

Letter calling for Citizens Assemblies sent by Derbyshire Climate Coalition, 10 February 2020

Dear Derbyshire County Councillors and Lead members of District and Borough Councils

This week the Prime Minister announced the UK's strategy for hosting November's UN Climate Summit in Glasgow. It is clear from his statement that he intends the UK to lead the way on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The steps taken in the next 12 months will have a lasting global impact.

However, it is also clear that the UK has a lot of work to do to meet the commitments of the Paris Climate Agreement. Lord Deben, chair of the Committee on Climate Change, has repeatedly highlighted the fact that [UK efforts to address the climate crisis have so far fallen short](#).

As I am sure you are well aware Derbyshire is already experiencing severe impacts from extreme weather events linked to climate change. These include the Todbrook reservoir near dam failure, flooding in Matlock and Derby, wildfires on the Moors and the tragic death of Annie Hall. The [£20 million estimated cost of road repairs](#) alone exceeds the entire county's annual road repair budget. The financial impacts are rapidly rising along with the water levels.

Polling shows that [85% of people in Britain are concerned about climate change](#) with the majority (52%) very concerned. A majority of people polled think that the UK should bring all emissions to net zero more quickly than by 2050.

However, we do not think that Councils in Derbyshire are acting with sufficient urgency or fully appreciate the catastrophic consequences of inaction. The [Tyndall Centre's modelling](#) shows that Derbyshire districts and boroughs need to reduce their emissions by around 13% year on year starting immediately. While most councils in Derbyshire have declared a climate emergency and have pledged to produce climate action plans, the emerging plans show a lamentable lack of urgency in their actions, with many simply repeating existing policies or actions that they are required to do legally or as responsible councils. Further many councils are failing to engage properly with their local residents, producing their action plans in-house with minimal or no engagement. Some do not even appear to have begun the process of developing a plan.

While we are pleased that the districts are working together under the umbrella of Derbyshire County Council to produce a framework, we are very concerned that this will produce a similar set of business-as-usual policies, and that the process fails to engage properly with the public.

Climate change is a result of a highly complex set of environmental, social and economic issues. Dealing with the climate emergency will require difficult decisions to be taken. Elected members and officers will only make progress if the solutions chosen command a broad consensus.

On behalf of the Derbyshire Climate Coalition we would like to propose that the County and District Councils undertake a more inclusive and enlightened process of citizens assemblies, similar to that being implemented in other local authorities including [Camden](#), [Leeds](#), and [Oxford](#). A citizens' assembly is a representative group of citizens who are selected at random from the population. Citizens assemblies bring together people from all walks of life. It provides them with a balanced expert evidence programme on the issues which allows them to hear first-hand from key stakeholders and those with different views and perspectives. They are then able to make recommendations to the benefit of the community. By involving the local community in the process of arriving at suitable solutions, it is much more likely that the solutions will be embraced by the whole community. While this has some costs associated with it, these are trivial compared with the costs of failing to act with the proper urgency.

Climate change is going to continue to rise up the political agenda, and we want Derbyshire local authorities to be ahead of the curve rather than continuing to lag behind. Many of the actions that are needed are no-regrets actions that will save local authorities money, improve air quality, benefit residents' health and reduce social inequality.

We hope that the county and districts can consider this recommendation and take action accordingly. Should you wish to further explore the process and benefits of community engagement, then it may be possible for a deputation of Coalition volunteers to meet Members and Officers for an outline discussion.

Thank you.

Anne Thoday

On behalf of the Derbyshire Climate Coalition: Acclimatize Whaley. Amber Valley Green Party. Amber Valley Labour Party. Bakewell Quakers. Belper Labour Party. Bolsover Environment and Climate Change Group. Chesterfield Climate Alliance. Chesterfield CND. Clay Cross Against Fracking. Chesterfield and District TUC. CPRE Derbyshire. Derby Climate Coalition. Derbyshire Churches Environment Committee convened by the Diocese of Derby. Eckington Against Fracking. Extinction Rebellion Derby. Friends of the Earth. Friends of the Peak District (CPRE). Green Christian Group. Hayfield and New Mills Labour Party. Heanor Little Green Folk. Hope Valley Climate Action. Kilburn, Denby and Holbrook Labour Party. Peak Extinction Rebellion. Sustainable Edale. Sustainable Hayfield. Transition Belper. Transition Buxton. Transition Chesterfield. Transition Melbourne Area. Transition Wirksworth. Unite Community Derby.