

## **A Local Green New Deal for Brighton and Hove**

**Climate:Change event – 30 November 2023**

### **Discussant remarks by Caroline Lucas**

Thanks so much, Simon. And thank you so much to all of the authors of this fantastic report. It's been really exciting to be catching up with it all and seeing how all of the ideas are developing and also seeing what some of the obstacles are to being able to scale them up and really allow them to flourish.

The context in which we're discussing this is really important. We are one of the most centralized countries in the whole of the Western world, and that really has big implications, in terms of the amount that we can do to enable these local green new deals to flourish without national government either getting out of the way or at least facilitating and devolving the power to enable this flourishing.

The point Simon makes about different kind of ideological approaches is really important. The biggest distinction I see is in some of the Labour approaches, which has been to see this much more as a green industrial strategy. It feels as if, for some in Labour, if this can just be presented all in terms of technology and jobs and more economic growth, then they're on familiar territory and everything's fine. I think the Green New Deal is far more transformational than that, which is what excites me about it. And I think a real Green New Deal is absolutely about social justice as well as about environmental justice. It is fundamentally about ownership. It's about power, wealth, who has it, how we might move it. It's not, to be very stereotypical, just about men in hard hats on building sites. I would argue quite strongly that social care should be part of our Green New Deal. Social care is pretty much a low carbon activity and is certainly an essential activity, and I would like to see a definition of a Green New Deal that goes far beyond the industrial strategy definition and that has a much more holistic approach.

In terms of the recent experience that I am bringing to this, one was as the co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Green New Deal, which I co-chair that with Clive Lewis, the Labour MP for Norwich South. We have recently done our own inquiry called Local Edge, trying to get as much evidence as we could from a whole range of different local authorities, but also from people like Andy Burnham in Manchester, to understand what some of the barriers are to enabling local new deals to flourish.

I also was one of the co-chairs of the IPPR Environmental Justice Commission, a two year process between 2019 and 2021, which put fairness and justice at the heart of the environmental transition. And the conclusion was the fairly obvious one, but nonetheless was very, very fully evidenced, which was that unless you have fairness and social justice at the heart of this transition, you're not going to bring people with you and it is not going to work. But it was quite helpful to get that reinforced.

Everything that I've heard this evening reinforces the conclusions of both the local report and from the IPPR report.

*How* a Green New Deal is implemented is as important as the content of the Green New Deal. Absolutely, bringing people with you, and understanding what consultation really looks like. When does that start? How do you really engage people at the very beginning of processes so that a Green New Deal is something that is done by and with people, not to people?

And so the whole issue of the *how* is massively important, with fairness, as I say, being at the heart and being seen to be fair as well, to really demonstrate that it is not the case, as Rishi Sunak has claimed, that Green policy is about penalizing the poor. To the contrary, it is the reverse of that. It is absolutely about really being able to ensure that those people who are on the front line of the climate crisis and the cost of living crisis are the ones who benefit most from this transition. And how should we absolutely screen every single policy from the perspective of its distributional aspects to make sure that social justice is embedded right at its heart.

The transition is also absolutely about the decentralization of power, making sure that local authorities have the powers they need to be able to pursue some of these measures, and making sure that there are sufficient resources for the transition.

I feel relatively confident about some of the solutions, but I think it would be useful to chat about that. But then also - and it didn't come out so much of what you have just presented, but it certainly came out in the report – it's really good news that this stuff is really popular, that people do want to engage with it. Again, contrary to what you might hear from government, there is a real groundswell of people wanting to move in this direction. If we could just enable them to do so and make that transition simpler.

When it comes to sector specific recommendations you make, I was delighted to see energy efficiency front and centre, because it is so often overlooked and yet it is so obvious. In politics, there are not that many win-win-wins. But certainly, insulating and retrofitting every single home is pretty much one of those in the sense that it gets your emissions down, it gets your fuel bills down, and it increases public health. There is less strain on the NHS, you create hundreds of thousands of jobs. And yet it is quite shocking that in the Autumn Statement just a few weeks ago, there was zilch, zero, nothing, about how we were going to be able to support that. I was just tweeting today about the fact that the government has issued its figures for how many homes have been insulated under the great Great British insulation scheme. There are 15 million homes in the UK that have poor energy efficiency and you will be pleased to know that in the first six months, 1026 of them have been done and E3G has calculated that it would take 146 years at the current rate of progress for the UK Government insulation scheme to meet its 2026 target. There is a problem here, Houston, and it's not been helped by the lack of funding. So we absolutely need to roll that out.

