

# NFLA Policy Briefing

## No.200



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Subject: Covid-19, the climate emergency and the need for a 'green' stimulus in its aftermath

### i. Background to this Policy Briefing

This report has been developed by the NFLA Steering Committee Policy Advisor in conjunction with the NFLA Secretary. It seeks to consider the impacts of the current and unprecedented Covid-19 public health crisis on the nuclear sector and on the wider climate emergency. It also considers what may happen in efforts to move the national and global economy forward as a response to dealing with the potential harmful economic effects of the public health emergency.

NFLA Policy Briefing 199 looked at ways local government needs to tackle the parallel climate emergency. This Policy Briefing will consider how one of the few potential benefits from the Covid-19 crisis could be to speed up an urgent 'green' stimulus as part of maintaining some of the positive environmental benefits which have arisen from a 'lockdown' of much economic activity. This could also ally with ways to get the economy and job creation moving forward in a more equitable direction. With all parts of government so heavily involved in this crisis across the UK and Ireland, this Policy Briefing seeks to assist local government as it begins considering its own formal recovery planning as, and when, the lockdown can be eased. These are unprecedented times with many people placed in a very precarious and difficult position in terms of their health, their own jobs and wider economic activity, and NFLA shares that concern. It is clear though that now is an unprecedented opportunity to tackle the wider climate crisis in a much more determined fashion, whilst supporting people into new jobs as a part of overcoming the public health crisis.

### 1. Introduction

***"Never Waste a Good Crisis"*** - Winston Churchill

***"Nothing has changed, and yet everything has changed"***

So said Chris Stark, CEO of the independent Committee on Climate Change (CCC) at a recent Green Alliance Webinar. He said we are seeing the impacts of a disorderly transition play out, but what we need is an orderly transition. Speaking at the same webinar Dr Thomas Hale, associate professor of global public policy at Oxford University said "we are at a real critical juncture". It's possible that governments will indiscriminately hand out huge wads of cash which will inevitably be captured by the dominant interest groups. Alternatively, we could 'build back better' with government intervention to ensure that social welfare becomes prioritised – a new kind of 'Bretton Woods' post-emergency moment which ushers in a revised form of global governance. Right now, we should be looking at the key choices we can make to push us towards the second scenario rather than the first. (1)

Writing in the Financial Times, Wendy Carlin, an economist at University College London, says the battle to control the post-pandemic narrative is already underway. We could see a new way of thinking about the economy and new policies and institutions to tackle climate change and guard against future pandemics. Covid-19, along with climate change, could be the driving force of our age to transform economic thinking and the choices people make. A first step will be to reject the fiction that a liveable future can be driven solely by self-interest. We need to cultivate and empower the civic virtues that underpin many of the successes in battling Covid-19. (2)

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR & ENERGY ISSUES:  
COUNCILS WORKING FOR A SAFE, PEACEFUL & RENEWABLE FUTURE**

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C/o Nuclear Policy, Level 3, Town Hall Extension, Library Walk, Manchester, M60 3NY  
Tel: 0161 234 3244 E-Mail: [s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk) Website: <http://www.nuclearpolicy.info>

## 2. Background

An analysis by Carbon Brief (3) suggests the coronavirus pandemic could cause emissions cuts globally this year in the region of 1,600m tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> (MtCO<sub>2</sub>). Although this number is necessarily uncertain, countries and sectors not yet included in the analysis can be expected to add to the total. **But this is equivalent to only around 4% of the global total in 2019.** Although the largest ever annual fall in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, more than during any previous economic crisis or period of war, it would not come close to the 7.6% fall we need to achieve every year in order to limit warming to less than 1.5C above pre-industrial temperatures. (4) To put it another way, atmospheric carbon levels are still expected to increase this year, and rising CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations will only stabilise once annual emissions reach net-zero.

