

Peter Soulsby MP

Leicester South Citizen's Inquiry on the Draft Climate Change Bill

Saturday 16 June 2007



Final Report

Leicester South Climate Change Citizens' Inquiry

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Peter Soulsby MP held a Citizen's Inquiry to explore the proposals contained in the Government's Draft Climate Change Bill. The event also provided an opportunity for interested constituents to debate wider climate change and environmental policy ideas.

Opening Plenary

Peter Soulsby MP introduced the Draft Climate Change Bill and described it as an important first step in bringing forward a legislative framework to tackle climate change. He also recognised that many people and organisations had campaigned for a Climate Change Bill for many years.

Peter Soulsby underlined that climate change presents the biggest current challenge to humanity - possibly the most important challenge of our time - and one that cannot be met just by politicians and institutions; but only with the full input of citizens and communities. Individuals needed to take action together effectively to confront the challenge of climate change.

A panel of academic experts, practitioners and campaigners set the scene and provided their own overview analysis of the Government's Draft Climate Change Bill:

Professor Paul Fleming

Institute of Energy & Sustainable Development, De Montfort University

Councillor Matt Follet

Green Party, Leicester City Council

Malcolm Hunter

Leicester Friends of the Earth

David Nicholls

Chief Executive, Groundwork Leicester & Leicestershire Parkfield

Workshop Discussion Groups

The main part of the event was a series of smaller discussion groups which considered two key themes linked to the Draft Climate Change Bill and wider policy:

- (1) **Emissions targets** - is this a viable model to go forward with?
- (2) **The Citizens Agenda** - exploring how citizens and communities need to be engaged in efforts to combat climate change.

The discussion groups used the Draft Climate Change Bill as the basis for discussion, effectively scrutinising the proposals in the Draft Bill. The groups also considered wider climate change policy from local, national, and global perspectives. They gave participants the opportunity to suggest their own policy ideas and approaches to tackling climate change.

Discussion Group 1: Emissions Targets

- The group felt that there should be clearly defined short, medium and long-term budget periods in statute for carbon emissions. The Government should signal more ambition in its long-term target; suggesting that the 2050 target should be for an 80% reduction, rather than the proposed 60%. The group also suggested more ambition in relation to the proposed mid-term target; suggesting a 50% CO₂ reduction target by 2020 rather than the proposed 26-32% target. However the group was also concerned that the more targets there

are, the weaker they can become. The key priority should be to have ambitious, achievable and well defined targets.

- There was a clear consensus that the Government should produce annual targets and that progress should be clearly measured and publicised. The group felt that one year targets would be more appropriate and would again indicate a stronger ambition to reduce carbon emissions. The group also felt these carbon budgeting targets should include an element of devolution from the centre - to include all Government Departments, regions and local authorities. Participants were strongly in favour of incorporating into the Bill a duty for all Secretaries of State to take responsibility for reducing emissions across their Government Departments. It was also suggested that, where appropriate, all new legislation should carry a climate change assessment.
- The group was agreed on the importance of reviewing targets and that the power to review and strengthen targets should be through secondary legislation. The group also felt that the Bill should recognise the need to be flexible and responsive in target setting, especially in light of scientific or technological developments, or evidence in the future that climate change is advancing at an accelerated pace.
- In relation to the 'banking' and trading of emissions reductions the group was strongly against the idea that purchased emissions reductions from overseas should count towards the UK's reduction targets. The group was also against the concept of carrying over emissions targets surplus into future years and that borrowing across budgetary periods should not be allowed. There should be a legal duty for the UK to stay within its carbon budgets.

- The group felt that the Government was right to focus primarily on CO2 emissions reductions and to keep under review broadening emissions policy to other greenhouse gas emissions. The group was concerned that focussing at this stage on other greenhouse gases could be a distraction from the major challenge of reducing CO2 emissions. (However the discussion group on the Citizen's Agenda felt that it was important to eventually expand emissions reductions targets to include other greenhouse gases including methane. They identified the exclusive focus on CO2 as a possible weakness of the Draft Bill.)

