

Red Green Study Group

Submission to the Labour Party National Policy Forum consultation, *Environment, Energy and Culture: A Greener Britain*

19 June 2018

The Red Green Study Group was formed in the spring of 1992 and first met in the wake of the Tories' unprecedented fourth successive general election victory. Both the left and the green movement were demoralised, fragmented and in disarray. The socialist project appeared all but collapsed, and many had turned their backs on it. The hope offered by green politics only a few years earlier had rapidly faded.

The group started from a presumption that green socialism offers the best, possibly the only, way forward and that no existing party reflects that vision. The starting point was a commitment to a society qualitatively different from capitalism, and an openness to the possibility of creating a new formation with a red-green perspective.

It has continued to meet bimonthly over the years, exploring and developing these commitments. With the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader there is a feeling that these issues are once more on the agenda of a major political party. With this submission we offer here our contribution towards advancing the debate.

Preface

Since much of our key environmental regulation comes from our membership of the EU, Brexit entails major risks, but there are also significant opportunities for environmental policies which enable a new pattern of relationships between society and nature. These have the potential not only to halt the current trend toward ecological disaster, but also to do so in ways that enhance social justice and individual well-being. From a more narrowly strategic point of view, the Conservative Party has, albeit cynically, recently made policy commitments on environmental issues that address many of the concerns of the environmental movement. It is crucial that Labour demonstrates the limitations of these moves, but also that it develops and publicly advocates its own more detailed and effective measures. There is an urgent need to take rapid and radical action to confront the challenge of climate change, bio-diversity loss and land degradation cannot be underestimated and needs to be a priority task of any incoming Labour government.

We offer a range of ideas for consideration under the following heads.

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A: Principles

1. All human activity depends either directly or indirectly on materials, energy, living beings and cyclical processes provided by nature.
2. Current social and economic dynamics and patterns of impact on life-support systems are already exceeding the earth's carrying capacity in several respects, with a growing ecological crisis impending.
3. The poorest people, globally and nationally, are the first to feel the costs of this in terms of risks to life and health, community cohesion, and quality of life. In turn, the survival strategies imposed on the poor often add to environmental degradation.
4. All these aspects of the crisis are linked to the mounting crisis of inequalities of wealth, income and power, within and between nations and regions.

In applying these principles

- Impacts on nature and on social inequality must be given jointly top priority across the whole spectrum of policy.
- Policy-making must therefore be guided by the twin aims of social and economic justice and environmental protection.
- A considerable expansion of public ownership and control in such areas as land-use, production, energy generation and transport is recommended, in line with the thinking of the current Party leadership
- However, it is important that this does not take the form of more 'classic' nationalisations. Though public ownership would certainly imply state funding of such ownership, we propose implementation in the form of stake-holder, democratically accountable social ownership, in which representatives of all those affected by an industry or service (including users, consumers, local residents, workers, and others, as appropriate) arrive at decisions through a process of negotiated co-ordination.

This guidance applies to policy-making across the board: on energy production and distribution, farming, fisheries, food, transport, housing, health and social welfare, local government, planning, manufacture, science, industrial policy, trade in goods and services and education.

Policy must be coherent and integrated

To ensure that policy is coherent across these diverse fields, we propose the setting up of a public body independent of government with the remit to

- a) monitor policy formation and consistency across departments according to these criteria

- b) evaluate progress, and publicly comment on achievements and limitations in implementation

(This body could be based on the Sustainable Development Commission (abolished in 2010). Other partial models might be the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the Climate Change Committee. However, we propose that membership be democratically accountable, and to include both academic experts and lay actors, drawn from trade unions, social movements and the wider public).

B: Democratic public control over allocation of land and resources

Key to achieving environmental protection and economic and social justice is a considerable expansion public ownership and democratic public control over allocation of land and resources.

1. Town and Country Planning

The developer-led, local-authority impoverished approach to ‘development’ favoured by Conservative governments and Local Authorities has been disastrous for local communities, local environments, and housing need.

