the proportion of the UK's energy generated by community energy, matched with the appropriate funding in the form of a national community-owned renewable energy fund, administered at a local level.

This should include section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments, as well as government grant and loans to provide:

- Seed funding and start-up loans for both community energy organisations and the intermediary development organisations that support the sector;
- And bridging loans of £100,000 to £3 million for medium-scale community-owned energy projects.

This could be supplemented by local or regional impact investment vehicles, created by local or regional government to pool energy opportunities for the long-term patient investor. As well as contributing their own patient capital, local and regional government could market opportunities to their partnered anchor institutions and more widely.

## **Polluter pays**

The toolkit to tackle climate change needs to include fiscal tools – a range of taxation and pricing measures which can potentially raise income and increase resource efficiency and fairness, while helping to meet environmental goals. In short, this means carbon taxes, cap and trade schemes and/or natural resourcing pricing measures.

The OECD look at these tools through the lens also of how revenues are spent – “improved alignment of taxes and tax-like instruments with environmental damages coupled with socially productive ways of using revenues raised”,<sup>6</sup> while a number of taxes seek to be revenue neutral such as the long-standing carbon tax in British Columbia.

Criticisms of carbon taxes to date have included – that the rate of change is too marginal and that they risk disproportionately disadvantaging those least able to pay. On the flip side, taxes are preferred by economists as an efficient way to address the market failure that causes markets to ignore environmental costs.

There is a role for carbon taxes, along the principle of polluter pays and bearing in mind the importance of a just transition in their design. The concept of a carbon dividend – tax revenue returned to those communities most adversely impacted by climate change and the policies implemented to tackle it – helps to ensure communities feeling left behind by impacts of climate change have an opportunity to benefit.

## **Democratic public ownership**

The Co-operative Party adopted the proposals set out in ‘Democratic Public Ownership for the 21st Century’ at its conference 2018. These include proposals for water, energy and rail owned and run by their respective customers, workers, communities and passengers.

In many parts of the world, communities taking back democratic control

of their key infrastructure has been a key factor in its decarbonisation. German Energiewende has seen communities demanding – and achieving – a much more rapid decarbonisation than the traditional energy companies were prepared to invest in, and consequently those energy companies have seen their share of the market decline while community and co-operative renewable solutions grow.

The Co-operative Party's proposals for democratic public ownership as set out in the report 'Democratic Public Ownership for the 21st Century' offer solutions for rail, water and energy which would give workers, consumers and passengers a role in decarbonising these industries.

## **New measures of economic success**

Environment versus economy is a false dichotomy. Our economic prosperity is underpinned by our natural capital – such as our biodiversity, clean water, and finite resources.

Target 15.9 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals states calls for countries to “integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts.” With this in mind, it is encouraging that the UK is leading some work on natural capital accounting, and that it is mentioned in the Government's 25-year environment plan.

However, recommendations based on the natural capital accounts developed by the ONS and Defra don't have any statutory footing, and GDP growth is still the measure of our economy, side-lining the value of our environment and preventing development of a genuinely sustainable, purposeful economy. The Government's own advisory

**“We need a cultural and economic shift to reduce consumption and consumerism, and reduce focus on GDP.”**

**– South West Peninsula Party**

Natural Capital Committee says “business as usual is going to lead to failure”,<sup>7</sup> citing a lack of progress since 2011. Our environment and climate continue to deteriorate.

For a just transition, our understanding of the economy needs to include natural capital, and go further yet. Our human resource and well-being should be measured and considered too, so that the transition to zero carbon achieves a fairer society.

The Co-operative Party believes that environmental accounting is an important tool in safeguarding our environment and climate for future generations, and that for a purposeful economy which is genuinely equipped to protect future generations we need new and better measures, with a statutory footing.

**Drawing inspiration and learning from New Zealand’s new Well-being Budget, the Government should use new measures which look beyond the financial bottom line to include the value of our natural capital, our well-being, and our long-term sustainability.** All public expenditure should be measured against its contribution to achieving climate targets.

