
Discussion Summary

Net Zero Britain

Top line recommendations

- **The UK Government needs to enact an urgent response to mitigating climate change.** Recent reports have shown how little time the planet has: action in the next 12 years will be critical if we are to prevent dangerous climate change.
- **The Climate Change Act 2008 should be adapted** in line with the new scientific evidence which shows an 80% reduction isn't going to be enough - we must hit net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest.
- **The Government should pursue the cheaper and workable solutions that are already available, alongside fostering innovation in new technologies and solutions.** This includes ensuring a route to market for solar and wind power, encouraging uptake in energy efficiency and incentivising a faster transition to zero carbon transport.

Top lines: discussion points

- **The UK is a global leader in climate change mitigation, and has driven climate action around the world.** This should encourage the UK to raise its ambitions on climate policy - including by placing climate action at the heart of all Government policy.
 - **Changes to agriculture and improved land management must be the focus of concerted policy efforts in the next decade.** Improved agricultural practices, afforestation, peatland restoration and soil management are important levers for decarbonisation.
 - **Green finance will be crucial to driving a shift to a low carbon economy.** Climate risk must be central in the investment plans of the banks, pension funds and insurance firms: and the Government should back mandatory disclosure of holdings. There must also be stronger divestment of fossil fuel assets in the financial industry.
 - **Climate mitigation measures should address wider societal issues to increase public acceptability.** Climate mitigation policies must focus on job creation, improved quality of life, social justice and a fairer society. Making the public health case for climate change could also be a good lever to use to promote policy action.
 - **Can we decarbonise capitalism?** Decoupling emissions from economic growth needs to happen 5 times faster than current rates to succeed in meeting the IPCC recommended target of halving global emissions by 2050. It remains to be seen whether constant economic growth can deliver sustainable climate change action globally.
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Speakers

- **Baroness Brown of Cambridge**, Committee on Climate Change
 - **Rt. Hon Ed Miliband MP**, Labour MP for Doncaster North, former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change
 - **Rt. Hon Sir Ed Davey MP**, Liberal Democrat MP for Kingston and Surbiton, former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change
 - **Lord Barker of Battle**, former Conservative Climate Change Minister
 - **Caroline Lucas MP**, Green MP for Brighton Pavilion and Chair of the APPCCG
 - **Rt. Hon Sir Vince Cable MP**, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, former Business Secretary of State
 - **Ian Blackford MP**, Westminster Leader of the Scottish National Party
 - **Rebecca Pow MP**, Conservative MP for Taunton Deane, PPS to Amber Rudd MP
 - **Professor Chris Rapley**, Professor of Climate Science, UCL
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Overview



This drinks reception, hosted by the Policy Connect's sustainability team, was set up to discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with a transition to a net zero carbon emissions economy.

The UK Government is required by legislation to reduce UK carbon emissions by 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050. The Climate Change Act 2008 is the basis for the UK's approach to tackling and responding to climate change. It requires that emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are reduced and that climate change risks are prepared for. The Act also establishes the framework to deliver on these requirements, with an obligation on the Government to meet regular instalments of reductions (carbon budgets) with threat of judicial review if they do not.

All previous carbon budgets have been met. While we are currently set to achieve the 3rd carbon budget (2018-2022), there is concern that much of the cheaper and easier policy measures have already been taken, and unless more is done hitting the 4th and 5th budgets could prove difficult.

The Policy Connect sustainability team works on developing climate change mitigation and adaptation policy. Our recent work in this area includes the Future Gas Series, which explores how low carbon gas can contribute to a low carbon heat in the future; Bricks & Water, which sets out climate change adaptation measures that should be taken up in new housing developments; and Warmer & Greener, a report which set out a comprehensive list of recommendations to increase the uptake of energy efficiency in the UK.

Discussion Summary



Baroness Brown spoke about both the past successes and the future challenge that remains in the fight against climate change, particularly to meet a net zero target. The UK has plenty to celebrate, with a world leading process and format for emissions reductions through 5 yearly carbon budgets and climate risk assessments. These processes have been copied globally. Through these, there has been a 40% reduction in carbon emissions and a 70% increase in GDP in the UK in the past 10 years.

