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Lessons from Covid-19: The Need for a Green-led Recovery

' Covid-19 has accelerated the shift towards a new urban paradigm towards inclusive, green and smart cities' (OECD, July 2020)

Business as usual is not an option

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. There will be major consequences for our economic, social and political life and this will impact how we tackle the Climate Emergency and achieve Sustainable Development in Canterbury and Kent.

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. 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. There is also a question mark over how central government will respond to the huge gap in public finances which the crisis has necessitated and if it will revert to a policy of austerity with all its social and other consequences.

In Kent the tourist sector alone is estimated to shrink up to 80% in 2020. The city of Canterbury and coastal resorts like Herne Bay and Whitstable will have suffered significantly from absence of visitors, especially from abroad, a major source of income. Retail, especially in town centres, is being hit by greater online shopping. The farming sector, too, will have felt the lack of agricultural labour and disrupted supply chains. All this will be potentially further accentuated by Brexit in 2021.

Local government- Canterbury City Council (CCC) and Kent County Council (KCC)- will face serious financial issues as a result of Covid-19. The 14 Kent councils have a major budget deficit of £214 million on account of extra spending incurred, notably on adult social care, and substantial losses in council tax, fees, business rates and housing revenue. Given the centralised nature of UK governance and reliance on Whitehall, this will be difficult to make up and current Government Covid-19 funding to councils is inadequate to meet the gap.

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 international level.

CCC, is about to adopt its Corporate Plan and is looking to draw up its Local Plan and other key strategies such as its Transport Plan¹. KCC, together with Medway Council, is also engaged in formulating key policy strategies post Covid-19 and helping to coordinate the Kent-wide economic recovery among district councils through the Kent Resilience Forum². The private sector, too, represented by our partner, the Canterbury Business Improvement District, BID, is also looking to adopt new post Covid-19 strategies for reopening and recovery and many of its members are actively committed to zero-carbon strategies³.

The KCC *Guiding Principles for a Green Recovery in Kent* Provide currently being finalised provide valuable framework:

- All investment and future growth should have net-zero Carbon emissions, use resources efficiently and aim for environmental net gain.
- Employees and residents are supported to protect and enhance their wellbeing through a cleaner environment and more access to rich and varied nature.
- Communities are well connected both digitally, and through an effective network of paths, cycleways and public transport.
- Future development and existing communities are resilient and adapted to the changing climate and severe weather events.
- Biodiversity is protected, restored and created; nature-based solutions are considered first and invested in at every opportunity.
- Ensure any green recovery solutions are equitable and fair, a green and equitable recovery go hand in hand.
- Greater partnership working and collaboration.

Local government, private sector and other corporate plans will need to be drastically revised to take into account the new realities post Covid-19, taking into account the above seven KCC Guiding Principles. They will need to address climate change as well as the interrelated issues of sustainability and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the *UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development*, which the UK has signed up to. These SDGs 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. In this context reference should be made to the new LGA/UKSSD guide for councils on the UN SDG and relevant international websites⁴.

Most recently, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, has highlighted key lessons from the Covid crisis to build back better cities. These include the

¹ CCAP has submitted its detailed views on both the Corporate Plan consultation and, in June 2020, the initial consultation for the Local Plan (*Issues and Vision: A Local Plan led by Climate Action, Sustainable Development and Covid-19 Recovery*) including in respect of housing and, with its partner CAST, transport; www.ccap.org

² Kent County Council *Guiding Principles for a Green Recovery in Kent* July 2020; *Kent County Council Approach to Zero Carbon* July 2020

³ CCAP and BID engaged in a dialogue on Climate Action and Covid Recovery on 7 July 2020 and agreed ongoing cooperation.

⁴ LGA/UKSSD *UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Guide for Councils*, 17 July 2020; www.local2030.org www.clgf.org.uk www.iclei.org www.uclg.org www.oecd.org/local-forum

conclusion that *'The 'Zoom effect; and the 'Greta effect' accelerated environmental awareness, making the transition towards clean mobility and circular economy more politically and socially acceptable'* and *'Global agendas such as the SDGs, the New Urban Agenda, and the Sendai Framework are both timely and relevant to reshape planning, policy, strategy and budget from the ground up.'*⁵

A Green-led Recovery and a Green New Deal

There is a growing realisation that unrestricted consumption comes at the expense of the greater good. That a focus on 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 and that green business and green infrastructure investment offer a better and more sustainable solution to post Covid-19 economic regeneration and growth.