Furthermore, learning from Wales’ Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, which requires Welsh public bodies to consider the long-term impact of decisions, future generations should be protected with statutory consideration in future decision-making.

It isn’t only the national accounts which focus on unsustainable growth at the expense of our climate, environment and well-being. Private businesses continue to profit from irresponsible behaviour – paying more regard to their bottom line than their impact.

There are some businesses which understand that their long-term profitability cannot be decoupled from their social and environmental responsibilities – however, too many businesses continue to pursue business as usual.

New measures are needed so that business which behave responsibly are rewarded, while those which don't currently are compelled to take stock. This could take the form of an amendment to companies law to require companies to report on environmental and social impact as well as their bottom line.

## **A collective responsibility and response**

There is not yet a clear technological pathway to completely decarbonise every community. Some technologies exist but need further development before they are ready to deploy at scale, and others will require difficult choices to implement. While climate campaigners have the country's attention, they do not yet have full public support or awareness of the significant lifestyle changes that will be needed within a very short timeframe.

Local government, with direct links into its communities, can help to bridge this gap. A Citizens' Assembly on climate change can be an impactful tool for forging consensus – or councils and councillors can also convene public meetings, engage online and consult on the choices and strategies needed to reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of our changing climate.

### **Case study: Oxford**

Oxford Council has a programme of work underway which they are building on. They've declared a climate emergency to build momentum and raise local awareness, they're lobbying Government for more powers and money to realise their ambition. They've proposed a Citizens' Assembly to forge consensus on the strategy, and, after holding the Assembly from September, they're looking forward to making decisions about how to become a Zero Carbon Council and lead the city to decarbonise.

# Putting the climate and environment at the heart of trade deals

Trade agreements should be assessed on their potential social, economic, environmental, gender, human rights, labour, development and regional impacts, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

## Upgrading Britain's buildings

The best route to limiting, or managing, energy costs in the long term is to reduce the need for energy in the first instance. The cheapest unit of energy is the one not used. The Co-operative Party sees energy efficiency as a top national infrastructure priority, which deserves a long-term revenue stream and appropriate incentives for homes and businesses to retrofit their buildings.

We want to see individuals, communities and the co-operative sector able to have tangible impact on improving energy efficiency and reducing bills. Similar to the incentives that the renewable energy Feed-in Tariff and Renewable Heat Incentive created for the installation of low carbon generation, we suggest a Feed-in Tariff for energy efficiency could be developed to incentivise domestic and business consumers to retrofit homes and businesses and replace inefficient appliances. We also believe that the Energy Company Obligation should be reformed to put a community-based approach at the heart of the drive to tackle energy efficiency.

The Co-operative Party's policy platform on housing also calls for a National Tenant Voice – whose role would include evaluation of building regulations, among other government policy, to ensure standards are improved.

In addition, a review of building regulations should look to raise expectations for new build development in terms of materials and

energy efficiency. Developers shouldn't profit at the expense of the environment, and new buildings shouldn't contribute to existing urgent problems for the environment and climate. Local councils can also take action on building standards, embedding the highest possible environmental standards into local plans.

Central government funding should be made available for councils to improve energy efficiency in their own social housing stock – not only does this protect the environment, it delivers better outcomes for tenants who can benefit from warmer homes and lower energy bills.

## **Measures to mitigate**

The UK has a National Adaptation Programme – a 5-yearly register of actions to address the increasing risks from climate change, as part of the requirements laid down in the Climate Change Act 2008. It includes flooding, coastal change, health, water, natural capital, food, pests and more.

As highlighted by the CCC, this plan as it currently stands fails to set measurable success criteria with timescales, and is lacking detail and rigour on monitoring and evaluation. A number of risks are missing from the list of actions, including extreme heatwaves.

This plan should be reviewed and made more robust and measurable. Reporting of exposure to climate change risks for companies and pension funds should be made mandatory – as the current voluntary reporting approach is failing to set sufficient pace and scale of change.