On the one hand this shows society the scale of the task ahead if government is going to successfully tackle the climate change crisis, but it also means that going back to 'business as usual' after the pandemic is not an option. Any emissions cuts in 2020 alone will have little impact, unless they are followed by longer-lasting changes. The pandemic may only temporarily cut emissions. Once shuttered factories reopen, commuters get back into their cars and flights once again take to the air, little will have changed in the structure of the global economy – and progress towards net-zero will likely be as slow as ever.

A recent opinion poll shows that only 9% of people want life to return to how it was before the lockdown. Some 54% agreed with this statement: "I hope to change some things about my life and I hope we will have learned from this as a country." Some respondents (51%) said they had noticed the air was cleaner and others (27%) said they had seen more wildlife. Four in 10 said there had been a stronger sense of community and the feeling of neighbours looking out for each other. (5)

On the other hand, Adrienne Buller writing in the New Statesman argues that "the pandemic has exposed the deep fractures, vulnerabilities and power imbalances present in the global economy long before the virus took hold." And these fractures are the same "...fault lines along which the battle for climate justice is fought." Hedge funds, for instance, are cashing in on the pandemic just as they have been on climate collapse. It's quite possible that instead of facilitating a 'just transition' for workers, governments decide to place carbon-intensive industries on state-funded life support and acquiesce to corporate demands to repeal environmental regulation while allowing investment in renewable energy to collapse. (6) Airlines are not just calling for bailouts but for delays to their (very meagre) climate targets. As another example, the North Sea oil industry has generously offered to put its own (very meagre) carbon reduction plans on hold. Richard Dixon, Director of Friends of the Earth Scotland says we could have a recovery where cash is piled into new road schemes to get the construction sector going again, or a recovery where we massively invest in renewable energy and insulating people's homes to tackle climate emissions and create the jobs that people currently working in the oil industry will need as that industry fades away. (7)

Buller says what we need to do is:

"...build a new economic consensus founded on justice, care and sustainability. We cannot afford to keep the global economy on life support only to resuscitate it, unchanged, once the public health emergency subsides." (8)

## 3. Nuclear Power and Covid-19

Nuclear power stations require adequate staffing levels to be able to operate, shut down and maintain safety. Although shutting down a reactor significantly reduces the required number of personnel, some safety related operations, such as essential reactor core cooling and spent fuel storage still require a skilled workforce. In response to industry pressure to maintain normal output during the pandemic, nuclear regulators around the world are relaxing requirements in many areas including maintenance, inspection and work-time limitations. Reductions in staffing, inspections, outages and necessary maintenance being implemented in many countries will adversely affect safety margins potentially leading to a serious accident. A severe nuclear accident under pandemic conditions would inevitably exacerbate the inevitable highly adverse consequences. (9)

Nuclear operators and regulators have long anticipated that a pandemic might threaten the continuity of nuclear operations. According to Roger Howsley, the former head of security for Britain's nuclear fuel manufacturer, "[E]pidemics are usually covered in emergency planning arrangements, but probably nothing on this scale." For instance, the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) held a workshop in 2016 on "Sustaining Safe Nuclear Operations during an Influenza Pandemic." Unfortunately, according to Edwin Lyman of the Institute of Nuclear Materials Management, the NRC could not reach an agreement with industry on contingency plans. Without extraordinary measures to maintain safety and security, nuclear installations could risk compounding the crisis with a large-scale radiation release.