The Local Government Association has asserted that *'It is essential that as a nation we tackle climate change and protect our natural environment. We need to improve air quality, protect against flooding, and ensure our transport, planning, waste and energy policies are sustainable'*. It notes that some 230 councils -including Canterbury- have declared a climate emergency , whilst two-thirds are aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030, and state that this makes *'local government well placed to support the transition to a low-carbon economy'*.⁶

Learning from the crisis provides an opportunity of 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. A recent KCC study, undertaken with Hampshire and Hertfordshire showed that as a result of Covid-19, in the next 12 months 47% of respondents stated they expect more locally produced food, 42% would reduce their use of single use plastics and 20% would use their cars less by using more active forms of travel.

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 the Canterbury Alliance for Sustainable Transport, CAST, or 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, individually and in close partnership with CCC and KCC, and as members of the CCC Climate Emergency Board, CCAP will seek 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 controls to promote zero carbon buildings or permitting councils to charge local tourist and other taxes.

There is however much that can be done now to push our agenda forward locally. This relates not only to climate action but sustainable development in general as 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

⁵ 'COVID-19 and Cities: *Impact, Lessons learned and Recovery Strategies'*. OECD Cities, OECD 27 July 2020

⁶ *'Post-COVID-19 recovery strategies that will contribute to a fairer, cleaner, and more sustainable economy'* LGA submission to House of Lords, 11 June 2020

the SDG framework into their local plans and strategies. In this we will continue to work closely with the Canterbury SDG Forum and other partners such as the Canterbury Society.

We should examine the policies 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, and Edinburgh where extensive pedestrianisation is being planned. Likewise, much can be learnt from municipalities overseas, such as Sint Truiden in Flanders, with which we have had direct contact, and cities like Brussels and Milan which are currently introducing more pedestrianisation and cycle ways post Covid-19.

International organisations like the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, G-40 Cities, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, United Cities and Local Governments, the Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the United Nations Development Programme have produced extensive materials and toolkits which we can use to measure and localise SDGs and advance effective climate action in our local community⁷.

The UN Secretary-General has recently added his voice 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; this approach is already being adopted by many European Governments and the European Union.

The adoption of green-led policies under a *Green New Deal* should be our overall concept for recovery. This needs to be reflected in the strategic plans being formulated by government at every level, including by KCC and CCC, for example in KCC's county-wide economic recovery work and in the forthcoming CCC Corporate and Local Plans and housing and transport strategies.

Our 10 Point Covid Recovery Plan

What follows is a consideration of how the Covid-19 experience can shape our priorities in Canterbury and Kent, based on CCAP's existing 10-point Action Plan adopted in 2019.

1. Inform, Educate and Change Behaviour

The Covid-19 experience has changed people's behaviour and it has taught us that building connections locally leads to resilient communities.

As we tackle the Covid-19 recovery, we must not lose sight of the even greater, existential threat of climate change from which a recovery may not even be possible.

We should seek to build on changes to people's attitudes towards the environment in areas such as clean air, improving provision for cyclists and pedestrians and supporting home working and the value we have placed on our green open spaces, our food supply and our community cohesion.

CCAP should pursue this by addressing the wider public, and especially those disadvantaged groups affected most negatively by Covid-19; it is likely the same social groups will also be hit by job and income loss post-Covid. What is required is to what the LGA has termed building more inclusive economies⁸.

⁷ See www.globalcovenantofmayors.com, www.c40.org, www.clgf.org.uk, www.iclei.org, www.uclg.org, <https://doi.org/10.1787/23069341> (2020), www.localizingthesdgs

⁸ LGA Building More Inclusive Economies, 24 June 2020

To do this, we need to marshal the extensive network of all our CCAP partners and ensure coordinated approaches to the production and distribution of public information, whether it relates to media, especially our social media and our respective websites, publications and leaflets, and holding of public events, including around a Climate Action Day on 22 April 2021. This will also mean working closely, where appropriate, with CCC and KCC communication teams.

In our endeavours, we should be constantly aware of, and learn from, national and international examples of covid-19 recovery plans and how these relate to the reduction in carbon emissions and environmental improvement here in Canterbury.

