

Georgia Gould
Leader, Camden Council

Dear Georgia,

Building back better

Today, our collective focus is to mitigate the worst health, economic and social effects of COVID19. Camden Council staff have been doing an outstanding job, keeping vital services going and protecting the most vulnerable. Nothing should distract them from that critical task and we thank you and them for their work.

Soon, however, important decisions will have to be made about how the millions of pounds of public money that will need to be invested to drive recovery should be used. Do we want to simply rebuild what we had before, or should we invest in a more resilient future?

There is a risk that as local and national politicians, exhausted and under pressure to deliver quick wins, put aside their commitment to respond to that other emergency: a planet hurtling towards a 4 degree rise in temperature, engendering agricultural collapse and mass extinction. We believe that this would be an unforgivable mistake. As the UN's environment chief has said: failing to take care of the planet means failing to take care of ourselves. The time we have to act is short – the infrastructure we build in the next few years will be what we have in 2050, so we have no time to lose.

This crisis has shown three key things.

First, the current health crisis is symptomatic of the wider crisis of climate change and the destruction of nature. Diseases such as Ebola, bird flu, SARS and now COVID19 originate in animals, and are being driven by the unsustainable exploitation of natural ecosystems for agriculture and other commodities. The destruction of these key habitats seems far away from urban life in Camden, but it is not: it is embedded in the food we eat and the products we buy. In our global society, a crisis in one part of the world quickly spreads across borders.

Second, it has shown that in times of crisis, human beings are remarkably adaptive and can deliver radical change at speed. While difficult, we believe that it is possible to learn from this and to deliver a similarly radical and swift response to the climate and ecological crisis which constitute an even bigger threat to the health and well-being of our families, friends and neighbours

Third, as ever, the most vulnerable amongst are hit the hardest when we don't get the right policies in place. We need to act with this in mind, ensuring that the transition to a low carbon economy also benefits the most vulnerable and excluded, including those in other, low income countries.

Camden has shown extraordinary leadership in the past year in relation to the climate emergency, and that leadership is needed now more than ever. We call on you to:

- **Lobby national government to ensure that public funds are used to deliver a just transition to a zero emission economy and a more resilient future.** Work with the Mayor of London and the Local Government Association to lobby national government to ensure that recovery funds accelerate the transition to a low carbon economy *and* benefit the most vulnerable. We must not repeat the mistakes of 2008 which failed to deliver either.
- **Focus recovery funding on investments that create local green jobs**, including retrofitting, scaling renewables, revitalising locally-owned, small businesses and develop the circular economy. Now is the moment to revisit the way in which the Council procures goods and services, learning from other progressive councils, such as that in Stockton. We think there is a real opportunity to engage with progressive partners in the private sector who are looking to invest in programmes that deliver social and environmental outcomes, and would encourage the Council to explore these opportunities.
- **Revisit the Council's existing budget to identify ways in which it could be repurposed to deliver a more resilient future.** For example, how can the transport budget be repurposed to lock in improvements in air quality and streets that are safe for walking and cycling? In the interim, follow the examples of Berlin, Bogota and other cities in temporarily re-purposing roads not required for the current much reduced traffic flows as streets for walkers and cyclists^{1,2}. How could the housing budget be better used to accelerate the energy transition? Are there ways in which the green spaces budget could be used to enable more people to grow more of the food they eat and to foster biodiversity?
- **Sustain the renewed sense of community and mutual aid**, supporting local groups to help to build that different future and opening up Council processes so that we can make the big decisions about our future path together.

Signed by:

Climate Emergency Camden
Extinction Rebellion, Camden
Camden Cycling Campaign

¹ [World cities turn their streets over to walkers and cyclists | The Guardian](#)

² [Pop-up bike lanes help with coronavirus physical distancing in Germany](#)

Greening Leighton
Power Up North London
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Friends of the Earth Camden
Transition Kentish Town
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Cc:

Cllr Adam Harrison,
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Cllr Sian Berry, Leader Green Party
Cllr Flic Rea, Leader Liberal Democrat
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