Restoration of full planning powers to Local Authorities, funding for urgent public sector-provided provision of homes, and integrated local coordination of transport and green infrastructure and employment opportunities will be necessary to address environmental degradation, homelessness and poverty. However, corrupt and undemocratic practices abound in the planning process as currently conducted. Enhanced powers in these respects must be accompanied by strictly enforced requirements for transparency, proactive public consultation and open access to local communications media – ie a vibrant local public sphere. Among planning powers, a Community Right to Buy which has demonstrated growing success in Scotland, and a serious proposal for taxation of land value to tackle the predominance of speculation in determining how scarce urban land is put to use should also be considered. The concentration of facilities and workplaces that has massively increased energy use, e.g. by forcing people to own cars and spend more and more time driving them, simply to meet their basic needs, should be ceased and reversed.

2. Facilitating political economic change through local democracy

Examples such as the Preston Model could be extended with national government support. In this case austerity was never accepted as a given, and instead of privatising the local authority invested in its own local and sustainable businesses and has developed a ‘toolkit’ which could be adapted in other local circumstances.

3. ‘Green spaces’

The consultation document rightly proposes maximising public access to national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and ‘green spaces’. However, we need better to understand what green spaces are, and where they may be found. Current assumptions that ‘brown-field’ sites are of little or no amenity value and should be prioritised for ‘development’ (e.g. Lower

Thames Estuary in Kent and Essex), while ‘green belt’ is sacrosanct, must be challenged in favour of site- and community-specific evaluation. Many brown-field sites are of exceptionally high value for biodiversity, and are also accessed and enjoyed by often densely housed working-class communities. Many areas of ‘green belt’ are industrially farmed monocultures, inaccessible even to adjacent rural or suburban populations. In addition to formal parks and recreation grounds for organised sports and leisure, every community should have a network of accessible, diverse, wildlife-rich open spaces for education, informal exercise, contemplation and fulfilling experiences of nature.

4. Transport

Where possible in existing settlements, and in all new ones, spatial relations between home, work, school and services should be organised so as to limit any need for motorised transport: walking and cycling should be facilitated, with energy-efficient, greatly improved, flexible and accessible public transport available for the less mobile and for longer journeys. While (given low carbon generation) electric vehicles are preferable to petrol or diesel-powered cars, the aim should be to encourage shift of mode away from such vehicles altogether. This need not be seen as deprivation for car-users but an improvement in the quality of life if pedestrian and cycling links are safe and pleasurable, forming links with green spaces in an integrated green infrastructure, away from noise, congestion and air pollution.

C: Biodiversity

To be fully human is to recognise oneself as belonging to the wider community of life.

1. Introduction

It is increasingly recognised that we are entering a sixth great extinction event, comparable in scale to those of the geological past, but happening immensely more rapidly. See the recent report by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, and, for the UK, successive State of Nature reports. This matters for two main reasons:

- a) we have co-evolved with many millions of fellow species, to which we are bound together by kinship, ecological interdependency, and moral responsibility. Most human cultures, and most people within those cultures share a fundamental love of nature, expressed in many ways, including bird-watching, bird-feeding in winter, joining conservation organisations, managing gardens for wildlife, keeping pets, visiting zoos, visiting nature reserves, even watching immensely popular TV wildlife series. This is perhaps the most immediate and most powerful source of pressure to protect other living species.
- b) biodiversity sustains not only our quality of life but life itself. A third of food-crops depend on insect pollination, myriads of microorganisms are involved in decomposing and recycling nutrients, and maintaining soil fertility, plant photosynthesis oxygenates the atmosphere and absorbs our carbon dioxide pollution, whilst oceanic flora play a crucial role in stabilising global climates. These naturally given conditions of life need to be recognised as such and protected from degradation. Fashionable approaches which purport to give them economic value as ‘natural

capital' are dangerously misguided, resting on faulty methodology, and rendering our life-support systems vulnerable to cost/ benefit calculations as 'commodities'.