Tobey, Saradzhyan, and Roth, writing in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, suggests eight different measures which operators could take:

1. Implement public health measures at the nuclear facility ensuring social distancing at work and probably temperature checks of employees when they enter the site;
2. Nuclear activities other than power production can be halted temporarily – Sellafield has halted reprocessing for instance;
3. Labour-intensive operations, such as the statutory outages and refuelling operations could be delayed;
4. Regulators could temporarily ease some controls, such as restrictions on the number of hours personnel can work, but this must be weighed against any increased risk that they might pose to operational safety and security;
5. Nuclear establishments can isolate essential workers as a preventive measure;
6. Nuclear enterprises should ramp up cyber defences. According to one nuclear security manager, "Hackers and criminals are unscrupulous and would take advantage of the relatively fragile situation of companies."
7. Nuclear operators can share best practices and knowledge about how to mitigate the effects of COVID-19. While some nuclear facilities have contingency plans for pandemics, the length of this international crisis may strain even the most robust strategies;
8. Nuclear operators and their security contractors should take additional measures to prevent the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other violent extremist actors from exploiting opportunities to stage attacks. (10)

Nuclear Intelligence Weekly reports that nuclear operators are doing their utmost to keep their plants running in the US, in some cases cutting corners when it comes to "social distancing" or using it as a reason for delaying necessary repairs. Meanwhile, the influx of thousands of temporary workers at refuelling sites is prompting efforts by activists and state and local officials seeking more protection against the spreading virus -- particularly from those workers who may be infected but are asymptomatic. Operators may be exacerbating the spread of the virus, endangering not only nuclear power plant workers but also the communities in which they live. (11) Nuclear critics complained that the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission is relaxing rules including work-hour limits and deferring inspections, but it is doing nothing to defer scheduled refuelling which requires hundreds of temporary workers to travel to various reactor communities to complete their specialist tasks. (12)

In the UK, Heysham B's Reactor 2 in Morecambe began a two-and-a-half-month statutory outage on January 31st before the virus hit. (13) A statutory outage involves closing a reactor for maintenance work that otherwise can't be done whilst the reactor is generating electricity. Similar to an MOT it takes two or three months to complete and requires up to an extra 1,000 temporary employees on top of the 750 staff usually on site. The extra staff usually stay at local hotels and B&B's, eat in the restaurants, use local taxi firms etc. (14) The reactor was expected to return to service on 17th April, but it is not clear at the time of writing whether or not this deadline was met.

But there has been no talk of delaying the statutory outage for Heysham A's Reactor 1 which is due to go offline in May 2020. And this will be followed by a statutory outage at Torness Reactor 1 in July 2020. Usually a statutory outage provides a welcome boost to the local economy, but it is not clear how well received an extra 1,000 workers will be during the corona virus lockdown. Will those workers working on Heysham B go home for a two-week furlough and then come back for the statutory outage on Heysham A? Sounds like a recipe for spreading the virus.

Continuing work at the Hinkley Point C construction site has been a big issue of local concern in the Somerset area and to the NFLA. Further measures to improve social distancing were introduced at the site after initial complaints, (15) but concerns remained. Numerous workers expressed their concerns about the perceived lack of social distancing measures. The Stop Hinkley campaign called for construction to be halted: “It cannot be right”, they said, “that Hinkley C is allowed to turn into a Coronavirus time bomb on our doorsteps.” (16)

Elsewhere, the nuclear industry has been accused of riding roughshod over democratic processes. EDF was poised to submit its formal application for a Development Consent Order to build Sizewell C to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) just before the lockdown. Although it has now announced a delay of a “few weeks” because of the crisis, (17) it has come in for some severe criticism for not delaying until the crisis is over. (18) One correspondent to the East Anglian Daily Times declared that the “Community has lost faith in the integrity of EDF.” (19) Local resident, John Rea Price, said because EDF has failed to provide any evidence of substance and quality on the probable cumulative environmental impact of Sizewell C, many now believe that the Company will exploit the opportunity presented by the coronavirus pandemic to drive forward its planning application for Sizewell C as aggressively as possible in order to minimise the depth of scrutiny of its proposals.

