

# GREEN BILL OF HEALTH

ACTING NOW FOR A SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY & HEALTHY FUTURE





**February 2021**

Authors: Ágnes Szuda and Charlie Clay

This research report was started by Charlie Clay and finished by Ágnes Szuda at Policy Connect.


Policy Connect  
7-14 Great Dover Street  
London  
SE1 4YR

[www.policyconnect.org.uk](http://www.policyconnect.org.uk)


# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>A green and healthy recovery</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Preparing for COP26</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Planning for the future</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>About this report</b>	<b>21</b>





**The pandemic is a reminder of the intimate and delicate relationship between people and planet. Any efforts to make our world safer are doomed to fail unless they address the critical interface between people and pathogens, and the existential threat of climate change, that is making our Earth less habitable.**



WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.  
Address to the 73rd World Health Assembly on 18th May 2020.

# Foreword

As we look forward to the hugely important COP26 climate summit this autumn, we can take a number of lessons from the past year that will help the UK in its exciting leadership role. We share with all our global partners the challenge of building back our nations' health and economies, and Covid-19 has given us important pointers on how to make that a green and resilient recovery, one that will help reduce and minimise the impact of climate change on our nation's health.

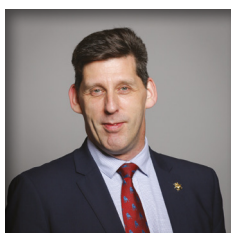
In recent years, we have become more aware of the effects of climate change on our health. From premature deaths of our elderly loved ones due to heat stroke, to the growth and global spread of unfamiliar diseases, climate change has many health impacts. These are not just problems in far-flung parts; they have direct effects in the UK. To take one example, according to Public Health England the record temperatures in the summer of 2019 claimed almost 900 extra lives in England.

We know what kinds of actions are needed to tackle climate change, such as improving our homes - which are ill prepared for both excess heat and flooding; our transport infrastructure; and the ability of our healthcare services to deal with the health consequences of climate change. Besides the fundamental loss and disruption, the Covid-19 pandemic also brings the opportunity to build back better, to switch to the jobs and industries that will tackle the twin consequences of unemployment and poor health.

Only eight months remain until the UK will appear on the global diplomatic stage as the host of COP26, the world's largest annual climate summit. COP26 provides the moment to ensure that the pandemic and climate change – both representing global problems – are tackled with global cooperation. As host of the conference, the UK has a momentous opportunity to lead by example and forge the success of the global recovery. The key to this is credibility in our domestic policy and demonstrable action. The UK needs to take early and important decisions about what we want our post-COVID world to look like, and to start delivering on measures that put climate and health front and centre.

This report aims to provide some pointers by setting out recommendations in three areas: the need for a green and healthy recovery, leadership at COP26, and planning for the future.

We are delighted to have co-chaired the evidence session that formed the basis of this research report, bringing together the expertise of health and climate professionals. We would like to thank everyone who gave of their time and expertise, and say a special thank you to the Lancet Countdown who kindly sponsored this Policy Connect report.



**Lord Duncan of Springbank**

Former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy  
Conservative Party



**Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP**

Former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Labour Party

# Introduction

Climate change has been described as the ‘biggest global health threat of the 21st century’<sup>1</sup>, threatening to undermine the last half century’s gains in public health<sup>2</sup>. It disrupts the health and wellbeing of communities, and the foundations on which health systems are built, via its direct and indirect impacts on environmental and social systems (See Box 1). Besides its global impacts, climate change also has severe implications on the health of the UK population (See Box 2).

There is an urgent need to tackle climate change to ensure global temperature rise is kept below the Paris target of 1.5°C – now seen as the threshold for avoiding the worst impacts of climate change<sup>3</sup>. However, the past year has brought another major threat to human health: Covid-19.

To recover from the economic and social impacts from the pandemic, countries will need to build back jobs and industries. We have learnt many new ways of doing business during Covid-19, and if we can exploit the best practical examples, we will also tackle the problem of climate change. Addressing climate change in turn has the potential to solve many of the biggest health challenges of our century<sup>4</sup>, and a green and healthy recovery from Covid-19 can help put the world on track to net zero.