However 75% of the UK’s emissions reduction has been through decarbonising the power sector and this is beginning to plateau. Emissions from buildings are not dropping, while transport emissions are actually rising. Areas like agriculture and aviation have still not been addressed; and the risks (floods, storms and droughts) from climate change to communities in the UK continue to rise, while our natural environment continues to deteriorate. Our consumption emissions have also risen significantly since 1990.

Action on climate change is urgent. Baroness Brown highlighted some simple, low cost actions the UK needs to be doing now, like deploying onshore wind and solar. We also need enforced, effective regulations, and an end policy chopping and changing. She argued that while we must keep long term options open, we cannot rely on new technologies to reach the 2050 target – the Government must be deploying technologies we know already work now.

“We need to make it clear to the world that the UK is going to deliver on decarbonisation with government support. Investment in low carbon energy infrastructure is dropping fast and investors are looking elsewhere for opportunities.”

Baroness Brown of Cambridge



Ed Miliband talked about why the net zero goal is an important target, and why it was important to enshrine the climate reduction targets into legislation. He argued that it is clear what the science is telling us about climate change and the need to cut emissions more sharply. The Climate Change Act was an important step, but the science today suggests that an 80% carbon reduction isn't enough. We have to get to net zero globally by 2050 at the latest, to avoid the worst of damaging climate change; the IPCC report has told us that action in the next 12 years will be vital in determining if we reach that goal. We know how we can get most of the way to net zero by 2050 - but it will only happen if there is political will.

How is political will created? One important point Ed underlined is that climate change is a genuinely cross party effort: it is something politicians of all parties care about. However, he argues that climate change must be higher up the agenda for every political party - and economic and social justice must be put at the heart of environmental policies. The route to environmental justice comes through not just convincing people that this is economically the right thing to do but also the socially just thing to do as well.

“Climate change must be higher up the agenda for every political party - and we need to put economic and social justice at the heart of environmental policies.”

Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP



Sir Ed Davey talked about how green investment can help to drive a low carbon transition. While he argued there are some reasons to be optimistic - the price for renewables is already competitive, battery costs are falling etc. - the overarching challenge is decarbonising capitalism both in the UK and around the world.

Investment in fossil fuel assets is pervasive across society. For example, every £2.50 of £10 spent by pensioners with pensions linked to the FTSE 100 is spent on carbon returns. Ed believes we can tackle this with strong policies like mandatory disclosure of assets, action by the pension regulator, and banks taking into account climate risks in their long term plans. This can shift money from fossil fuels into green technology.

Ed also talked about environmental politics. India and China are picking up the slack that has been created from recent US and Brazilian political shifts away from taking climate action. Air pollution has been key in this shift, which demonstrates how arguments on health grounds could be a strong way to make the case for action on climate change.

“We need real, strong policies: mandatory disclosure of people’s assets, action by the pension regulator, banks taking into account climate risks in their long term plans to shift money from fossil fuels into green tech, to reach net zero.”

Rt Hon Sir Ed Davey MP



Caroline Lucas spoke about the need for a fundamental shift in the direction of our society and economy. Various recent reports that have called for urgent action, including the IPPCC report, the Living Planet report and the Met office impact assessment. Yet even with the Paris agreement, we are still heading for at least 3 degrees of warming.

Caroline highlighted actions that need to be taken, including bringing forward the phase out of the internal combustion engine from 2040 to 2030, limiting the growth of aviation, bringing solar and onshore wind back into the energy mix and scaling up investment in renewables, increasing energy efficiency installations, ending fossil fuel subsidies, revolutionising the way we use land, and addressing consumption emissions, not just production emissions.

Beyond this, Caroline argues that our current rate and model of economic growth is unsustainable. The IPPCC report says we need to cut emissions in half by the middle of the century. In that time, the global economy is set to triple. Therefore, to reach the IPPCC goal, we would need to decarbonise the economy

at a rate of 11% per year - 5 times faster than historic rates of decarbonisation. Decoupling of economic growth and decarbonisation can therefore only get us some of the way, and not fast enough. Caroline believes that the model of the Climate Change Act should be applied to other areas - for example, caps on waste or in resource use, and that we should leave behind GDP as a way of measuring growth.