2. Campaigning/advocacy

Our aim is zero carbon usage by 2030 locally within the overall national target of 2050.

Given that local government -both CCC and KCC- have committed to dealing with the Climate Emergency, and have key responsibility for driving local economic and environmental development, most of our advocacy work will need to be directed at influencing their strategies and policies. Our close existing cooperation with leading councillors, officers, including with the CCC Climate Change Champion and lead officer, our membership of the CCC Climate Emergency Board and our close engagement with KCC notably in respect of the Kent Resilience Forum should facilitate this work.

We should engage more with our young people, both school pupils and those in the Y4C movement to promote ECO schools and universities. This will also add to CCAP's own campaigning capacity.

We should build on the rise of, and enthusiasm for, video conferencing and webinars. We should thus organise webinars on a regular basis targeted at various groups according to our message. Use of our own CCAP website and social media will be another key tool.

3. Economy and Business

The LGA has stated that 'a key component of clean growth is the creation of green jobs' and has estimated that nearly 700,000 low-carbon jobs could be created in England by 2030.⁹

Our own local economy in Kent will be badly hit. We will need to support our local economic recovery, but that recovery must be a Green Recovery, supporting the concept of a Green New Deal and the creation of green jobs. In this respect, developing joint strategies through our partnership with BID and its members is crucial as is linking to other local institutions such as the Kent Business School¹⁰. CCC and KCC should accordingly use their public procurement and other policies to favour, where possible, local businesses ventures in Kent.

As part of this strategy we should promote home working and the development of local "work hubs". In Antwerp, for example, the council is providing professional learning local businesses to facilitate this. We will require a serious rethink how and where businesses and homes are located to encourage tele-working and reduce commuting.

Likewise, many businesses, including those signed up to the UN Global Compact,¹¹ have committed to achieving a low carbon economy and promoting sustainable development in

⁹ LGA 2020 op. cit.

¹⁰ KBS is looking to see how issues of climate action and sustainable development can be further integrated into its work, including its MBA curriculum and the annual Kent Business Summit.

¹¹ www.unglobalcompact.org

line with the SDGs. This means business adopting their own targets to achieve this end and encouraging the growth of the low carbon environmental goods and services sector.

The LGA has pointed out that 'localising and devolving skills investment, back to work support and a job guarantee will be critical to ensuring that everyone benefits from these new local jobs'. We should therefore seek to expand local employment and training as a means of reducing levels of long-distance commuting and to encourage young people to stay in the area.

We should support sustainable tourism locally and look especially how Canterbury's UNESCO heritage status and historical sites can best be enhanced, as well as promoting the sustainability of our coastal towns and countryside.

4. Sustainable Transport

As a sector, transport contributes to 33 per cent of UK CO2 emissions and during the Covid-19 lockdown there has been a significant drop in air pollution as a result of reduced road transport. This better air quality needs to be maintained and CCAP is working with its partner, CAST, to advocate for more sustainable transport strategies by CCC and KCC¹². It is also able to draw on expertise by other local organisations such as Canterbury Clean Air.

In particular, social distancing has necessitated the establishment of temporary extensions to pedestrian and cycle routes in cities and we should aim to ensure that these temporary arrangements are made permanent, as has been the case in many UK and European cities.

We should prioritise the establishment of low emissions zones in Canterbury and Kent, establish more electric car charging points, prioritise bus lanes to increase punctuality and promote car free days and car sharing. Sustainable and green public transport, including enhanced rural bus services with low emission fuel can play a key role in ensuring longer-term green recovery¹³.

The recent Government endorsement for major airport at Manston in Thanet contradicts the Planning Inspectorate recommendations against such a development, notably as regards the negative effects on climate change. It is also contrary to the green-led recovery and green jobs strategy being advocated by KCC, the LGA and others and will seriously impact on residents in Canterbury District and beyond.

5. Buildings and Infrastructure

The emphasis on working from home must change the way we consider development in the future and the relationship between the residential and business areas in our cities and towns. It is important that new development, including housing, is zero carbon in use.

Detailed proposals for new approaches by private developers and the deployment of both incentives and regulation by our local governments have been set out by CCAP's building group and these provide the basis for CCAP policy in this area.¹⁴ It is to be hoped that the recent announcement by the UK Government for funding home insulation and other energy-saving measures will provide an impetus.