Discussion Groups 2 & 3: The Citizens Agenda

Public Awareness and Action

- The key issue identified by the groups was the urgency of taking action to raise the level of awareness of climate change and to publicise what individuals can do to make a difference. It was felt there needed to be a clear and robust public empowerment agenda linked to the Draft Climate Change Bill and other policy.
- It was pointed out that it was important to keep the climate change debate accessible. This involved not using such as 'carbon footprint'. Whilst such terms are now common language to those interested in green issues, they are not terms in common use amongst wider society, and especially in hard to reach groups where promoting a broader understanding of climate change issues is essential.

- The groups also felt that the wider narrative on climate change needed to shift to highlight the consequences locally and in the UK. It was felt that there was too much focus on global consequences in Africa, Asia and the Arctic/ Antarctica and that highlighting more local impacts would galvanise more action. It was suggested that media could play a greater role in educating the public and encouraging action.
- The groups felt more legislative changes could be brought forward to stimulate action to tackle climate change. Suggestions included a tightening of building regulations in relation to environmental sustainability; changing regulations relating to the production of domestic appliances and the need for a universal and comprehensible carbon points system for packaging (such as a traffic lights system). It was also suggested that further regulation of energy supply companies might be needed to encourage the industry to be more pro-active in providing energy saving advice to business and domestic customers.

The groups felt that there needed to be more distinction between the need to shift the behaviours of institutions/ organisations and individual citizens. It was also noted that there needed to be a combination of reward-based incentives for action (including financial and economic incentives) and punishments and sanctions for not taking action. It was suggested specifically in relation to large corporations that voluntary approaches often fail and that the only effective means of instigating behavioural changes is negative incentives, punishments and sanctions. It was suggested that more enterprise grants and support could be targeted at businesses leading on important green initiatives (such as energy saving light bulb manufactures), and that more financial support should be made available for schools that want to achieve carbon neutrality. However it was also recognised that some large and small businesses have taken pioneering and innovative action to help tackle climate change. It was also

acknowledged that some of the big supermarket chains are taking steps in the right direction and they should be encouraged further.

The groups recognised that some communities are also implementing innovative and important changes. It was suggested that the Government could reward these communities and encourage the wider sharing of best practice.

The importance of encouraging lifestyle changes and greener behaviour amongst individual citizens was identified by the group as a major priority that needed more emphasis in the Draft Bill. International comparisons were drawn in relation to individual action, including with some EU and US states where, for example, there is legal enforcement of recycling. It was also suggested that people needed more support and information on taking small steps as opposed to significant lifestyle changes which can act as a deterrent to action. The issue of affordability was raised, especially in relation to energy saving products. Financial incentives at the domestic level for going green are not yet commonplace.

- The group raised the importance of linking climate change to social justice and social exclusion policy. It recognised that poorer communities, globally and locally will be damaged the most by climate change, and that poorer communities can also be excluded from taking action because of education and awareness. Tackling climate change is not always seen as a priority amongst lower income groups who may be pre-occupied with more pressing issues such as housing, finance, education, childcare and health.
- It was noted that the tax system could be developed and adapted to be more responsive to climate change; including motor vehicle tax and tax-based incentives for home insulation and switching to sustainable/renewable energy.

Weaknesses of the Bill

The group welcomed the Draft Climate Change Bill, but agreed that it should only be seen as a first step and not an end in itself. Progress to tackle climate change will require further legislation and will have wider policy and social implications. The group had strong concerns that a Climate Change Bill/Act alone would not be enough and that broader policy solutions needed to be brought forward by Government.

There was some unease that passing a Climate Change Act may deter the Government from taking further action on the issue. However the vast majority of participants welcomed the Draft Bill and recognised that it could ever only be part of the solution.

Some of the weaknesses of the Draft Bill that participants particularly identified is a lack of annual emissions reductions targets. The group also wanted to see a stricter and a more rigid approach to targets with stronger accountability and reporting mechanisms for targets.