Countries around the world responded to Covid-19 with lockdowns of varying severity to rapidly reduce and contain the spread of infection. These lockdowns saved millions of lives, but also damaged livelihoods and industries, and deepened inequalities across society. The rapid transformation in how people live, learn and work has given us a window to decide how to build back fairer and develop a ‘new normal’. When assessed simultaneously from a health and climate perspective, the pandemic calls for a systematic rethinking of current practices<sup>5</sup>.

There is widespread recognition that the recovery from Covid-19 must be a green and healthy one that builds our systems back in a more resilient way<sup>6</sup>. The response to the pandemic, and all stimulus and recovery measures to deal with its impact must be aligned with wider net zero aspirations. Investing in a green recovery can in turn improve health and well-being.

2021 is an important year in which we can link efforts to solve the converging challenges of health and climate change. COP26<sup>7</sup> presents an opportunity to ensure the long-term effectiveness of the Covid-19 response by linking it to measures that aim to address the recovery from the pandemic and those targeting climate change<sup>8</sup>. As host of the COP26 summit, the UK has significant opportunity and responsibility to lead by example and thus shape the success of the global recovery.

This report presents recommendations for the UK government to implement in order to tackle the converging challenges of climate change and public health as we emerge from Covid-19. It sets out recommendations in three areas: the need for a green and healthy recovery, leadership at COP26, and planning for the future.

<sup>1</sup> Costello, A. et al., 2009. Managing the health effects of climate change. *The Lancet*. Vol. 373, No. 9676: 1693–1733.

<sup>2</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. *The Lancet*. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

<sup>3</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2018. Special report: Global warming of 1.5°C.

<sup>4</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2015. Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health. *The Lancet*. Vol. 386, No. 10006: 1861–1914.

<sup>5</sup> Munro, A., Boyce, T. and Marmot, M. 2020. Sustainable Health Equity: Achieving a Net-Zero UK. Health Expert Advisory Group Report for the UK Committee on Climate Change.

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization. 2020. WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19. Accessed at <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/who-manifesto-for-a-healthy-recovery-from-covid-19> on 24 January 2020.

<sup>7</sup> The 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

<sup>8</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. *The Lancet*. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

## The report calls on government to implement the following recommendations:

### Green and healthy recovery:

1. Ensure that stimulus and recovery measures do not subsidise carbon intensive industries that lock in climate risks and worsen health conditions.
2. Use stimulus and recovery measures to promote active transport, and building on this, widen the UK's COP26 presidency focus on sustainable vehicles to sustainable transport more broadly, including cycling and walking.
3. Ensure that stimulus and recovery measures from Covid-19 facilitate the durable transition to a climate resilient, energy efficient and healthy building stock.
4. Couple the NHS net zero plan with a comprehensive adaptation strategy and include responding to climate change as a priority of the new National Institute for Health Protection.
5. Use Covid-19 stimulus measures to expand high quality green spaces.
6. Frontload funding to create Sustainable Drainage Systems as a COVID-19 stimulus measure and launch stimulus packages that specifically focus on increasing Property Flood Resilience.

### Preparing for COP26:

7. Establish and lead a coalition of countries promoting a green, resilient and healthy recovery from COVID-19.
8. Lead by example at COP26 through a set of ambitious domestic policies.
9. Emphasise the role of the health care sector in climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience at COP26.

### Planning for the future:

10. Install the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care as a permanent member of the Climate Action Strategy Committee and Climate Action Implementation Committee.
11. Support the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill to enshrine in law a duty on public bodies to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations.

# Introduction

## Box 1: Global overview of health and climate change

Climate change has numerous implications for public health across the globe that urgently need greater attention in national and international policy making.

Health risks associated with climate change occur through gradual changes in average conditions (e.g. a warmer climate), as well as in variability (e.g. more frequent floods, storms or heatwaves)<sup>9</sup>.