Similarly, in Essex, General Nuclear System Limited (GNSL) (CGN 66.5% and EDF Energy 33.5%) has been the subject of opprobrium after the project team decided to plough on with its pre-application public consultation on Bradwell by extending it for a further five weeks despite being forced to cancel exhibitions and face-to-face meetings. (20)

In Scotland, The Ferret website reports that Faslane nuclear base and nuclear power plants have been given the green light to break safety limits on radioactive waste, because during the Covid-19 crisis the industry’s ability to run their operations may be compromised by a lack of available staff, the need to protect staff and minimise transmission of the Covid-19 virus. (21)

As expected by the NFLA, the Nuclear Industry Association has started to position itself as part of the call for a post-pandemic ‘clean’ energy stimulus package. Tom Greatrex of the NIA said: “...nuclear power can offer ... high volumes of always-on, low carbon power, alongside transformational economic benefits in jobs, growth and investment. [It can] contribute to district heating, hydrogen manufacture and production of synthetic low carbon fuels for aviation and shipping—helping to tackle the harder challenges inherent in meeting net zero.” (22)

But nuclear power hasn’t exactly received a good press during the pandemic lockdown. Linda Pentz Gunter of Beyond Nuclear pointed out at a NFLA English Forum conference just before the lockdown that nuclear would not be appropriate to a system in which we are trying to build new resilience to future shocks particularly those caused by climate change:

“...the climate crisis will involve sea level rise and increasing storm surges of greater intensity to put a nuclear plant on a beach is some sort of level of insanity ... whilst you can walk away from a windfarm and the wind turbines will keep spinning and you can walk away from a solar array and it will still collect solar energy, you cannot call all your workforce home from a nuclear plant.” (23)

#### **4. Nuclear Power to the Rescue?**

World Nuclear Association Director General Agneta Rising and Chairman Kirill Komarov have been describing their vision for the future of the nuclear industry following the coronavirus pandemic. They claim that developing nuclear power is part of the ultimate proven way of creating low-carbon and affordable energy as well as local and long-term high-value jobs and supply chains. Their goal is to achieve 1000 GWe of new nuclear capacity by 2050. (24) This compares to the current global capacity of 360GWe. (25)

A worldwide deployment of 1000GW of new nuclear capacity means 1,000 new reactors of 1000MW capacity or 312 nuclear power stations the size of Hinkley Point C (the largest construction project in Europe). If all the resultant spent fuel were to be disposed of in an underground repository it would require a facility roughly equivalent in size to the proposed Yucca

Mountain repository to be built somewhere in the world roughly every three or four years. (26) Global uranium enrichment capacity would have to increase by between 120% and 165%. If just one percent of the enrichment capacity required were to be diverted to make Highly Enriched Uranium it could make between 175 and 310 nuclear bombs every year. (27) Under this nuclear growth scenario probability tells us that there would be a high chance of at least one nuclear meltdown occurring somewhere in the world prior to 2050, and the probability would continue to rise after 2050 while the reactors continue to operate until each had reached the end of its 60-year operational lifetime. (28)

## 5. Nuclear Weapons

In the US defence officials have been reassuring the public that, despite the pandemic, the US is still capable of launching a massive nuclear retaliation that would undoubtedly kill millions. Yet Hans Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project at Federation of American Scientists, tweeted that all US nuclear bases except one had confirmed cases of COVID-19. (29)

In early April, the Times reported that two of Britain's four nuclear-armed submarines have been under repairs for the last year, leaving the Royal Navy with almost no margin for error in dealing with the coronavirus. This could bring about an unprecedented break in the UK's round-the-clock deterrence mission, which, at least in theory, needs to be uninterrupted if it is to remain credible. (30) France's sole aircraft carrier, which plays a role in its air force's nuclear strike missions, returned home on April 12 with at least 50 cases onboard the ship. Similarly, Forbes has reported that "the entire crew of a Russian [non-nuclear armed] submarine has reportedly been quarantined after indirect contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19." And at least four different US aircraft carriers have reported COVID-19 cases onboard. (31)

