

Home > News stories > COVID-19 can be an historic turning point in tackling the global climate crisis

# COVID-19 can be an historic turning point in tackling the global climate crisis

25 June 2020

**Ministers must seize the opportunity to turn the COVID-19 crisis into a defining moment in the fight against climate change, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) says today.**

In its [annual report to Parliament](#), the Committee provides comprehensive new advice to the Government on delivering an economic recovery that accelerates the transition to a cleaner, net-zero emissions economy and strengthens the country's resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Important steps have been taken in the last year, but much remains to be done. For the first time the Committee sets out its recommendations government department by government department. These are the urgent steps that must be taken in the months ahead to initiate a green, resilient COVID-19 recovery. They can be delivered through strong coordination across Whitehall. Doing so will propel the UK towards more rapid climate progress and position the country as an international climate leader ahead of the pivotal COP26 climate summit in Glasgow next year.

**CCC Chairman, Lord Deben, said:** "The UK is facing its biggest economic shock for a generation. Meanwhile, the global crisis of climate change is accelerating. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address these urgent challenges together; it's there for the taking. The steps that the UK takes to rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic can accelerate the transition to a successful and low-carbon economy and improve our climate resilience. Choices that lock in emissions or climate risks are unacceptable."

**Chair of the CCC's Adaptation Committee, Baroness Brown of Cambridge, said:** "COVID-19 has shown that planning for systemic risks is unavoidable. We have warned repeatedly that the UK is poorly prepared for the very serious impacts of climate change, including flooding, overheating and water shortages. Now is the moment to get our house in order, coordinate national planning, and prepare for the inevitable changes ahead. The UK's domestic ambition can be the basis for strong international climate leadership, but the delivery of effective new policies must accelerate dramatically if we're to seize this chance."

The Committee's new analysis expands on its [May 2020 advice to the Prime Minister](#) in which it set out the principles for building a resilient recovery. [In its new report](#), the Committee has assessed a wide set of measures and gathered the latest evidence on the role of climate policies in the economic recovery. Its report highlights five clear investment priorities in the months ahead:

- 1. Low-carbon retrofits and buildings that are fit for the future.** There are vital new employment and reskilling opportunities across the country if Governments support a national plan to renovate buildings and construct new housing to the highest standards of energy and water efficiency, to begin the shift to low-carbon heating systems, and to protect against overheating. Roll-out of 'green passports' for buildings and local area energy plans can begin immediately.
- 2. Tree planting, peatland restoration, and green infrastructure.** Investing in nature, including in our towns and cities, offers another quick route to opportunities for highly-skilled employment, and outcomes that improve people's lives. By making substantial changes in our use of land, which are needed to meet the UK's Net Zero target, we will bring significant benefits for the climate, biodiversity, air quality, and flood prevention.
- 3. Energy networks must be strengthened** for the net-zero energy transformation in order to support electrification of transport and heating. Government has the regulatory tools to bring forward private sector investment. New hydrogen and carbon capture and storage (CCS) infrastructure will provide a route to establishing new low-carbon British industries. Fast-tracked electric vehicle charging points will hasten the move towards a full phase out of petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2032 or earlier.
- 4. Infrastructure to make it easy for people to walk, cycle, and work remotely.** Dedicated safe spaces for walking and cycling, more bike parking and support for shared bikes and e-scooters can help the nation get back to work in a more sustainable way. For home working to be truly a widespread option, resilient digital technology (5G and fibre broadband) will be needed.
- 5. Moving towards a circular economy.** Within the next five years, we can not only increase reuse & recycling rates rapidly but stop sending biodegradable wastes to landfill. Local authorities need support to invest strategically in separated waste collections and recycling infrastructure and to create new regional jobs.

There are also opportunities to support the transition and the recovery by investing in the UK's workforce, and in lower-carbon behaviours and innovation:

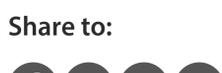
- 1. Reskilling and retraining programmes.** The net-zero economy will require a net-zero workforce, able to install smart low-carbon heating systems and to make homes comfortable; to design, manufacture and use low-carbon products and materials; and to put carbon back, rather than taking carbon out, from under the North Sea. Now is the time to build that workforce and to equip UK workers with vital skills for the future.
- 2. Leading a move towards positive behaviours.** There is a window for Government to reinforce the 'climate-positive' behaviours that have emerged during the lockdown, including increased remote working, cycling and walking. The public sector must lead by example by encouraging remote working. It also needs to innovate in order that customer service can be provided effectively remotely.
- 3. Targeted science and innovation funding.** Kick-starting research and innovation now in low-carbon and adaptation technologies will facilitate the changes needed in the decades ahead and build UK competitive advantage. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of research if we are to understand fully the threats and learn how to manage them.

Achieving the UK's climate goals and rebuilding the economy fit naturally together. Each makes the other possible. Success demands that we do both. The actions recommended by the CCC will deliver an improved economy, better public health, improved biodiversity and access to nature, cleaner air, more comfortable homes and highly productive and rewarding employment.

[Notes to editors](#)

- The CCC's recommendations for key UK Government departments can be found in the Executive Summary of the report, from page 24 onwards.
- On 6 May 2020, the Committee wrote to the Prime Minister setting out six principles for building a resilient recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. The Committee's new report provides further detail on the policies underpinning those six principles. [Read the Committee's letter to Boris Johnson here.](#)
- The CCC's report finds that, overall, UK emissions reduced by 3-4% in 2018-2019, a cut of 30% between 2008 and 2019. Strong progress in the electricity sector has largely driven this overall trend as a result of well designed, coherent and effective policy. The Government must now replicate that success story in all sectors of the economy whilst improving the country's resilience to the impacts of climate change.
- In 2020, global emissions are expected to fall by a record 5-10% as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a potentially larger fall for the UK. But this effect is only temporary. CO2 emissions must still be cut consistently year on year until they reach Net Zero globally in order to slow and halt global warming. Sources: *International Energy Agency, Global Carbon Project.*
- The UK's consumption emissions – emissions embedded in imported products that are produced overseas but consumed in the UK – have fallen and are 18% down from 2008 to 2017, despite growing consumption over the same period.
- Over the past year, the UK Government has made a range of important new announcements on transport, buildings, industry, energy supply, agriculture and land-use. These steps do not yet sum to meet the size of the net-zero challenge. Nor do steps taken in recent years deliver adequate progress in addressing even the unavoidable impacts of climate change, let alone the risks of expected levels of global warming of around 3°C above pre-industrial levels.
- A 'green passport' is a digital passport providing detailed guidance on the actions required – and already undertaken – to improve a building's energy efficiency and comfort, based on building fabric and operational data. The CCC sees a role for these passports to include recommendations on low carbon heat alongside this, and for the platform to be expanded to cover issues such as indoor air quality, flood resilience, water efficiency and overheating. In doing so, passports would set out a customised and holistic retrofit roadmap for each home. Passports would be transferable between building owners and help to maintain sight of long-term decarbonisation / resilience goals. They would capture EPC data digitally and augment it with other data over time.

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