Climate change has already led to significant shifts in the social and environmental determinants of health. The Lancet Countdown – an international collaboration tracking the health profile of the changing climate through an independent global monitoring system – has identified in its 2020 report concerning and often accelerating trends for each of the human symptoms of climate change monitored. The 2020 report presented the most worrying outlook since the Lancet Countdown was established<sup>10</sup>. As it is not possible, here, to cover the long list of different impacts climate change has on health, this report examines selected indicators to demonstrate the scale of the problem.

One of the most immediate and direct impacts of the changing climate on human health is seen in the increased frequency, intensity, and duration of extremes of heat<sup>11</sup>. Heatwaves have become more frequent globally and vulnerability to extremes of heat has continued to rise in every world region. Due to a combination of rising heatwave occurrences and ageing populations, a record 475 million additional exposures to heatwaves that affect vulnerable populations was recorded in 2019<sup>12</sup>. From 2000 to 2018, the heat related mortality of people older than 65 increased by nearly 54%, and an excess of 100 billion potential work hours were lost in 2019 compared to 2000<sup>13</sup>.

Global food security is impacted by rising temperatures, increased frequency of extreme events and changing precipitation patterns. The global yield potential for major crops decreased by 1.8–5.6% between 1981 and 2019<sup>14</sup>. Another concern is that the climate suitability for the transmission of diseases, including dengue and malaria has increased globally and regionally since the 1950s<sup>15</sup>. Due to warming waters the area of the Baltic coastline favourable to *Vibrio* bacteria (which can cause gastroenteritis, wound infections and sepsis) has increased by 61.2% since the 1980s<sup>16</sup>.

Climate impacts on nutrition and infectious diseases are coupled with increased exposure to high risk of wildfires, drought and floods. Altered precipitation patterns increase the risk of localised flood events<sup>17</sup> that can lead to direct injury, damage homes, contaminate freshwater supplies, heighten the risk of water-borne diseases, and create breeding grounds for disease-carrying insects such as mosquitoes, while also impacting mental health and disrupting the supply of medical and health services. Moreover, due to climate change, there will be an increased likelihood of high sea level conditions resulting in coastal flooding. Rising sea levels can lead to a range of health impacts, including livelihood security, changes in water and soil quality and supply, the spread of disease vectors and saltwater intrusion, and as Lancet Countdown data shows, between 145 million people and 565 million people currently live in areas at risk of rising sea levels globally<sup>18</sup>.

As they interact with already existing vulnerabilities, these effects of climate change have unequal impacts across society, often having a disproportionate impact on those who contributed the least to the underlying causes of climate change. Already disadvantaged communities are often the most vulnerable to the effects of extreme events and systemic shocks, therefore, climate change has a potential to widen existing health inequalities<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization. 2015. Strengthening Health Resilience to Climate Change. Technical Briefing for the World Health Organization Conference on Health and Climate.

<sup>10</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. The Lancet. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

<sup>11</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2019. The 2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate. The Lancet. Vol. 394, No. 10211:1836-1878.

<sup>12</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. The Lancet. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

<sup>13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Munro, A., Boyce, T. and Marmot, M. 2020. Sustainable Health Equity: Achieving a Net-Zero UK. Health Expert Advisory Group Report for the UK Committee on Climate Change.



## Box 2: The health impacts of climate change in the UK

In the UK, the impacts of climate change on health include those arising from higher summer temperatures, increased exposure of UV radiation and pollen, more frequent flooding, poorer air and water quality, water and vector-borne diseases<sup>20</sup>. In addition, increased winter precipitation can lead to more damp and cold homes, as well as to changes in food production, thus impacting health<sup>21</sup>.

These impacts are felt unequally across the UK's society, with disadvantaged groups often bearing more of the climate health burden, for example due to poor housing. Without intervention, climate change will further exacerbate existing health inequalities<sup>22</sup>.

While it is not possible to cover all health-related impacts of climate change on the UK population within the scope of this report, a few examples are discussed below to demonstrate the scale and urgency of the problem.