“David Attenborough recently said that if we don’t take climate actions seriously, the collapse of our civilization and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon. We need to take a moment to really feel what that means to us. And what it means to me as a politician is that we can’t simply say things aren’t politically possible, but start at what is scientifically necessary and work back from there as to how we make that politically possible.”

Caroline Lucas MP



Lord Barker spoke about why the Climate Change Act was the highlight of his political career. He argued that, while we must strive to do better domestically, we should also celebrate our achievements to date. He believes that the climate leadership we provided in the EU was integral to driving forward the global climate agenda, leading to the Paris Agreement. We are also a leader in the world on climate mitigation. The UK is 43% below our climate baseline, and we have outperformed the first, second and third carbon budgets. Lord Barker suggests we should be proud of this, and that our past performance should give us confidence that we will find the innovation and resources to reach the fourth and fifth carbon budgets.

He also agreed with Ed Miliband's point that climate change is an area where politicians can work together to solve a problem, without the rancour that characterises other areas of politics both in the UK and abroad, and this is a fundamental strength of the climate change debate in the UK.

“Be proud of what we have achieved - now more than ever, we need a strong British voice for a progressive climate agenda, to be a trailer blazer for climate action.”

Lord Barker of Battle



Sir Vince Cable spoke about the role government has in setting the climate agenda. He argued firstly that a transition to a low carbon economy must be fair: richer countries must do a significant portion of the decarbonisation required, to allow poorer countries to develop in a sustainable way whilst also making progress with cutting emissions.

In his view, the role Government must play is in pump priming new technologies, which has been important in helping low carbon technologies reach commercialisation. Harnessing capacity in the private sector is also an important part of the story, both in terms of skills and expertise, and in terms of investment. For example, fossil fuel companies have skills and expertise on deep sea oil platforms which can enable us to bury carbon or further develop offshore wind.

Vince also talked about how we can make climate policy popular with the public. A lot of climate change mitigation measures are not popular. It is important to consider the social implications of tough regulations so they don't hurt people who are struggling. Linked to this, industries can also be affected by the climate change policies - the effect of these policies on industry should be offset, to ensure they remain competitive.

“It is possible to get genuine international agreement that works. The Montreal Protocol provides a positive precedent for urgent international action on climate.”

Rt Hon Sir Vince Cable MP



Rebecca Pow talked about the role that soil has to play in tackling climate change. Soil is fast becoming a serious issue, both globally and in the UK. In a decade, half of all our soils in the east of England will be unproductive, and worldwide, one third of the world's arable soils are already degraded. Soil is not just important for growing food or filtering water but also because soil sequesters carbon.

Rebecca outlined two areas which are particularly important in soil emissions in the UK. Firstly, peatlands: as well as being they are biodiverse and helping to drain water, they store a substantial amount of carbon. Damaged peatlands release carbon, so become a source rather than a carbon sink. By restoring peatlands, we can reduce these emissions. Secondly: the agricultural industry. Agriculture contributes about 10% of the UK emissions footprint and 30% to global emissions. Just the agricultural industry could use up the Paris budget in 20-30 years globally. There must be incentives to get farmers to make soil more sustainable and healthy.

Rebecca has been working with the Environmental Audit Committee and DEFRA to get soil recognised as a public good, and suggests polices on soil management and restoration will be part of the Government's 25 year plan for the environment.

“Soil is not just important for growing food or filtering water, but also because soil sequesters carbon. We have to get soil up on the agenda to meet the climate change targets.”

Rebecca Pow MP



Ian Blackford talked about how Scotland is acting to limit global temperature rises. He says, even in Scotland, he daily sees the effect climate change is having in his constituency. Scotland is becoming wetter and windier and spring is happening later, and it is putting his constituents' livelihoods at risk.

