

To:

Cllr. Lezley Picton, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Policy and Strategy,
Improvement and Communications
Cllr. Ian Nellins, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Natural Assets & The Green
Economy
Philip Dunne MP
Daniel Kawczynski MP
Owen Paterson MP

An Open letter from Green Party Councillors in Shropshire.

“Humanity as whole, at halftime, is 5 -1 down”. “Code red for humanity”. “Our last best chance”. The rhetoric has certainly ramped up as COP26 arrives. Delivery in Glasgow is uncertain, but there is now a consensus on the need to eliminate carbon emissions and to do so quickly. There is also a desperate need to prepare for the inevitable, even if the world succeeds in limiting the average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees.

At the same time, we know our communities, both global and local, face enormous challenges. Some are directly related to global heating, but most have been with us for a long time or were brought on or heightened by the pandemic.

We must work out how to address these challenges in a way that also tackles the climate emergency. Luckily, this is possible. Here in Shropshire, our own COP26 commitments could create healthy, secure, prosperous, equitable communities whilst contributing to a net zero future, but only if we urgently invest in zero carbon solutions, whilst putting an end to fossil fuel dependency.

- Well insulated homes with heating powered by renewable energy will improve comfort and health for all, but especially for those in substandard dwellings that are costly to heat. Shropshire Council needs to lead on accelerating partnership work with our housing associations, and neighbouring councils, and with training providers to start this work at scale. This now needs an annual target for decarbonising Shropshire’s social homes to decarbonise 19,000 of them by 2030. Homeowners need help with grant applications and who to go to for advice. Shropshire Council, working with the Town and Parish councils, could ensure there are Home Energy Advice Hubs available to all our communities. We should also be committing to zero carbon building by the council’s wholly owned development company, Cornovii. So far this hasn’t been the case, but other councils, like York, have managed this. We need a rethink to make this possible. Our planning policies are not yet robust enough to ensure developers only build homes for the future. These too need a rethink.
- Regular, affordable, high quality, zero-carbon public transport will improve connectivity and economic prospects for all, but especially for isolated and disadvantaged communities. Better walking and cycling facilities can reduce congestion and improve health. Shropshire Council’s highways and

transport planning must be redesigned to achieve these aims above all else. Our neighbours in Herefordshire have delivered free weekend Buses. Oswestry Town Council is funding a free bus service in the run up to Christmas. Let's commit to much more of this, by bringing back evening and Sunday services and by adopting the CPRE's aim for a bus in 'every village, every hour' which they have shown is cheaper for the nation than the current plans for road expansion. Let's commit to pushing hard for improved rail connectivity, getting towns like Oswestry back on the network. Of course, a serious commitment to sustainable transport is undermined by the continued plans for a new Shrewsbury by-pass, as well as continued priority given to other road. It's time to catch up with reality and place the investment and commitment in transport that supports our communities in a zero-carbon future.

- Land management that prioritises soil health, carbon storage, rainwater retention and reduced methane emissions will protect our countryside, reduce flood risk and provide healthy diets. So far, the government has ducked the issue, but as a rural county we can lead the way. We need to incentivise our farmers with a Sustainable Food Strategy, including a reduction in meat consumption, in council workplaces and through the council's influencing role with schools, colleges and other partners.
- Shropshire council has a welcome commitment to being self-sufficient in renewable energy for its own buildings. This requires continued investment in renewable energy. Solar farms and locally produced biofuels should continue to be supported, but wind generation needs to be part of the mix and Shropshire Council could promote this too, and help others to meet their energy needs locally.
- From e-cargo bike delivery schemes to the fantastic Bishops Castle Heat Initiative – investigating a renewable energy scheme for heating homes in the town – there are people with energy and commitment making change happen, but so far the scale is nowhere near enough. For a local zero carbon strategy to be meaningful it must be rolled out well beyond the council, mobilising those with the energy and drive to take the lead whilst pushing others to get up to speed. By shifting policy, using influence, and activating its contracting and purchasing power Shropshire Council can promote a greener local economy, and steer activity away from those doing harm. This needs a robust Council led Net Zero Partnership with local 'anchor institutions' – the LEP, higher and further education sector, the health services, the larger businesses and third sector - joining together to promote a greener local economy. It means putting wellbeing and sustainability before raw 'growth' measurement. Shropshire's previous economic strategy has run out, so let's commit to a Net Zero Economy and Wellbeing Strategy for Shropshire that accelerates the move away from fossil fuels, tests all supported investment and development against this aim, and invests in effective support for a sustainable net zero future. Our county's pension funds could help if a proportion was set aside for local renewable investment. At the same time these funds must stop profiting from destructive fossil fuel-based industries.

- Our communities must help to shape these changes. Simply imposing change could easily backfire. Residents need to know how these changes can improve our lives and they need to be able to track progress. Zero Carbon Shropshire and the South Shropshire Climate Action Partnership have done great work in demonstrating what a zero-carbon county could look like and what needs to be done. Shropshire Council needs to work closely with these community organisations and others to ensure residents are involved in every step, can see progress and can easily make the choices that will help us all.
- Some of the impacts of the climate emergency are being felt now. Further impact is inevitable however quickly we decarbonise. Shropshire needs an Adaptation and Resilience Plan, developed alongside partners in health, the environment agency and the emergency services, that is shared with residents.
- Much of the change we need is 'place-based' and will require local leadership and initiative. For too long local government has been stymied in its climate action ambitions by a lack of funds, short term funding pots that are difficult to access and regulations that undermine the government's own legal commitment to net zero. We call on the counties MPs to work to ensure the planned 'Net Zero Forum' announced recently within the Net Zero Strategy becomes a genuine partnership between national and local government, brings forward regulation and funding that removes existing barriers and gives local councils the power to move ahead at pace.

Green Party councillors will work with others to help realise this future. Our councillors brought the first climate action motion to Shropshire Council in 2018. We brought forward further motions on the retrofit challenge and on sustainable transport planning. We have challenged the direction of the local plan which continues to enable car dependent unaffordable homes on green field sites. We won proposals to add Shropshire Council's voice to demands for much more support from central government to enable councils to lead on climate action. We have helped to change the conversation. We will continue to look for opportunities to work with others, in the council administration and beyond, to make change happen because, if we don't act now, it will soon be too late.

Yours,

Julian Dean, Shropshire Councillor, Porthill, and Shrewsbury Town Councillor

Julia Evans, Shropshire Councillor, Radbrook

Duncan Kerr, Shropshire Councillor, Oswestry South, and Oswestry Town Councillor

Mike Isherwood, Shropshire Councillor, Oswestry West and Oswestry Town Councillor

Lyn Antill, Church Stretton Town Councillor

Olly Rose, Oswestry Town Councillor

Stephen Froggatt, Oswestry Town Councillor

Josh Cockburn, Oswestry Town Councillor

Georgia Stackhouse, Oswestry Town Councillor

Jonathan Upton, Oswestry Town Councillor

Gemma Cassin, Oswestry Town Councillor
Jay Moore, Oswestry Town Councillor
Sian Kerr, Oswestry Town Councillor
Sam Chadwick, Oswestry Town Councillor
Rosie Radford, Oswestry Town Councillor
Steve Watts, Oswestry Rural Parish Councillor
Chris Lemon, Shrewsbury Town Councillor
Paul Herbert, Weston Rhyn Parish Councillor
Sophie Hughes-Saunier, St Martins Parish Councillor
Mike Atherton, Much Wenlock Town Councillor