### Heatwaves

Lancet Countdown data shows that Europe remains the most vulnerable region to heat exposure worldwide, due to its ageing population, high rates of urbanisation, the prevalence of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and diabetes<sup>23</sup>. The UK's population is particularly vulnerable to heat-related health impacts. In the summer of 2019, the UK saw record temperatures, and in 2018 there were four heatwaves in the UK, resulting in 863 excess deaths<sup>24,25</sup>. The number of heat-related deaths in the UK is expected to rise from 2,000 to approximately 7,000 each year by the 2050s<sup>26</sup>. In 2010, approximately five million staff days were lost due to overheating above 26°C. Based on an average staff cost of £150 per day, this resulted in an economic loss of £770 million<sup>27</sup>.

### Floods and storms

Around 1.8 million people across the UK are living in homes that are at risk of significant river, surface water or coastal flooding<sup>28</sup>. There have been several major flood events in recent years, such as the 2007 floods and the winter storms of 2013-14, and, as a result of Storm Dennis, 1,650 homes were flooded in England and Wales in February 2020<sup>29</sup>. Public Health England surveyed mental health outcomes following flooding in winter 2013-14 and observed that the risk of depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was approximately 6 times higher in this group than in those unaffected by flooding<sup>30</sup>. Climate change will further increase the likelihood of flooding in the UK's coastal areas and rivers<sup>31</sup>.

### Vector-borne diseases

Warmer springs associated with climate change can lead to increased numbers of the tick *Ixodes ricinus*, which is a vector of *Lyme borreliosis* in the UK<sup>32</sup>. The Asian Tiger mosquito, *Aedes albopictus* is a vector for dengue virus and chikungunya virus, both of which may cause serious or life-threatening infections. The mosquito has been identified in at least 25 European countries, including the UK (though transmission of dengue or chikungunya has not yet been recorded in the UK)<sup>33</sup>.

### Food security

Almost one fifth of the fresh food the UK imports comes from countries vulnerable to climate change, including India, South Africa, Belize and Brazil<sup>34</sup>. In the UK, more frequent extreme temperatures and changes to rainfall patterns will lead to overall negative impacts on production in the UK, even if a warmer climate may improve the UK growing conditions for some crops<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Munro, A., Boyce, T. and Marmot, M. 2020. Sustainable Health Equity: Achieving a Net-Zero UK. Health Expert Advisory Group Report for the UK Committee on Climate Change. <sup>21, 22, 35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. The Lancet. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

<sup>24</sup> Madge, G. 2019. Summer 2019 climate statistics: largely warm and wet. Accessed at <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2019/summer-2019-statistics> on 19 January 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Public Health England. 2019. PHE heatwave mortality monitoring Summer 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Hajat, S., Vardoulakis, S., Heaviside, C. and Eggen, B. 2014. Climate change effects on human health: projections of temperature-related mortality for the UK during the 2020s, 2050s and 2080s. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. Vol. 68, No. 7: 641-648.

<sup>27</sup> Surminski, S et al. 2016. UK Climate Change Risk Assessment Evidence Report: Chapter 6, Business and Industry. Report prepared for the Adaptation Sub-Committee of the Committee on Climate Change, London.

<sup>28</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2019. UK housing: Fit for the future?

<sup>29</sup> Met Office. 2020. Record breaking rainfall. Accessed at: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2020/2020-winter-february-stats> on 20 January 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Public Health England. 2017. The English National Study for Flooding and Health: First year report. Briefing for policy makers and practitioners.

<sup>31</sup> NERC. 2015. Health Climate Change Impacts. Report Card.

<sup>32</sup> Vardoulakis S, Heaviside C 2012. Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK 2012. Current evidence, recommendations and research gaps.

<sup>33</sup> Medlock, J. M. Vaux, A. C., Cull, B., Schaffner, F. Gillingham, E., Pfluger, V., and Leach, S. 2017. Detection of the invasive mosquito species *Aedes albopictus* in southern England. *Lancet Infectious Diseases*. Vol. 17, No. 2: 140.

<sup>34</sup> Scheelbeek, P. F. D., Moss, C., Kastner, T., Alae-Carew, C., Jarmul, S., Green, R., Taylor, A., Haines, A., Dangour, A. D. 2020. United Kingdom's fruit and vegetable supply is increasingly dependent on imports from climate-vulnerable producing countries. *Nature Food*. Vol. 1: 705-712.

