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POST COVID-19: A DISCUSSION PAPER

Lessons from Covid-19: Need for a New Approach and Learning from Others

When the current global health pandemic is finally overcome, which may not be until late 2020 or even 2021, the world will be a different place. Clearly there will be major consequences for our social, economic and political life and this will impact how we tackle the Climate Emergency and achieve Sustainable Development in Canterbury and elsewhere.

One scenario would see us revert to business as usual, driven by the enormous impact the health lock-down will have had on business and jobs. The city of Canterbury and coastal resorts like Herne Bay and Whitstable will have suffered significantly from absence of tourism, especially from abroad, a major source of income, while the farming sector will have felt the lack of agricultural labour and disrupted supply chains. All this will be potentially further accentuated by Brexit in 2021.

There is a big question mark too over how central government will respond to the huge gap in public finances which the crisis has necessitated and if it will revert to policy of austerity. Business failure, mass unemployment, social insecurity and associated poverty and homelessness could be key factors in governments seeking to ramp up unrestrained economic growth to create jobs. This would however be highly negative for climate action and sustainable development objectives.

An alternative scenario is learning from the crisis and using the opportunity of what might result in new mindsets – such as a greater willingness to adopt green lifestyles, to collaborate collectively as a community, to strengthen the public sector and essential services, including at local government level here in Canterbury and Kent. There should be a realisation that unrestricted consumption comes at the expense of the greater good. That a focus short term profits obscures the need for long term investment aimed at tackling issues like climate change. That our global ecosystem is a fragile one. That green business and green infrastructure investment offer a better and more sustainable solutions to post Covid-19 economic regeneration and growth.

The Covid-19 crisis should teach us that business as usual is not a viable scenario. There are direct consequences for our individual lifestyles and choices as well as for the kind of engagement required of government – whether at local, national or indeed international level. Canterbury City Council, CCC, is about to adopt its Corporate Plan and is looking to draw up its Local Plan and other key strategies such as transport. Kent County Council, KCC, is also engaged in formulating key policy strategies. All these will need to be drastically reformulated to take into account the new realities

post Covid-19 and to address both climate change as well as the interrelated issues of sustainability and achieving the interrelated sustainable development goals, SDGs of the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development which they UK has signed up to. These relate to poverty, health, education, clean energy, economic growth, income inequalities, responsible consumption, climate change and more, much of which is implemented at the county or district level.

It must be the role of CCAP to promote learning from the Covid-19 crisis, drawing on relevant national and international experience, as well as from local partners, for example the work of East Kent Permaculture. This means that our mission to *educate, energise and empower* must be greatly re-enforced and all our partner organisations should aim to coordinate their respective activities in support of this mission. Our local youth – through our schools, universities, and bodies like YS4C also needs to be fully engaged.

Collectively and in close partnership with CCC and KCC, for example as members of the CCC Climate Emergency Board, we need to ensure that our local government strategies reflect the new realities. In the UK, local government action is hindered by excessive Whitehall control over local powers and finances compared to most countries and this, too, needs to be addressed and changed; examples include allowing stricter building controls to promote zero carbon or permitting councils to charge local tourist and other taxes.

There is however much that can be done locally to push our agenda forward locally. This relates not only to climate action but sustainable development in general set out in the SDGs. CCC and KCC have responsibility for implementation of many of the specific SDG targets and need to be encouraged to follow the lead of other local authorities and integrate the SDG framework into their local plans and strategies. This should follow the lead of other local governments like Bristol City Council, with its innovative approaches such as its recent Voluntary Local Review of SDG implementation and its Green Capital Partnership.

Likewise, much can be learnt from municipalities overseas such as Sint Truiden in Flanders, with which we have had contact, and cities like Brussels and Milan which are currently introducing more pedestrianisation and cycle ways post Covid-19. International organisations like the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, United Cities and Local Governments, the Council for Local Environmental Initiatives and the United Nations Development Programme have produced extensive materials and toolkits which we can use to localise SDGs and advance effective climate action in our local community.

The UN Secretary-General has recently called for the post-Covid recovery to be based on addressing the climate emergency and promoting green strategies for growth. As he has pointed out this may mean making government support conditional on companies promoting such green strategies and reducing pollution. The adoption of a *New Green Deal* should be our overall concept for recovery and this needs to be reflected in the strategic plans being formulated by government at every level, including by KCC and CCC, for example in the forthcoming CCC Local Plan and transport strategy.