CND General Secretary, Kate Hudson, points out that pandemics have, for some time, been designated as tier one threats to our security - worthy of the highest level of concern and planning. Whereas the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation and use as a tier two threat. Yet the Government has chosen to pour £205 billion into a new nuclear weapons system to 'meet' this lower level threat, leaving the health system chronically underfunded and unable to meet the challenge of a pandemic. (32)

## 6. The Climate Crisis

Climate Change is not going to stop while we deal with the coronavirus pandemic. Over the next few months, the world will still experience hurricanes, floods, heatwaves and wildfires, on top of the pandemic. Climate change is loading the weather dice against us. Disasters that might have otherwise proved manageable will be compounded by climate change. It acts as "a threat amplifier," exacerbating everything from terrorist attacks to immigration. Already the deadly Cyclone Harold has been charging through the South Pacific, leaving small island nations in its path struggling to balance responses to the disaster with maintaining efforts to stop the spread of the coronavirus outbreak. (33)

In 2017, the U.S. National Climate Assessment warned that scientists and officials often fail to capture what the report called "compound extremes" and anticipated that the impact of several disastrous events unfolding in rapid sequence would catch the nation by surprise. Imagine what could happen if, during the Covid-19 pandemic, large numbers of people are forced to flee a natural disaster on short notice and be housed in shelters that are overcrowded, understaffed and undersupplied. How will people maintain physical distancing? (34)

The Covid-19 pandemic shows that we need to build resilience into our systems – including health – to deal with what we know will be the adverse impacts of climate change. Lenore Taylor, former advisor to the Australian Government, says we will be basically borrowing from our kids to fund the billions in recovery stimulus, so we cannot further burden them with damaging dead-ends that lead to higher emissions and less climate resilience down the track to our economic, environmental and community disadvantage. Significantly, climate related investments in many cases will offer the best prospects for economic growth and jobs. On that basis alone they should be prioritised. The OECD report 'Investing in Climate, Investing in Growth' demonstrated this in detail for the G20 in 2018. (35)

When the crisis passes, a new world needs to be built, and Covid-19 has the potential to be the midwife of the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewables. It creates space for policymakers to put in place a sustainable energy system and so enables the clean energy revolution to continue. “In the midst of the chaos and despair that we face, this is a beacon of hope for the future”, according to the financial think-tank, Carbon Tracker. It sounds overoptimistic, but “the maths of what happens when a sector [fossil fuels] near its structural peak hits a cyclical downturn are pretty simple: the peak of demand is advanced by a few years.” (36)

However, there is uncertainty regarding the role that governments will play. Fossil fuel companies are asking for government bailouts which means governments will have an unprecedented ability to drive change. And governments all across the world will need to enact a huge series of stimulus packages in order to get the economy moving again and avoid a Depression. But they must avoid the mistakes of 2008 – the money must not be spent on propping up high cost fossil fuel assets with no future. The key reason for optimism is that renewable energy technologies are now the cheapest source of electricity in almost every country in the world. Electric vehicles are a cheaper way to run a transport system, and the cost of an EV is about to reach parity with that of traditional cars.

Dr Richard Dixon, Director of Friends of the Earth Scotland says we could have a recovery where governments try to get things back to where they were, battling through the inevitable extended period of recession, where cash is, for example, piled into new road schemes to get the construction sector going again. Or we could have a recovery where we massively invest in renewable energy and insulating people’s homes to tackle climate emissions and create the jobs that people currently working in the oil industry will need as that industry fades away. Governments are going to have to spend a fortune helping the country get going again, so why not use that spending to create a more resilient, fairer, more caring and greener country. (37)

Fatih Birol at the International Energy Agency says the nature of the post-pandemic stimulus will be vital, depending on whether it boosts the fossil fuel industry or the transition to clean energy: “If they are sustainable, it can bring major benefits, not only to emissions, but quick wins to our economy.” (38)