<sup>35</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2018. Land-use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change. Cited in: Plumpton, H. and Wentworth, J. Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. 2019. Climate Change and Agriculture, POSTnote600.

# A green and healthy recovery

Covid-19 and the climate emergency both represent a threat to human welfare and prosperity. Governments all over the world, including the UK, have started to launch short-term stimulus and longer-term recovery measures to revitalise their economies from the disruption wrought by Covid-19. These packages will strongly influence whether the commitments made in Paris are met and the global temperature rise compared to pre-industrial levels kept under 1.5°C<sup>36</sup>.

Stimulus and recovery measures therefore play a key role in determining what the 'new normal' following the pandemic will look like. If designed and implemented carefully, the response to Covid-19 offers an important opportunity to facilitate a shift from our current economic model to a net zero-compatible economy whilst delivering health co-benefits (Box 3).

## Box 3: Co-benefits

Co-benefits are 'the positive effects that a policy or measure aimed at one objective might have on other objectives, thereby increasing the total benefits for society or the environment'<sup>37</sup> – win-win in shorthand. Among other factors, they depend on local circumstances and implementation practices.

Co-benefits are also important for climate change mitigation, as most policies designed to tackle greenhouse gas mitigation also have other, often at least equally important, rationales<sup>38</sup>. Positive impacts on health are amongst the most published type of co-benefits<sup>39</sup>. However, it is important to highlight that not all effects are always positive and care needs to be taken to ensure that the measures applied to tackle climate change are designed to unlock co-benefits for health<sup>40</sup>. (See recommendation 3 for more detail.)

Being more ambitious than current climate targets would also bring economic benefits. Keeping global temperature rise below 2°C would enhance air quality such that the consequent health gains would repay the investment cost twice over<sup>41,42</sup>. Going further and limiting temperature rise below 1.5°C by 2100 would generate a net economic global gain of 264-610 trillion USD<sup>43</sup>. Further benefits would also include a healthier workforce and reduced health care costs<sup>44</sup>.

It is important to highlight that Covid-19 has had highly uneven impacts across society, interacting with, and often exacerbating inequalities and disadvantages that existed prior to the pandemic<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, besides using any recovery effort to bring the UK closer to meeting its net zero target and enhance public health, we must ensure that recovery from Covid-19 happens fairly so as to leave no one behind. Where appropriate, policy design should target co-benefits that tackle the health, economic, education or other inequalities<sup>46</sup>.

The government is at a critical juncture in protecting the future health of the UK public from the impacts of climate change. It has a huge opportunity to introduce measures to support the recovery of the economy and accelerate the UK's transition to net zero that also prioritise the health of UK citizens and build our resilience to the impacts of climate change.

<sup>36</sup> Allan, J., Donovan, C., Ekins, P., Gambhir, A., Hepburn, C., Robins, N., Reay, D., Shuckburgh E., and Zenghelis, D. 2020. A net-zero emissions economic recovery from COVID-19. Smith School Working Paper 20-01.

<sup>37</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2018. Special Report: Global warming of 1.5 °C. Glossary.

<sup>38</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2001. Climate change 2001–Mitigation: Contribution of Working Group III to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change vol 3. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>39</sup> Deng H-M, Liang Q-M, Liu L-J, et al. 2018. Co-benefits of greenhouse gas mitigation: a review and classification by type, mitigation sector, and geography. *Environmental Research Letters*. 2018;12:123001.

<sup>40</sup> Milner, J., Hamilton, I., Woodcock, J., Williams, M., Davies, M., Wilkinson, P. and Haines, A. 2020. Health benefits of policies to reduce carbon emissions. *BMJ* 2020;368:l6758.

<sup>41</sup> Markandya, A., Sampedro, J., Smith, S., Van Dingenen, R., Pizarro-Irizar, C. Arto, J. and González-Eguino, M. 2018. Health co-benefits from air pollution and mitigation costs of the Paris Agreement: a modelling study. Vol. 2. No. 3. 126-133.