2. *Policy here has three main goals:*

a) *Massively extend wildlife habitat*

Policy above on green spaces is necessary for this, but must go further with roadside verges, railway cuttings, river corridors, coastal habitat, mineral extraction sites and other areas of non-productive land managed for biodiversity. Land given over to blood sports such as pheasant, deer and grouse shooting should be brought into social ownership, and returned to semi-natural conditions, with enhanced public access. Golf courses should be required to meet high biodiversity criteria in their management.

Freshwater habitats need to be protected by avoidance of agricultural run-off, seepage from waste disposal, and avoidance of adjacent building development, with marginal habitats maintained for species which are semi-aquatic. Transitional habitats are of particular importance, for example coastal dunes and salt marshes and current legislation to protect them needs to be both made more rigorous and more effectively enforced.

Post-Brexit the fishing industry will need new forms of regulation to prevent over-fishing, and marine biodiversity off-shore will require extensive marine protection zones.

b) *Transform farming and food production*

This must include incentives and scientific research to increase the extent of low-input and organic farming systems, with direct links to local consumers, and increased opportunities for local populations to engage practically in horticulture and food production through community gardens, urban farms and allotments. A shift in dietary preferences towards reduced meat and dairy consumption would increase the ecological efficiency of food production, allow for maintenance of high animal welfare standards, enhance biodiversity of farming systems, contribute to reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and benefit human health. The cost of meat and dairy products could be allowed to rise, commensurate with awareness of the ecological and ethical significance of the use of animals for food. Wherever possible, networks of semi-natural habitat should be managed as integrated landscapes incorporating farmland, providing pollination, biological pest control, shelter and protection of soil quality, as well as amenity access.

c) *Encourage change in consumption and local food production*

Local food networks such as the Fife Diet and the Ayrshire Food Network have shown that schools and food co-operatives can influence consumption patterns, and local authorities and social networks working together on sourcing supplies can influence the production of food and benefit nutrition.

Consideration should be given to scaling up such examples, alongside expert advice, on a National Food Policy.

3. *These changes are to be achieved by:*

a) *Legislation*

Currently biodiversity in the UK is subject to legal regulation from several sources, including the EU birds and habitats directives, wider international law including the Ramsar wetlands convention, and UN convention on biodiversity, as well as UK law, notably the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. The EU has further devoted part of its farm subsidy to fund stewardship schemes which are intended to ameliorate the negative effects of its promotion of industrial agriculture. If, as currently seems unlikely, Britain remains in the EU, then a UK Labour government should use its influence to move EU policy in the direction advocated here. In the more probable scenario of our leaving the EU, then a UK Labour government should integrate, update and improve the existing dispersed legislation in this field, and establish a statutory body to oversee and ensure the implementation of the new legal framework, as follows:

b) *Oversight*

The official body established by the 1945 Labour Government to conduct research, protect and promote biodiversity, the Nature Conservancy Council has been eviscerated by successive Conservative governments, and devolved to regional bodies. We propose restoring to the remaining bodies (Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, Countryside Commission for Wales, Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside in Northern Ireland) powers to act independently of government (or devolved assemblies) to intervene in planning decisions, designate areas of importance for biodiversity and ensure appropriate management. This statutory body should also be empowered to participate in drafting legislation or amending it, as well as monitoring breaches of the law. It should also be charged with the responsibility to work with other organisations and the wider public to monitor and report on gains and losses of biodiversity as well as being resourced to conduct research.

D: Energy

1. Introduction

Work to increase the energy efficiency of households needs to be accelerated, and strict carbon-neutral and energy-efficiency building regulations need to be applied to all new build. The shift away from fossil fuels to emerging renewable technologies such as deep water offshore wind, tidal and wave power needs to be accelerated, with nuclear generation abandoned as far as legally possible by the time a Labour government is elected. Fracking carries environmental and health risks, as well as constituting a ‘step back’ in terms of the urgent necessity to shift to low carbon energy sources. We welcome Labour’s policy to ban fracking. This rejection of a new source of fossil fuels should be extended to all fossil fuels.