Scotland aims to show leadership in climate action. Scottish emissions have almost halved since 1990, and 98% of Scottish electricity was produced by wind turbines last year. Scotland is outperforming the rest of the UK and also most of the European nations: only Sweden and Finland have achieved greater cuts in emissions. In May 2016, the first ever cabinet minister in Scotland for environment, climate change and land reform was appointed, to ensure that a low carbon transition is at the heart of cabinet decisions. Finally, the new Scottish Climate Bill will increase ambition in direct response to the Paris Agreement.

Ian challenged the UK government to increase its ambition on climate change. He argues that the cut in funding for renewables at a time when the world needs to make a transition to a low carbon economy is problematic. Ian emphasised that despite Scottish leadership in climate policy, some actions to reach net zero rests with Central Government. He believes that we have both a moral obligation and a business opportunity in decarbonisation, and the UK must act accordingly.

“Climate change is the greatest risk to our generation and future generations. It is imperative that each of us recognises and renews our commitment to the importance and urgency of limiting global temperature rises. The consequences of not doing so will be catastrophic.”

Ian Blackford MP



Professor Chris Rapley spoke about turning points in 2018 that he believes might spur action in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

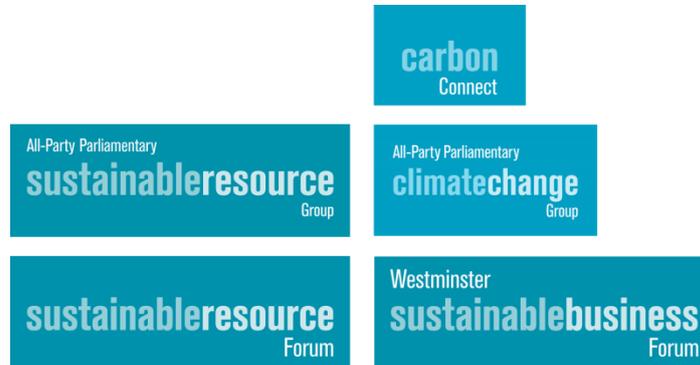
Firstly, there have been a lot of climate-enhanced natural disasters which have penetrated the media and the public sphere: droughts, typhoons, fires etc. This has primed people to recognise that climate change is a serious and immediate issue. There have also been lots of powerful reports from climate scientists. These tell us that we are fast running out of time, and have shown there are profound and troubling differences between a 1.5 and 2 degree world. These messages are a powerful incentive to act.

Secondly, the reduction in costs of renewable energy over the last decade has been impressive: 25% per annum for solar, 14% for wind, 25% for batteries. If you extrapolate this reduction, by the time you get to 2030 renewables will be a fraction of the cost of fossil fuels. Investors are also realising that investing in fossil fuels runs the potential risk of stranded assets and carbon fuel market bubble. Finally, there will be a legal case for damage to assets and investments from climate change on the pretext of 'reasonable foreseeability'. This combination of factors will drive enormous change in the energy mix over the next decade.

“Britain’s strength globally is in our climate change science: the research, the policy, and the Climate Change Act. From this place of strength, future governments should place sustainability and climate science central to policy. Demonstrating that we can be a world leader in climate change is something we should all fight for.”

Professor Chris Rapley

About the organisers



Policy Connect is the go to cross-party think tank, successfully delivering new policy ideas through research, evidence, political meetings and sector engagement. With no set ideology, we recommend the best approach from facts and data, and help influence policy decisions and law-making. We find the common ground and build consensus to improve public policy.

We have a rich history of influencing cross-party policy for over two decades. With a unique reach into Parliament - and as a leader in research and engagement for a number of diverse policy areas - we support charities, academia, NGOs, public sector and private businesses to engage with Parliament and politicians. We lead debates and seminars and have invited sector specialists to contribute to more than fifty different research inquiries.

The Policy Connect Sustainability Team consists of:

- All-Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group
- All-Party Parliamentary Sustainable Resource Group
- Sustainable Resource Forum
- Carbon Connect
- Westminster Sustainable Business Forum

For further information please visit www.policyconnect.org.uk or alternatively please contact the Head of Sustainability at claudia.jaksch@policyconnect.org.uk or on 020 7202 8584.