What follows is a consideration of new opportunities post-Covid-19, based on CCAP's existing 10-point Action Plan adopted last year, which seeks to raise issues for discussion and modification of our Plan and for new policy direction and recommendations.

1. Inform, Educate and Change Behaviour

What are the lessons of Covid-19 for individual changed behaviour and how does CCAP accordingly adjust its messaging to the public post Covid-19?

How in practice should CCAP use the experience of the Covid-19 crisis to inform our public: for example through a special leaflet, website, targeted approaches to specific groups such as schools or business, planning for our 2021 EcoDay (coinciding with Earth Day on 22 April)?

How do we coordinate and integrate our work with CCC and KCC to inform the public?

How do we encourage CCC and KCC to learn from/link to relevant national and international good practices/networks including in respect of SDG implementation and climate action?

2. Campaigning/advocacy

How does CCAP modify its advocacy work in respect of CCC and KCC (CCC Climate Emergency, Corporate and Local Plan formulation, transport, housing strategies etc; KCC environmental/other strategies) in the light of post Covid-19?

How do we practically work more closely with CCC and KCC councillors and officers?

What specific new campaigning should CCAP do and which target groups are a priority taking into account the impact of Covid-19 also on vulnerable groups?

Can we now make use of the greater familiarity with social media (e.g. Zoom conferencing) for our advocacy work?

3. Land Management

Can our farming be encouraged to adopt more sustainable and environmentally sustainable methods post Covid-19, given also the likely ongoing labour shortages as a result of Brexit?

How can there be more sustainable water management, including in respect of coastal and river flooding?

How can our green spaces be protected and enhanced?

Can tree-planting be stepped up as a result of the crisis?

4. Economy and Business

Given the post Covid-19 need for economic recovery and encouraging business and job-creation, especially for youth, how does this affect CCAP's focus on green economic growth strategies and green business and jobs (e.g. the Herne Bay clean fuel plant)?

How do we work in practice with BID, CCC, KCC and others to promote a Green New Deal and create new jobs?

Are businesses likely to continue to engage with more home working, reducing the need for commuting (including to London) and what changes will this result in?

How can tourism to Canterbury and the coastal towns be once again encouraged but in a more sustainable way?

5. Sustainable Transport

Covid-19 has seen significant drops in air pollution in cities on notably account of reduced road transport – how can this be maintained?

Does the likely need for ongoing social distancing allow the establishment of more pedestrianisation and cycle routes in cities and how will this impact on existing strategies by CCAP and its partners like CAST and CCC?

Is there now a possibility of much more encouragement/subsidies for electric vehicles (especially local buses) and more frequency of public transport to outlying rural areas?

6. Buildings and Infrastructure

Do we need to modify CCAP's housing strategy paper and its targets submitted to CCC in the light of the current crisis?

How does the crisis impact on local infrastructure priorities by CCC and KCC/others?

7. Sustainable Food Supplies

How does the crisis and its effect on the food supply chain (and the ensuing greater reliance on online shopping/delivery) impact on likely individual behaviours and how could this encourage more sustainable approaches for example on avoiding food wastage, plastic packaging and using local produce?

How can the food insecurity experienced by vulnerable groups such as low-income families and school children eligible for school meals during the crisis be prevented in future?

8. Waste Avoidance and Recycling

Can the positive experiences of the crisis, for example its greater reliance on individual composting and recycling, rather than local green collections be utilised? Can this experience help enhance the work of our repair café?

9. Affordable and Clean Power

The crisis has shown the ability of both individuals and countries to rely less on fossil fuels like petroleum – how can this be built on by encourage greater switching to green and renewable energy resources?

Given that low-income groups, which could well increase in size as a result of post-Covid-19 unemployment, may want to continue to rely on the use of (now cheaper) fossil fuels, how can their specific needs be addressed?

10. Monitor and Evaluate

Can we learn from the need to rely on expertise and scientific knowledge during the crisis to deploy the know-how of the University of Kent and Canterbury Christchurch University and other local expertise more in pursuit of climate action?

Can we get CCC to adopt a formal 5-yearly CCC carbon reduction plans over a 15-year period with clear indicators to monitor progress?

Can CCC and KCC be given support to help integrate specific SDG targets and indicators in their various planning targets and to produce a Voluntary Local Review on SDG implementation, including in respect of climate action?