As mentioned in the consultation document, support for emerging renewable technologies such as tidal power must be given priority, along with research to improve energy storage

capacity and provide energy security. The proposal to give communities control over their energy supplies is welcomed, with the proviso that allocations must be subject to the overriding priority to provide security to currently energy-poor households.

2. Longer term aims: substantial fossil fuel reduction

The overwhelming majority of greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore most of the global warming effect, are attributable to fossil fuel use. The priority in tackling global warming must be the reduction of fossil fuel use by means of energy conservation, and the transition to low-carbon or zero-carbon technologies in all aspects of human activity, including but not limited to the substitution of fossil fuel-driven technologies with those using renewable energy sources. The context for this is the transition to an economy and forms of human activity for use and need, and not for profit.

The Labour party should make it a principle, governing all aspects of energy and industry policy, that the transition away from a fossil-fuel-based economy internationally requires a holistic approach. Piecemeal measures are always in danger of being undone if not coordinated with other policy objectives.

The transition should not be based on so called ‘techno-fixes’ of negative emissions technology including, but not limited to, carbon capture use and storage. Solutions to achieving a zero-carbon economy need to be sustainable in that problems are not stored up for future generations.

Labour should pledge to adopt whatever immediate measures it can, while also using the resources available in the civil service, academia and in the public sphere to work out holistic policies for the transition. Labour should start a national public discussion on the transition and do everything possible to hand the initiative to civil society; this can start before it is elected and continue when it is in government.

It should champion internationally the principles of energy conservation and economic transition. It should not rely on negative emissions technologies, such as carbon capture and storage, when available resources would be better concentrated on technologies that reduce fossil fuel use. It should oppose dangerous geo-engineering strategies that leave untouched both the fossil-fuel-centred and internationally unequal structure of the world economy.

3. Immediate measures

- a) A moratorium on airport expansion, and support for opposition to Heathrow expansion (as already voiced by John McDonnell).
- b) A moratorium on nuclear development. No new investment decisions for nuclear projects.
- c) A review of transport infrastructure spending in which major projects such as HS2 and Crossrail2 are scrutinized with the aim of diverting the resources, where appropriate, to low-carbon, high-tech light rail projects that will form part of a transport policy aimed at reducing car use.

- d) A programme of investment in low-carbon, high-tech industries and in energy conservation measures.
- e) Cancel Trident replacement and other prestige military projects, redirecting the liberated funds and skills into a “Just Transition” to a low-carbon future.
- f) Transition to decentralised electricity and heat networks, with electricity generated from multiple sources, should be declared a policy goal. Research on holistic plans for the technological transformation of these networks, and their relationship with transport networks, should be commissioned. The research summarised by the Energy Futures Lab at Imperial College, in *Unlocking the Potential of Energy Systems Integration*, should be taken into account.

One starting point is support for local, renewable-based providers (see Alan Simpson, *The Transformation Moment*); from there, return of distribution, transmission and generation to the state sector needs to be considered.

- g) With regard to fossil fuel industries, Labour should pledge to:
 - i. remove all subsidies to fossil fuel production. This includes those identified by the OECD methodology (e.g. allowances on Petroleum Revenue Tax, and budgetary support for seismic surveys), but also those not covered by that methodology, such as loan guarantees, and insurance. (see e.g. ODI, *Phase-out 2020: monitoring Europe's fossil fuel subsidies*);
 - ii. use the government’s procurement powers to favour firms that minimise fossil fuel use;
 - iii. impose a moratorium on new oil and gas field development;
 - iv. put an end to the current scandalous situation in which the total Petroleum Revenue Tax received by the Treasury from North Sea oil is negative, due to allowances for decommissioning costs. Labour should pledge to reintroduce a royalty, to reassert sovereignty. Labour should commission a study on the tax arrangements in the section of the North Sea that belongs to the German state of Schleswig-Holstein, where tax revenue from oil is used to fund renewable energy development;
 - v. initiate discussions now, with unions and civil society in north-east Scotland and other areas dependent on the oil and gas industry, on the transition to other forms of economic activity. Former coal mining communities should be invited to contribute the mainly negative lessons of their hard experience;

Note. The UK's largest fossil fuel subsidies, as measured by the OECD methodology, are VAT relief for consumers. Research should be commissioned on pricing, to examine how these subsidies can be phased out without putting a financial burden on households, e.g. using demand management technologies, reform of local supply and transport systems, etc.