## **A plan for our environment**

Human activity is accelerating the extinction rates of species, the erosion and degradation of our soil, the poisoning of our air, razing of our forests and destruction of the oceans.

But our policy change has been, ‘too slow, and limited to certain natural systems’, precipitating the ‘age of environmental breakdown’.<sup>8</sup>

As well as focusing on climate change and emissions, there needs to be a strengthened effort to prevent negative environmental change and protect the natural resources we rely on and ecosystems we cohabit. This should take the form of statutory targets for the rapid reduction of a full range of environmental impacts, building on existing strategies such as the UK’s Biodiversity Framework and giving actions the necessary footing in law and effectively placing a full sustainability constraint on all UK economic activity.

It should include:

- Biodiversity
- Land use
- Soil protection
- Air quality
- Reforestation

## **Tackling plastic waste**

The issue of plastics in our oceans and landfill is one which has gathered vast global momentum, with high profile campaigns and campaigners raising awareness, cutting their own consumption and calling on others to do the same.

And it isn’t just individual consumers and local communities taking action – many businesses are stepping up their efforts. Leading the business community, many co-operative societies are developing ambitious and innovative approaches. The Co-operative Group, for example, has replaced plastic bags with the UK’s first compostable carriers and were the first retailer to remove plastic from their own

brand teabags, developing a version without polypropylene which most teabag makers use to help teabags hold their shape.

In a recent debate in Parliament on single use plastics, the then-Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that their “general approach is to help people and companies make the right choice and develop alternatives, rather than move to banning items outright”.<sup>9</sup> Despite progress over the last few years, this incremental approach is unlikely to deliver the changes need in time to prevent irreversible damage to land, air and water – and affecting our health, food and drinks.

Furthermore, the story of plastic is the story of the fossil fuel industry. The big companies profiting from fossil fuel exploitation are the same large multinationals behind much of the production and manufacture of the world’s plastic. To cut plastic in a radical way forces a radical change in the amount of oil extracted from the ground and cuts the profits made by the companies that benefit from pillaging the world’s resources and contributing most to carbon emissions.

**“Single use plastics –  
ban them!”**

– North East Sussex Co-operative  
Party branch

There is no way that recycling can keep pace with the growth in plastic production, and so the focus must be on reducing the use and limiting the production of plastic.

**There should be a national Plastic Action Plan, which sets a target of reducing plastic pollution to zero.** For some forms and uses of plastic, this should be a radical and immediate ban or phase-out, and for others there will need to be time and innovation to ensure the appropriate economic and social adjustments are made.

Locally, councils can take action by banning single use plastics from their buildings and encouraging local businesses and residents to do the same. They can ensure the widest range of plastics can be recycled in their facilities or waste contracts, and include a requirement to reduce plastic use as a criterion for procurement.

# A personal toolkit

The Co-operative Party's policy is member-led, developed from the contributions, debates and ideas of local parties and co-operatives around the UK. This topic, more than most, has prompted not only policy ideas but suggestions on how each of us can reduce our personal impact, and how communities and activists can come together to effect bottom-up change.

**“Many people co-operating and doing something quite small can and will contribute to making a substantial difference to improving our climate”**

– Dartford and District Co-operative Party branch

## Change your travel behaviour

From taking the bus and car sharing schemes, to switching to hybrid and electric vehicles, there are a myriad of ways to reduce your emissions. Transport accounts for about a quarter of UK emissions, so you can have a big impact by making different choices.

## Reduce your plastic consumption and encourage others to do the same

There are a growing number of ways to avoid plastic, especially packaging – whether it's checking that your teabags don't contain plastics and buying in bulk, to using reusable coffee cups and water bottles. You can also run a local campaign, asking your council to end single use plastic in their buildings and events, or writing to retailers and manufacturers to ask that they reduce their packaging on products.

## **Read labels and consider where your food comes from**

The wide choice in supermarkets and need for convenience mean we often shop without thinking about where our food comes from and the impact it has had while being grown and transported. Try supporting local producers and eating seasonally, or checking out local vegetable box schemes such as Local Greens in south London.