In terms of what's in the report, there's an interesting question about grants and loans for individual homeowners. I definitely think we need those grants. We do need to make it possible for people to do this. But I just wonder how that sits potentially against or at least alongside the issue of local authority-led street by street programmes, because there is a lot of evidence that actually what gets people to do this is when the neighbours are doing it, when they see the street parallel to them doing it. You need that momentum. And we know that because we know that it's a hassle for people to get their lofts clear or whatever else. And by just picking out which homes are the ones where the grant is needed, I just think that there's potentially a trade off between doing that and a more systematic approach of building the momentum of street by street and just doing it that way. I'd be really interested to unpack that a little bit more to see how that works

Training for the workforce is going to be key. You absolutely touch on that. And a citizen's engagement campaign I think is absolutely key in terms of building momentum. Again, maybe

that is easier when you have that sense of a local authority led street by street program. Where you've got that geographical sense of something happening.

Your sections on public transport and active travel was all music to my ears. I think the issue of ownership is at the heart of this issue, as you say. If you see what Andy Burnham has been able to do when he has been given the powers for buses in Manchester, it feels to me that that is exactly what we need to be learning from here and getting some powers back. The duty and the powers to deliver integrated public transport services I think absolutely should be returned to local authorities.

I imagine it was well outside the scope of this report, but bringing rail back into public ownership feels like a fairly important thing to do as well. And when I say that, I don't just simply mean going back to British Rail, I do mean something that would be much more engaged with by the community. So you could imagine boards of new rail delivery groups having local community stakeholders, including disabled people. So the railway is much more of something that is driven for and by the local community.

I love the map of the of the trams and I have a genuinely ignorant question about how much more efficient are trams than electric buses, if they were all electric? But I like the idea of it very much.

And food, again, massively important. I'm very glad that you've got land and food in here because it feels to me again, so often in all of these debates, land is a bit of an afterthought. We have some fantastic examples here in Brighton and Hove, the Brighton Hove Food Partnership and so on, and they're doing fantastic work and just showing how you can make sustainable food part of the planning system right from the start and at its heart. I would love to see a Green New Deal for food.

To wrap up with a couple of conclusions.

Overall, I really welcome the focus in the report on demand reduction, because the Green New Deal is often associated with a big expansion of renewables and other green industries. But we can only meet our climate and nature goals if we address the overproduction that is driving environmental destruction. We are going to have a whole load more growth around renewable infrastructure and so forth. So, I do think we need to have a debate about whether having rather less growth in other sectors is necessary to make the space for this essential growth. We might start, for example, with not expanding airports.

The Government's recent energy bill was focused entirely on supply. It did not have a word about demand. So I tabled an amendment calling for a demand reduction plan. I think it is really important to challenge the narrative that we often hear that more is always better. Research by, for example, Julia Steinberger and others has shown that above a certain threshold, satisfying human need doesn't necessarily require increased energy consumption and could be achieved globally using less than half of current energy consumption. As you said earlier on, that is really quite a remarkable figure. Provision of good public services is key to achieving a high quality of life with low energy consumption. That is obvious in the case of transport, where poor land-use planning, the decline of buses and the focus on private rather than public wealth has led the number of cars on our roads to double since 1990.

I think a Green New Deal demands that we expand the public realm and provide good quality public services more efficiently.

Fairness I've already touched on. But absolutely those distributional questions are key. Democratic ownership is key. Enabling more workers to have more control over the processes which are affecting them. And unless we address deep seated inequalities of wealth and power, then I think the major programme of investment required for the green transition will simply put money and assets in the hands of those already who already have them.

So, what next? I would just stress devolution, getting more powers down to the local level and really pushing governments on that. Devolution has to be about also improving democratic participation and accountability. There are issues around metro mayors and just how accountable they are. It is interesting that in Bristol, for example, they've now had a referendum and decided not to have a mayoral system. So questions about how we get the power back down to a local level, but not just simply put it into the hands of one person.

And finally, I would just say make the Green New Deal an election issue.

Thank you.