

Imagine 2030 - and what an amazing place it would be if we succeeded in reducing our carbon emissions to zero

It is hard to reflect on the climate emergency whilst the coronavirus crisis is turning all our lives upside down. But at the same time, it has become increasingly understood by all political parties, all faith groups and all parts of our community that urgent action is now needed to protect ourselves from the worst impacts of climate change.

This shared understanding gives me hope that the action needed might also bring our divided society together and be an amazingly positive experience.

The IPCC and the global scientific community are unequivocal that society needs to de-carbonise at an unprecedented scale and pace over the coming decade if we are to avert the worst effects of climate breakdown. In conjunction, we face a crisis in our natural environment, with a 60% loss of wildlife populations over the last 50 years.

But Imagine 2030, and what an amazing place our neighbourhood would be to live in if we succeeded in reducing our carbon emissions to zero by 2030. I believe that a zero carbon, ecologically rich society is something to look forward to. By articulating the amazing quality of life that could be achieved in a well-balanced community that would result from a zero-carbon lifestyle, we can build an exciting and positive vision for the future.

We need to have an open and honest conversation about what we can achieve as individuals and what needs to be done through local, regional and national policy initiatives. We need to be prepared to tell the truth and be brave enough to respond to the evidence with action that matches the existential threat that the climate and ecological emergency demands.

The dilemma of National and Local Targets

In July 2019, our local Council (Hammersmith & Fulham) declared a Climate Emergency and set a target date to reduce our carbon emissions to net zero across the whole borough by 2030. They then set up a Resident Led Climate and Ecological Emergency Commission to help the council understand how it might achieve this goal and they asked me to Chair the commission by bringing together a team of 12 local residents.

The 2030 target is very ambitious and is ahead of national policy, which is geared to 2050. But based on IPCC analyses¹, if we are to avoid a temperature rise of more than 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial average, then advanced nations will need to reduce our carbon emissions much more rapidly.

As a group of non-expert local residents, the Commission quickly came to the realisation that we would not be able to provide a full and detailed analyses of the changes to council policies that would be needed to reduce carbon emissions at the required pace. Instead, we concluded that tackling climate change will need changes in behaviour right across our community and the local economy – a cultural shift supported by a host of new policies, innovations, opportunities and above all robust communication about the changes that are needed.

We established that most of the councils' emissions comes from the management of housing and commercial buildings, with transport being the third largest emitter. In addition, the amount we all consume, and what we waste, plays a significant part – particularly when we started to consider the embodied carbon that is emitted in the manufacture and transportation of what we consume.

The Commission determined that The Council needs a new framework against which it can measure if their proposed and emerging projects, policies or other initiatives will avoid emitting carbon in their own right and help reduce carbon emissions across the borough so that we can be sure to achieve the target of net-zero emissions by 2030.

So how can the council Map the Road to Net Zero?

As a commission we recommended four priorities.

The first priority was to encourage the council to define a positive Vision for what 2030 would be like if we succeeded in our ambition to reduce carbon emissions to net zero – **Imagine 2030**. By defining a clean, fresh and healthy environment in which people care about each other and where success is measured by high levels of well-being, everyone will be encouraged to change their behaviour and help each other to work towards a more prosperous future for all.

Secondly, we must all develop much greater **Knowledge at a local level** to better understanding the carbon emissions of all our activities and their effect on global warming. We all need training in carbon literacy, environmental management and the importance of biodiversity in order that we are better equipped to consider the carbon emissions of the choices we make. We should become as proficient in how we measure our carbon emissions as we currently are in measuring how much money we spend on doing the things we do.

Thirdly we must use this new local knowledge to prepare a **Road Map to get to Net Zero** that demonstrates what needs to be done in the short term, what we must plan for

over the next 3 to 5 years and what has to wait for regional or national legislation to enable the changes in the longer term. The plan should be measurable at set against realistic timescales for each initiative so that we can focus on what can be done and not get distracted by the enormity of the problem.

Finally, we demanded that the council prepare a robust **Communication Plan** that uses their newly acquired knowledge in an open and honest way. They must both highlight the dangers we face if we do not act now and enable us to make positive changes that bring us closer to the Imagine 2030 vision. Covid has shown us all how an effective communication plan can influence rapid and significant changes in behaviour to stem the transmission of a deadly disease. We must learn from this experience and implement an effective local communication plan that influences changes in our behaviour to massively reduce our carbon emissions.

I believe that the changes in behaviour that are now necessary will happen if we develop a positive vision, supported by greater knowledge that is used to make a proper plan. This must then be clearly and honestly communicated to show that if we succeed in reducing our carbon emissions then life will get better for everyone.

¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>

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