It was suggested that the Draft Bill could have taken a more robust approach to the aviation and shipping industries. It was strongly felt that the Draft Bill did not recognise nearly enough the importance of reducing aviation and shipping emissions in the wider emissions reduction strategy.

The group felt that it was important the Government maintained credibility on the issue of climate change. It recognised that policy must always be based on sound scientific evidence and must change in response to future scientific evidence and technological developments.

Beyond the Bill

Looking beyond the proposals in the Draft Climate Change Bill the group identified several areas for further Government action to tackle climate change including achieving a fully integrated public transport system; reforming planning laws; strengthening and increasing the status of environmental impact assessments for new buildings and developments and doing more to promote viable sustainable communities with local amenities, services and shops.

Another desirable change would be incorporating a visible energy consumption reader on domestic appliances that would help individuals monitor their own consumption and progress in reducing energy usage. It was also noted that more should be done to encourage greater investment in renewable energies including combined heat and power generation at the local level, as well as doing more to support micro-generation.

Committee on Climate Change

In relation to the proposals for a Committee on Climate Change the group were clear in stating the need for total independence. Its credibility will be entirely dependent on its membership and powers.

It was suggested that the Committee should have a diverse membership but that it should be led by scientific experts who can provide evidential and objective assessments of progress. It was noted that the Committee should not have a membership dominated by politicians or biased stakeholders.

It was also suggested that in some way there should be a model of public engagement in monitoring progress and holding the Government to account on climate change progress.

It was also suggested that the Committee might have an international membership, in order to ensure an independent and impartial assessment is made. It was also identified that there should be a structure of democratic

accountability of those on the Committee itself, possibly including elections of some type. There was a consensus that interest groups including industry should not dominate the composition of such a Committee.

Ten issues for Peter Soulsby MP to raise with the Government following the Leicester South Citizens Inquiry on the Draft Climate Change Bill

- 1. Will the Government consider having more ambitious emissions reduction targets, especially in relation to long-term targets? Perhaps moving from a 60% target by 2050 to an 80% emissions reduction target?**

- 2. Will the Government consider having annual emissions targets as well as five year targets, to enable progress to be more closely monitored?**

- 3. Will the Government do more to ensure the climate change debate is more accessible and that more is done to widen public understanding of the need for action?**

- 4. Will the Government ensure that tackling climate change is a top priority for all Government Departments and that all new legislation contains, where appropriate, a climate change impact assessment?**

- 5. Will the Government develop a devolved structure for tackling climate change with departmental, regional and local emissions reduction targets; and with responsibility devolved to local authorities?**

- 6. Will the Government take a more robust approach to ensuring the aviation and shipping industries do more to reduce emissions?**

7. Will the Government and specifically HM Treasury put in place a framework of financial and tax-based incentives for action for business and industry and individual citizens?

8. Will the Government commit to renewing and improving climate change legislation as new scientific evidence comes to light?

9. Will the Government ensure that tackling climate change is fully linked to social inclusion policy and commit the Social Exclusion Unit to bring forward proposals to ensure no groups - especially lower income groups - are excluded from taking action to tackle climate change?

10. Will the Government pledge to putting in place a totally independent and representative Committee on Climate Change to monitor progress, and ensure the Committee is led by scientific experts?

With thanks to....

Speakers and panellists:

Professor Paul Fleming, Institute of Energy & Sustainable Development, De Montfort University

Councillor Matt Follet, Leicester City Council

Malcolm Hunter, Leicester Friends of the Earth

David Nicholls, Chief Executive, Groundwork Leicester & Leicestershire Parkfield

Eddie Playfair, Principle of Regent College, Leicester

Discussion group facilitators and note takers.

And most importantly all the participants who attended and contributed to the discussion and debate and those who did not attend but sent written comments about the Draft Climate Change Bill

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If you would like further copies of this report please get in touch.