4. Energy conservation

The following are areas in which Labour can pledge now to improve energy conservation

- a. *Industry.* A commission should be established to synthesise current research on energy and materials flow analysis. One starting point is the research at the University of Cambridge summarised in Allwood, Cullen *et al*, *With Both Eyes Open: Sustainable Materials*. Proposals should be drawn up on how industry, while providing goods that people need, can be decarbonised.
- b. *Communication.* The development of low-capacity public internet services to enhance communication and knowledge-sharing free of advertising should be a policy goal. Electricity companies and ISPs should be required to provide information about the way in which internet capacity is financed, with a view to raising a tax on commercial activity to fund such public internet services.
- c. *Electricity and heat.* Pricing should be reformed on the principles that (1) electricity is a service, and (2) demand reduction can be managed without any deterioration of service and in particular with protection for low-income households.
- d. *Buildings.* Buildings account for at least 40% of carbon emissions so that it is essential to reduce consumption if European 20/20 targets are to be met. The new Energy Performance in Buildings Directive stipulates nearly zero energy building, equivalent to Passive House standards, and it is vital that this is put in place as a matter of urgency for all new building. For existing buildings a major country-wide systematic retrofit programme is essential to reducing energy consumption.

As was evident in the failure of the Green Deal, a major stumbling block to this is, however, the lack of a workforce equipped to build, let alone to construct low energy buildings, and fulfil retrofit programmes. Current employer-based construction vocational education and training (VET) provision is at a point of collapse, through employer disengagement and the lack of a training infrastructure as a result of extensive subcontracting, self and casual employment, and agency working. A broad-based and comprehensive VET programme is essential, one able to bridge occupational interfaces, to incorporate energy literacy and to impart a holistic view of the building process. VET for low energy construction and retrofit cannot rely on learning-on-the-job, but requires a significant classroom and workshop component, so that trainees learn how to apply the necessary theoretical knowledge and to simulate this in practice.

- e. *The labour process in building.* The current construction labour process is highly fragmented and unregulated, though integrated teamwork is necessary for effective, good quality low energy building and retrofit. The way to achieve this is for local authorities and other publicly accountable organisations in collaboration with trade unions and housing associations to develop their own diverse construction workforces, directly employed with good employment and working conditions, and trained in partnership with well-equipped Further Education Colleges. Glasgow City Building, with its 2,200-strong building workforce, provides a model for how this can work.

- f. Retail.* It should be a policy goal to slash the carbon intensity of supply chains. Suppliers and retailers of goods, including foodstuffs, should be required to scrutinise their supply chains with a view to reducing waste of materials, including in packaging, and waste of foodstuffs and other perishables. Suppliers of energy-consuming retail products (e.g. electronics) should be required to prioritise their energy efficiency. One starting point is a study of the Japanese “top runner” programme.

E: Jobs

We welcome the question in the consultation document about provision of new jobs and maintenance of existing skills. We have not quantified the effects of the above proposals on jobs and the general division of labour. However, it is clear that the shifts in agriculture and food production/ distribution would lead to much more labour-intensive farming, horticulture and distribution systems. These jobs could be far more intrinsically fulfilling and better rewarded than current low-paid temporary work in intensive systems. Greater attention to biodiversity conservation in both farmed and non-farmed habitats would also expand the demand for a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. The shift in energy generation toward renewables, too, should provide many more job opportunities of high quality, especially in the fields of research and technological applications. The move to public sector housing and development should lead to more secure and higher quality jobs in this sector than are currently experienced.

It is imperative that trade unions are involved from the outset in discussions around impact on jobs and proactive labour market intervention to ensure the transition not only happens, but that it protects workers and communities in the process as part of Just Transition.