Stimulus packages will offer an excellent opportunity to ensure that the essential task of building a secure and sustainable energy future doesn’t get lost amid the flurry of immediate priorities. “Governments can use the current situation to step up their climate ambitions and launch sustainable stimulus packages focused on clean energy technologies. The coronavirus crisis is already doing significant damage around the world. Rather than compounding the tragedy by allowing it to hinder clean energy transitions, we need to seize the opportunity to help accelerate them.” (39)

At a European level, politicians, business leaders, lawmakers and activists have formed the European Alliance for Green Recovery which is calling for EU leaders to embrace green stimulus measures that will focus recovery efforts on growing Europe’s low-carbon industries. It calls for a “new economic model” for Europe saying a carbon-neutral economy with strong biodiversity will prove more resilient to future shocks. Signatories to the group’s statement include the CEOs of Volvo, Unilever, L’Oreal and IKEA, alongside ministers from Germany, Italy and France. This will be of direct benefit for the Republic of Ireland, but remains questionable for the UK, which has begun the process of leaving the European Union, though this has inevitably become much more challenging to achieve by the planned deadline (of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020) due to this public health crisis. (40)

## **7. What next for UK and Irish action on climate change?**

In the UK, while Ministers have stressed that they remain fully committed to the net zero goal there are widespread concerns that the timetable for new climate policies could be delayed as Whitehall focuses all its attention on tackling the coronavirus outbreak. (41) The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) will refocus its annual Progress Report to Parliament in June to include advice on supporting a resilient recovery following the pandemic. It will also write to Ministers in the coming weeks to set out initial advice on ensuring that rebuilding efforts support a just transition towards Net Zero emissions and strengthen the UK’s preparedness for climate change.

Advice to Government on the level of the Sixth Carbon Budget (2033-2037) will be published in December 2020, instead of in September. This provides additional time to complete the analysis and reflect on the impacts of the crisis. (42)

Chris Stark, CEO of the CCC has been discussing the impact of the current health crisis on the environmental agenda at an online event organised by the Green Alliance. (43)

He said that with little sign of global demand for oil returning to higher levels any time soon due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, the "astonishing" low oil prices are likely to remain a fixture for some time ahead. One likely result, he said, would be to make investments in renewable energy far more attractive, which could "fundamentally change" the outlook of oil majors, more of which may now be looking more seriously at transitioning to net zero, following in the wake of announcements from BP, Repsol and Shell in recent months. Those companies that are interested in diversifying might be prepared to take the hit in internal investment terms by moving and transitioning towards net zero infrastructure projects.

Stark also said he believed very low fossil fuel prices would likely follow for consumers this year which could deliver opportunities for ambitious green policies in the UK and beyond to accelerate decarbonisation. This could open the door to things like carbon taxes to ensure we don't see very negative impacts on the environment. Stark warned the government to avoid the temptation to offer unconditional bailouts to fossil fuel firms struggling with the recession and the low oil price.

More broadly, meanwhile, the current pandemic crisis and oil sector woes have highlighted the resilience and long-term benefits of low carbon industries and activities by comparison, argued, Camilla Born, deputy strategy director in Cabinet Office's COP26 unit. "It's been quite impressive to see some of the resilience of those investments in different markets around renewables and digitisation - and that really points to a suggestion that is where the future investment is," she added during the event. "That is evolving. It's not clear which direction it going to be going to. But I think we are in a different space to where we were in the last financial crisis, and so there are a whole range of better options when it comes to climate, so we are able to take that choice for a more sustainable path." (44)

Chris Stark told the Green Alliance webinar that the CCC would be reframing the advice it gives to Government in terms of rebuilding a resilient economy. Camilla Born emphasised the need for a green resilient recovery and building back better.