<sup>42</sup> World Health Organization. 2020. WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19. Accessed at <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/who-manifesto-for-a-healthy-recovery-from-covid-19> on 24 January 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Wei Y-M, Han R, Wang C, et al. 2020. Self-preservation strategy for approaching global warming targets in the post-Paris Agreement era. *Nature Communications*. Vol. 11: 1624.

<sup>44</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. *The Lancet*. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

<sup>45</sup> Munro, A., Boyce, T. and Marmot, M. 2020. Sustainable Health Equity: Achieving a Net-Zero UK. Health Expert Advisory Group Report for the UK Committee on Climate Change.

<sup>46</sup> IPPR. 2020. Faster, Further, Fairer: Putting people at the heart of tackling the climate and nature emergency.

## Recovery measures focusing on mitigating climate change

Climate mitigation measures provide a key tool to prevent the escalation of another health crisis. Therefore, Covid-19 stimulus and recovery measures need to pay particular attention to emissions reductions.

### Recommendation 1: Ensure that stimulus and recovery measures do not subsidise carbon intensive industries that lock in climate risks and worsen health conditions.

Any measures introduced to reduce unemployment and inequality caused by Covid-19 must not support investment into high carbon industries and infrastructure. For the UK to reach net zero by 2050, it is essential the government does not lock in carbon emissions for years to come by providing subsidies to fossil fuel and carbon intensive industries. Such ‘lock-in’ would not only amplify climate change and environmental degradation, but would also worsen public health outcomes both short- and long-term. Any support for carbon intensive industries must be conditional on a change to a less carbon intensive business model.

#### Box 4: The importance of a green recovery

The importance of a green recovery from Covid-19 was also emphasised by the Committee on Climate Change, urging the Government to “[e]nsure that the recovery does not ‘lock-in’ greenhouse gas emissions or increased climate risk”<sup>47</sup>. Similarly, as the recent Climate Assembly briefing highlighted, 79% of assembly members – representative of the UK public demographically and in terms of concern levels to climate change – agreed or strongly agreed that, “[s]teps taken by the government to help the economy recover should be designed to help achieve net zero”<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, requests were made at the assembly to ‘make the most of the economic opportunities presented by the path to net zero’, avoiding the lock-in of high carbon industries.

Public funds need to be invested in ways consistent with the UK’s commitment to be a net-zero economy by 2050 and government spending needs to be carefully assessed against this objective (Box 4). After the 2008 financial crisis, governments globally introduced a number of green stimulus measures making up 16% of total support. At the same time, however, they subsidised carbon intensive and fossil fuel industries; by 2010 greenhouse gas emissions were rapidly increasing again. The opportunity for systemic climate action was missed<sup>49</sup>. In the wake of Covid-19, the focus needs to be placed on green stimulus measures that accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels.

The government’s announcement in October 2020 of a £160 million funding package to increase the UK’s offshore wind capacity<sup>50</sup> and other elements of the Ten Point Plan that facilitate the transition towards a clean energy system in the UK are welcome steps in this process<sup>51</sup>. In another positive development, at the Climate Ambition Summit the Prime Minister pledged to end direct support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas from 2021<sup>52</sup>. However, it is important to ensure the principle of avoiding the lock-in of any climate risk is taken into account in all policies. As the government’s new Build Back Better Council starts its operation, the principles of a green, healthy and resilient recovery should be built into its operating principles and practices.

<sup>47</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2020. Reducing UK emissions. Progress Report to Parliament.

<sup>48</sup> Climate Assembly UK. 2020. Interim Briefing – Covid-19, Recovery and the Path to Net Zero.

<sup>49</sup> Peters, G., Marland, G., Le Quéré, C., Boden, T., Canadell, J., & Raupach, M. (2011). Rapid Growth in CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions after the 2008–2009 Global Financial Crisis. *Nature Climate Change*. 2. 2-4. 10.1038/nclimate1332.

<sup>50</sup> HM Government. 2020. New plans to make UK world leader in green energy. Press Release. Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-plans-to-make-uk-world-leader-in-green-energy> on 24 January 2021.