However, in the longer term, the shift to a greener and more socially just economy and society, with associated technical change, would provide opportunities for reducing the overall quantity of unfulfilling work, which could be shared equitably, while opening up time for more engaging and creative forms of activity. The proposals for universal basic services might become more relevant as these changes take place.

F. Education

Education for sustainability should be embedded in the school and higher education curricula to ensure that young people are adequately prepared for the challenges of transitioning to a sustainable, low-carbon economy and society. This should include integrating carbon literacy and an ecological systems approach into the science curriculum, as well as practical opportunities for engaging with nature that foster an ethic of care and custodianship. It should build on the numerous models of existing good practice and aim to make these consistent across the sector. To ensure that education for sustainability policies are effective, they will need to involve a programme of training for teachers, governors, and heads as well as relevant stake-holders in HE—including funding councils. These changes should go along with improved status of and investment in technical and vocational education.

There is no doubt that transitioning to a sustainable low-carbon society requires a cultural shift away from a culture oriented around high levels of consumption, where carbon intensive practices are often a source of social status and prestige. Re-orienting habits, practices, norms, values and beliefs should be a medium-term goal. It will require public education campaigns that explicitly challenge the negative myths and stereotypes that have become entrenched in the last ten years in the context of climate denial. It is important that public education campaigns frame the transition as a positive shift and an exciting opportunity to strengthen community cohesion and amenities, save money in the long term, improve health and well-being, and to build a more just and convivial society. In this regard, the Labour party should explore ways of engaging the culture industries, artists, writers, musicians in this campaign.

G: Evaluation: Achieving equitable and just eco-efficiency

All the proposals above need to be tested against their effects on **equity** and **just transition**. (It is quite possible for some of them to leave households, workers and communities stranded – as well as stranded assets. We need to be aware of these dangers and anticipate them).

Here are some policy proposals:

- a. Bring back into **plural forms of social ownership** (state, municipal, cooperative etc) all privatised basic utilities, including energy and water, as advocated by the LP leadership. The form of social ownership we propose is decentralised as far as is practical; it will involve people and organisations who are affected being represented in decision-making at each level: a process of negotiated co-ordination.
- b. Revamp **Green New Deal proposals**, starting with social housing, low efficiency housing and housing in deprived areas.
- c. Introduce **social tariffs for electricity, gas and water**: low tariffs for the first x units consumed, then escalating tariffs as we move from necessary to discretionary spending.
- d. Consumption: Rich countries like the UK contribute to climate change through consumption as well as production. Indeed the greenhouse gas emissions embodied in all UK consumption exceed the emissions from the territory of the UK by 70-80%. What is more, while territorial emissions are declining, consumption-based emissions continue to rise. Thus a start must be made in identifying and targeting high-carbon emissions; but again, to contribute to social justice, bearing in mind the necessity of different consumer goods and services.
- e. Measures to **restrain high incomes** will help here but they will not be enough (evidence in Gough, *Heat, Greed and Human Need*). So we need eco-social policies to recompose consumption in a sustainable direction.

The following two policies should be considered:

1. Expanding the scope and extent of public service delivery of basic need services, such as bus travel for young people, as recently aired. The idea of Universal Basic Services should be introduced as an alternative frame to Universal Basic Income.
2. Introducing smart VAT: high rates on high-carbon luxuries such as business class flights and frequent flyers; lower or zero rates on low-carbon items which contribute to wellbeing.

H: Conclusion

The policies suggested above are an attempt to support and complement the exciting and radical direction given to the Labour Party by its new leadership. However, we think that the Labour Party and Labour Government cannot realise these policies on their own; it will have to work with, and build alliances with, a wider constituency. So, we would emphasise the need for the Labour Party to work with other appropriate groups, political parties, trade unions, social movements and more where agreement around environmental issues is obvious. We would want to see the Labour Party build democratic alliances with such organisations. In order to succeed in transforming society, Labour will also have to encourage and develop support through activity outside parliament, in the unions, in civil society and the social movements.

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