Meanwhile, as the Irish Green Party lays out its 17 demands for entering coalition negotiations, including a commitment to annual reductions of 7 per cent in carbon emissions, (45) the Irish Times says a failure to incorporate a green recovery at the heart of the global response to Covid-19 risks lengthening the economic shock:

"...the climate crisis has already caused more deaths than the worst predictions for coronavirus ... in Ireland there has never been greater support for decisive climate action. The "green mission" in the Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil framework document for a new government fails to build sufficiently on that in tangible commitments, although it endorses the European Green Deal and carbon neutrality by 2050. The parties' credibility could be immediately enhanced by declaring, in the context of Covid-19, that any stimulus packages will be directed towards renewable energy and zero- or low-carbon infrastructure ...If there is a "dash for growth", however, in the absence of better protection of human welfare, embracing sustainability and restoring a biosphere under intolerable strain, Ireland faces a great depression. Desperation cannot be allowed to result in the parking of progressive climate measures. There can be no "return to normal". (46)

## **8. Build Broadband not Roads**

The President of the AA, Edmund King, told the BBC that anecdotal evidence suggests a permanent reduction in the demand for travel might be taking place because people have learned during the crisis to use home-working technology. The chancellor currently plans to spend £27bn to curb congestion on roads and £100bn on HS2 – but if demand falls, that may not be needed. Infrastructure funds might be better spent on broadband to support home working. (47) Lawyers

for the Transport Action Network have commenced proceeding against the Government on the grounds that the road building plans breach the UK's climate and air quality obligations. (48)

Chris Stark agrees with the AA. He says it could be cheaper, better for the economy, and climate-friendly to expand fibre-optics. He believes productivity and the economy would benefit if the roads fund was re-directed from tarmac to fibre-optics. (49)

He said other elements of government infrastructure spending would help the UK out of the Covid-19 crisis. They included "shovel-ready" projects such as electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and energy projects including onshore wind. The big challenge is to insulate the UK's draughty homes – a pledge that was made in the Conservative manifesto, but wasn't mentioned in the latest infrastructure announcement. The labour-intensive process of renovating homes could provide an essential source of jobs across the UK and Ireland.

## 9. A Local Response

By the end of February 2020 over 280 local authorities, including 65% of District, County, Unitary & Metropolitan Councils, 8 Combined Authorities/City Regions (50) and 18 local authorities in the Republic of Ireland had declared a climate emergency. (51) Many of these authorities will be well on the way to drawing up plans which could form the backbone of a green sustainable recovery. As can be seen from the NFLA's Climate Emergency 2020 Update Policy Briefing 200, many of the projects being proposed can actually make money for local authorities. As the World Bank points out, energy efficiency, nature conservation, clean energy options, and the sustainability of transport are clear win-win areas for stimulus investments. "A clear option to create many jobs and support economic recovery is to invest massively in retrofitting buildings to make them more energy efficient, more comfortable and healthier." (52)

The Global Mayors Covid-19 Recovery Task Force will see leading mayors worldwide collaborate to achieve an economic recovery from Covid-19 that enables people to get back to work, while preventing climate breakdown from becoming an even bigger crisis that halts the global economy and threatens the lives and livelihoods of people everywhere. The mayors will discuss how to use huge public investment in the recovery to create a "new normal" for city economies, based on eliminating pollution and poverty, improving public health and increasing resilience to shocks. (53)

The Mayor of Milan, who is chairing the taskforce said:

"How we structure our recovery efforts will define our cities for decades to come. It is our responsibility as mayors to ensure that we build a solid foundation so that our cities emerge as healthier, equitable & more sustainable places to live."

The Recovery Task Force will provide mayors with the best data for how to achieve an economic recovery that puts resources into the hands of those who need it most, quickly gets people back to work & accelerates action to overcome the climate crisis.