## **Change where you buy your energy, and own a stake in a renewable future**

There is increasingly no trade-off between the cheapest and the greenest tariffs – you can make an affordable switch to a lower emission option by switching supplier.

And to go a step further, you can own a stake in the transition too, through community owned energy. Organisations like Energy 4All and Community Energy England can signpost ways to get involved, from setting up your own project to investing in a community share offer. Democratising energy and playing an active role in new renewable generation is key to meeting decarbonisation targets.

## **Offset your emissions**

Until sustainable choices are made easier, there will be some things that are unavoidable. Carbon offsetting schemes are becoming more mainstream, including online tools to calculate your personal footprint and guidance on how to offset it from environmental charities. It is important to carefully research your choice of offsetting scheme so that there is no unintended damage – some tree planting schemes for example have been criticised for displacing people or creating monocultures.

# Protect and improve your local natural environment

For those living in towns and cities, it can feel like the urban jungle leaves limited space for greenery – despite the positive impact it can have on local air quality, as well as wider positive impact on biodiversity, flood risk and the climate.

However, there are many hidden ways to improve your local environment, from getting involved with local growing groups such as Incredible Edible, to planting bee friendly flowers on your estate or local unloved verges.

# Insulate your home and encourage neighbours to do the same

Britain's housing stock is hugely energy inefficient – but co-operative solutions do exist. Why not become a member of the Carbon Co-op to get advice on reducing your energy consumption and retrofitting your home, or get involved in or start up a local co-operative like the Brighton & Hove Energy Services Co-operative to help others improve their energy efficiency.

# Eat less meat

According to studies, reducing your meat consumption is the biggest single way to reduce your impact on the planet. By being a more conscious consumer, you can consume less but better – buying from local and responsible co-operative farmers who uphold high environmental standards rather than eating poor-quality mass-produced meat.

**“We need to eat less red meat for the good of the environment.”**

– Sutton Co-operative Party branch

## Get involved in repair cafes and tool lending libraries

Increasingly, communities are coming together to change the way they consume – repairing and reusing rather than throwing things away. This sharing economy has given birth to repair cafes and tool lending libraries, for example, where instead of buying expensive items you can borrow them for as long as you need or learn how to fix things and make them last longer. Take a look at the Library of Things in Crystal Palace, for example, to find some inspiration for projects you could start in your own neighbourhoods.

**“ We came up with what we thought was a rather novel idea why do people need to personally each have things like an electric drill or home tools, why not set up a series of like lending places for such tools, or for items that have a fault or are broken promotion of repair cafes are looked at. Why throw away and buy when it may only need to be repaired and can be reused.”**

– Swindon Co-operative Party branch

# Endnotes

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- <sup>3</sup> 'UK Energy Statistics, 2018 & Q4 2018', Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (March 2019) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/791297/Press\\_Note\\_March\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791297/Press_Note_March_2019.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> 'Lawyers reveal massive climate impact of new Drax gas plant', Client Earth (January 2019) <https://www.clientearth.org/lawyers-reveal-massive-climate-impact-of-new-drax-gas-plant/>
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- <sup>7</sup> 'State of Natural Capital Annual Report 2019', Sixth Report to the Economic Affairs Committee of the Cabinet (2019), p.2 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/774218/ncc-annual-report-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774218/ncc-annual-report-2019.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> Laurie Laybourn-Langton, Lesley Rankin and Darren Baxter, 'This is a Crisis: facing up to the age of environmental breakdown', IPPR (February 2019), p.29 <https://www.ippr.org/files/2019-02/this-is-a-crisis-feb19.pdf>
- <sup>9</sup> 'MPs debate call for ban on non-recyclable packaging', BBC News (24 June 2019) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48749049>



**co-operative  
party**

📍 Unit 13, 83 Crampton Street, London, SE17 3BQ

📞 020 7367 4150

✉️ [mail@party.coop](mailto:mail@party.coop)

🔗 [party.coop](http://party.coop)

🐦 [@CoopParty](https://twitter.com/CoopParty)

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