

Joint Response to consultation: Priorities for the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

From Transition Bro Gwaun and Extinction Rebellion Pembrokeshire

General points

1. We believe the Welsh Government should be aiming for more rapid action on climate and the environment. The Centre for Alternative Technology's 'Zero Carbon Britain' reports, provide an example pathway to net zero by 2030, showing that it is possible. We say that it is imperative, given that at current emission rates, the global carbon budget for remaining within 1.5°C of warming will be exhausted in about a decade (<https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-refining-the-remaining-1-5c-carbon-budget> : 2026 for a 66% chance of not exceeding 1.5°C of warming and 2031 for a 50% chance).
2. Public support and engagement are crucial and would be more likely to be forthcoming if the frequency, format and content of communications signalled the seriousness of the emergency that we face. We would propose regular communications to the Welsh public from the First Minister and senior ministers on the vision for a cleaner, healthier, more vibrant Wales, built around zero carbon. Covid-19 briefings, including the latest statistics, rules and guidance, became a valuable and expected feature during the pandemic. Similarly, every citizen should know the key statistics around tonnes of carbon dioxide released to the atmosphere and plans for their reduction. This can and should become an exciting project for Wales, where every citizen feels they have a key part to play and gains confidence that this will be of benefit to their lives.
3. Citizens' Assemblies and other forms of deliberative democracy should be widely used to ensure optimum decision making and to ensure that citizens feel they are part of the decision-making process. Deliberative democracy enhances representative democracy by making it more effective.
4. We hold that there should be a veto on anything that makes the problem worse. In particular, new projects should not be approved if they will increase emissions or damage ecosystems. Given the long lifespan of some assets and some projects, we need to move as rapidly as possible to anything new being zero carbon – from housing stock to factories to transport projects.
5. Some of the minister and deputy minister's priorities, notably circular economy, are vague. It would be helpful to know how the priority area will be tackled and the related targets.

Energy

6. Increased ambition is not only necessary but relatively easily achievable on electricity generation – 100% renewable electricity by 2030. Surplus renewable generation could be used to produce Hydrogen for powering transport, particularly trains and ships – build on experience in Scotland – see <http://www.emec.org.uk/projects/hydrogen-projects/>

7. The emphasis on local ownership is very welcome, but there needs to be significant change in the regulatory landscape to create a presumption in favour of community owned projects. It is, however, encouraging to note, at <https://energylocal.org.uk/clubs> that Energy Clubs are forming for mutual financial benefit, and this model must be encouraged.

8. There is no mention of projected increases in electricity demand with increased electrification.

9. Ambition should be raised with fossil fuels; fossil fuel extraction may be at the bottom of the fuel hierarchy, but it needs to move out of the system altogether. As a starting point there should be a commitment to block all new fossil fuel projects.

10. There must be comprehensive assessments of the wider environmental impacts of power projects, so that unintended consequences are avoided and we do not simply shift harm to other parts of the world. For example: consideration should be given to the effects of any proposed tidal power generation on marine mammals and offshore wind installations on seabirds and marine mammals; supply chain impacts should be considered for equipment and fuel for renewables.

Transport

11. As in point 4 above, road schemes should be assessed in terms of their long term impact on the environment and should be rejected if projections show a rise in emissions, a loss of ecosystems or a loss of carbon sinks. In most cases it seems that the bigger/better/faster the roads, the more cars appear on them.

12. There is an immediate need to decongest and decarbonise the M4 corridor and A470, bringing people down from the valleys. Welsh Government could set a target of reducing car use on these routes by 50% by 2030. Reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, improvement of air quality and reducing congestion on these routes is totemic and would show real momentum in Wales' journey towards net zero. This is an ideal focus for a Citizens' Assembly of stakeholders. The solutions undoubtedly involve greater use of trains and active transport. Welsh Government's efforts to find solutions to the M4 corridor congestion and its refusal to build an M4 relief road are very much welcomed.

13. There should be a target that all Welsh trains are electric/hydrogen by 2030.

Housing

14. The Optimised Retrofit Programme is a good first step. It would be good to see the rollout of retrofitting expedited. The benefits in terms of tackling fuel poverty would surely attract public support. Obviously, all housing will need to be well insulated and heated and powered in a net zero manner. The faster we gear up in terms of workforce skills, contractors, proper oversight, etc. the better.

15. Planning laws should be used with immediate effect to ensure all new builds, whether housing or commercial, are low/zero carbon and do not have other adverse environmental impacts, e.g. on biodiversity, flood risk. If this is delayed it is inequitable. Who will pay for the costs of retrofitting buildings that could have been low impact in the first place? Building standards should require all new build to minimise total life-cycle carbon. The use of concrete should be avoided where possible because of the high emissions inherent in its manufacture. Examples of alternatives:

- Western Solar style developments, using natural materials, sourced in Wales.
https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/western_solar_eco_social_housing_village_is_just_the_beginning
- Use kit-style construction rather than traditional build, as in above.
- Promote the roll out of 'Active Buildings' technologies, as developed at Swansea University:
<https://www.specific.eu.com/>

We understand embodied and whole life-cycle carbon is a focus area for the Royal Institute of British Architects and we feel that judicious use of these concepts would set new housing in Wales on a sustainable pathway. The

[Embodied and whole life carbon assessment for architects sustainable design \(architecture.com\)](#)

Land use and Biodiversity

16. Land use and agriculture are strongly linked. There is no explicit mention anywhere of agriculture, despite this being a key sector across the board: recovery and enhancement of nature, reducing emissions, increasing carbon sinks, reducing pollution, natural solutions in adapting to climate change such as peat bog restoration. We would expect to see robust but constructive engagement with the Welsh agricultural sector to ensure that agriculture rapidly becomes part of the conversation and part of the solution. Policies on agriculture, food, climate and environment need to align with each other and with tackling the climate and ecological emergency that we face. There are numerous publications addressing these issues available from The Land Workers Alliance, in particular [Farming-Food-and-the-Climate-Crisis_v2.pdf \(landworkersalliance.org.uk\)](#)

Specific priority suggestions relating to food production:

- Ensure that allotment provision is safeguarded in Local Development Plans.
- Facilitate the expansion of Community Supported Agriculture.
- Support producer marketing initiatives that connect with final retailers/customers in order to shorten the food chain and minimise wastage.
- Require all producers to develop environmental management plans.
- Introduce taxation on all potentially polluting inputs, using the money raised to accelerate change to regenerative systems of farming.

Circular economy

17. The increased prevalence of repair café's in Wales is welcome, although their availability is currently very restricted to only one or two days per month at listed venues. However, our understanding is that their good work is hampered by products which are designed for obsolescence rather than being designed for repair. Repair and re-use for designed purpose must be a core principle in a sustainable society. We understand that many of the powers in this area may be reserved, and working closely with the UK Government will be required. The latter also applies to any legislation to minimise the use of packaging. Could design for repair principles be built into product quality standards to allow shops and customers to make more informed decisions? More radically, would it be possible to have a lower VAT rate on products which have been so designed? These same principles would facilitate disassembly at end of life for recovery of materials.

It would make sense to site much repair café/restoration activity immediately adjacent to Recycling Centres, to be open during normal working hours.

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