Milan is introducing one of Europe's most ambitious schemes to reallocate road space from cars to cycling and walking, in response to the coronavirus crisis. Under the nationwide lockdown, motor traffic congestion has dropped by 30-75%, and air pollution with it. City officials hope to fend off a resurgence in car use as residents return to work looking to avoid busy public transport. The city has announced that 35km (22 miles) of streets will be transformed over the summer, with a rapid, experimental citywide expansion of cycling and walking space to protect residents as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

In the UK on Monday, Brighton started opening part of the seafront, Madeira Drive, only to pedestrians and cyclists from 8am-8pm. In Barnes, London, businesses and residents have coned off part of the road outside shopping parades to expand pedestrian space and help shoppers keep their distance from each other. Meanwhile in the Republic of Ireland, Dublin is suspending loading bays and parking spaces to increase space for social distancing, by using removable plastic separators. (54)

Making improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure will undoubtedly have to be a focus of post-pandemic policy. Social media has been buzzing with pictures of pavements which are too

narrow for individuals to pass each other and maintain social distancing; pictures of private parks and golf courses which could be opened up for recreational use; parents out cycling with their children wondering how they are going to break it to them that they can't cycle safely anymore after the lockdown has finished; bike shops and community projects donating or loaning bicycles to health workers (they won't want to go back to travelling by bus). Around the world a growing number of cities are temporarily reallocating road space from cars to people on foot and bicycles to keep key workers moving and residents in coronavirus lockdown healthy and active while socially distancing.

Hackney Council in east London is the first UK local authority openly planning to temporarily "filter" its streets, using bollards and planters to prevent rat-running while maintaining access for emergency vehicles and residents. Pedestrians stepping into the road to socially distance from one another are put at risk by speeding drivers, whose number appears to be increasing during the lockdown. (55)

The Department for Transport (DfT) has loosened its rules to enable roads to be closed to motor traffic and given over to pedestrians and cyclists during the duration of the coronavirus lockdown. "Traffic Regulation Orders" usually take time to implement, have to be publicized through advertisements in local newspapers and by notices on site, and can be stymied by objections. The new rules—announced on April 16— will be "withdrawn once conditions allow," states the DfT. It is hard to see the public being very keen on some of these roads, such as Brighton's seafront, returning to routes for traffic after the lockdown has ended. (56) The same needs to happen across the UK and Ireland.

The London Cycling Campaign (LCC) states:

"A massive shift away from motor vehicles and towards cycling (and walking and public transport) is essential to decarbonise London's transport sector. Do we want to return to pre-crisis, or possibly even higher, levels of motor traffic? Or create a new baseline for walking, cycling and traffic levels as we emerge from the crisis?" (57)

'Pop-up' cycle lanes and widened pavements are being planned for Edinburgh and Glasgow. Both city councils have confirmed they are discussing the innovations with the Scottish Government's Transport Scotland agency and cycle and footpath developers Sustrans. It also comes after a significant increase in cycling being recorded in Scotland since road traffic fell by 75 per cent because of the lockdown. The redrawing of streets is being planned for when lockdown restrictions are eased because 2m social distancing is likely to continue to be required for a long time. (58)

There is also an excellent global database which shows how towns and cities are developing new cycleways and footpaths across the world on the Pedbike website, which NFLA recommends. (59)

## 10. Conclusions

The world is at a critical juncture. We could see governments throwing money at companies without any pre-conditions, and fossil-fuel-based industries receiving the lions share, or we could see a new kind of economics emerging with a 'green' recovery stimulus package which recognises the urgency of tackling climate change, builds resilience to guard against future pandemics, rejects the fiction that a liveable future can be driven solely by self-interest and cultivates the civic virtues that underpin many of the successes in battling Covid-19.

For local authorities the recovery offers an opportunity to leapfrog forward with plans already being drawn up to tackle the climate emergency. Levels of traffic can be kept at a new low and walking and cycling at a new high. Stimulus package funding could be directed at renewable and energy efficiency projects which not only create new jobs, foster the new civic virtues which have emerged during the pandemic and generate new income streams to protect services into a future which will undoubtedly be burdened by some huge levels of national debt.

## 11. References

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