6. Sustainable Food Supplies

¹² CAST 'A Vision for 2030 and How to Travel There', June 2020.

¹³ The recent planning approval for the establishment of a hydrogen producing plant in Herne Bay, which will provide fuel for buses in particular, offers new opportunities,

¹⁴ CCAP 'Zero Carbon Buildings', April 2020

We have experienced empty supermarket shelves during the crisis. Going forward, we should promote the use of local independent shops for our food and other goods.

With our fertile agriculture land here in Kent, there is scope to support local farming, for example through farmers' markets and buying local, fresh, produce. Our aim should be a sustainable local food supply and to also encourage farmers to adapt more environmentally sustainable farming methods.

We should further push for the establishment of more community allotments, greenhouses and "edible gardens".

7. Land Management

Covid-19 has taught us the value of green, open spaces, both for exercise and our psychological wellbeing. We need to ensure that these spaces are protected, enhanced and extended. What is needed is more green spaces and corridors and areas of ecological restoration and community use. This includes the planting of many more trees and hedges in association with Canterbury Trees and working with partners like East Kent Permaculture on wider ecological issues including the regeneration of coastal ecosystems.

We should support local farming so that we have a sustainable food supply and encourage farmers to adapt more environmentally sustainable farming methods. There also need to be sustainable approaches to water management to enhance resilience to flooding in coastal and river areas.

8. Waste Avoidance and Recycling

We should build on our greater reliance on individual composting and recycling. Here we can draw on and seek to directly support the work of our various partners and relevant local community initiatives such as repair cafés and recycling initiatives.

In part because of more online deliveries, there has been some increase in single-use plastics and the existing efforts by CCC and other councils to reduce single-use plastics need to be redoubled working closely with partner such as Plastics Free Canterbury.

9. Affordable and Clean Power

The Covid-19 aftermath will affect low-income groups greatly and could throw more families into fuel poverty. We should increase our efforts to help those families to switch to cheaper and greener energy tariffs as a number of Kent councils are already doing whilst helping them find the much-needed help to insulate their homes and improve draught proofing.

We should encourage the development of "street groups" to bulk buy solar panels for example and work with our partners to identify sites for renewable energy.

10. Monitor and Evaluate

We look to CCC to set formal 5- yearly carbon reduction plans for the District over a 15-year period with clear indicators to monitor progress and working closely with the Council through its Climate Emergency Board. As an initial step, we look forward to engaging in discussion on the formulation of the new CCC Local Plan based on the proposal submitted by CCAP.

We further encourage CCC to produce a Voluntary Local Review of SDG implementation, based on relevant SDG targets and indicators and drawing on national and international good practices, including the recommendations contained in the 2020 LGA/UKSSD guide¹⁵.

Likewise, we look to KCC to implement its Guiding Principles for a Green Recovery in Kent and incorporate green-led initiatives into its economic, environmental and other policy frameworks, together with monitoring and implementation of relevant SDG targets and indicators. As with CCC, CCAP would be pleased to engage directly with KCC in this regard and to input into the work of the Kent Resilience Forum and CV19 recovery work.

We have come to rely on expertise and scientific knowledge during the Covid-19 crisis. We now need to deploy the know-how of the University of Kent (including its Business School) and Canterbury Christchurch University and valuable local expertise in pursuit of climate action. Likewise, CCAP is able to draw on the practical know-how of its many community, business and other members within its partnership; it is also in a position to access expertise and advice from a wide range of external bodies such as international local government organisations.

Conclusion

‘Covid-19 bears implications for governance, with citizens’ trust in governments increasing in some countries, especially for local politicians, and decreasing in others’ (OECD, July 2020)

Recovery from the many economic, social and political shocks resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic will present numerous serious challenges.

It also offers opportunities for a new start, for a green recovery, as KCC has advocated, and for reaching Zero Carbon in Canterbury District and beyond. But Zero Carbon will need to be achieved well before the official Government target of 2050 if the seriousness of the Climate Emergency is to be fully addressed.

CCAP brings together a rich range of community, business, academic and other key local stakeholders and, working with our local governments, is fully committed to seize the opportunities for Green-led Recover from Covid. We look forward to early opportunities for cooperation with KCC and CCC to realise our 10 point Covid Recovery Plan and agree on common actions.

¹⁵ LGA/UKSSD op.cit.