<sup>51</sup> HM Government. 2020. The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. Accessed at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/936567/10\\_POINT\\_PLAN\\_BOOKLET.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936567/10_POINT_PLAN_BOOKLET.pdf) on 24 January 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-the-uk-will-end-support-for-fossil-fuel-sector-overseas> on 21 January 2021.

## Recommendation 2: Use stimulus and recovery measures to promote active transport, and building on this, widen the UK's COP26 presidency focus on sustainable vehicles to sustainable transport more broadly, including cycling and walking.

The Government's commitment to support electric vehicle expansion is a prime example to mitigate climate change, bringing several health co-benefits through the decarbonisation of transport. However, while the electrification of transport reduces some roadside emissions, continued private vehicle dependence will remain a source of harmful particulate matter due to non-exhaust emissions (including road- and tyre-wear), thus still undermining health through air pollution<sup>53,54</sup>.

Alongside support for electric vehicles, the government should invest in supporting forms of active travel that, besides reducing emissions, also bring important health co-benefits by encouraging physical exercise. The government's frontload of £2bn spending - out of the £5bn pledged funding - on walking and cycling is also a good example of a policy win-win that has a wide range of positive co-benefits<sup>55</sup>. Cycling currently supports 64,000 jobs and further investment will increase the decarbonisation of our transport system, improve air quality in our cities and benefit our health and wellbeing<sup>56</sup>.

While this funding injection provides a rapid increase in the per person spending of the UK on cycling<sup>57</sup>, further continuous funding is required to ensure per person funding is kept high enough to create a sustained positive impact on cycling and walking.

Moreover, building on this, the UK should broaden its focus on sustainable vehicles (a priority of the UK's COP Presidency) to sustainable transport more widely and place the promotion of walking and cycling on the agenda.

## Recommendation 3: Ensure that stimulus and recovery measures from Covid-19 facilitate the durable transition to a climate resilient, energy efficient and healthy building stock.

Housing represents an important area where economic recovery and stimulus measures can help reduce emissions and mitigate climate change while bringing important health co-benefits.

The government has made a number of important economic stimulus announcements on housing: a £2 billion Green Homes Grant, a £50 million Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, and a £1 billion Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. These will reduce emissions from the UK building stock through enhanced energy efficiency and the installation of low carbon heating systems<sup>58,59</sup>. These measures also contribute to the creation and protection of skilled, green jobs whilst tackling climate change and improving public health.

<sup>53</sup> Munro, A., Boyce, T. and Marmot, M. 2020. Sustainable Health Equity: Achieving a Net-Zero UK. Health Expert Advisory Group Report for the UK Committee on Climate Change.

<sup>54</sup> Milner, J., Hamilton, I., Woodcock, J., Williams, M., Davies, M., Wilkinson, P. and Haines, A. 2020. Health benefits of policies to reduce carbon emissions. *BMJ* 2020;368:l6758.

<sup>55</sup> HM Government. May 2020. £2 billion package to create new era for cycling and walking. Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking> on 29 January 2021.

<sup>56</sup> DfT (2020) Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking (online). Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-plan-for-england>.

<sup>57</sup> Hirst, D. March 2020. Cycle funding and bike lanes: Is there enough money to create "mini-Hollands" in England? Accessed at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/cycle-funding-and-bike-lanes-is-there-enough-money-to-create-mini-hollands-in-england/> on 29 January 2021.

<sup>58</sup> HM Government. 2020. Press Release: Greener homes, jobs and cheaper bills on the way as government launches biggest upgrade of nation's buildings in a generation. Accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greener-homes-jobs-and-cheaper-bills-on-the-way-as-government-launches-biggest-upgrade-of-nations-buildings-in-a-generation> on 2 October 2020.

<sup>59</sup> BEIS. 2020. Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. Accessed at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-decarbonisation-scheme-psds#:~:text=The%20Public%20Sector%20Decarbonisation%20Scheme%20\(%20PSDS%20\)%20provides%20grants%20for%20public,efficiency%20and%20heat%20decarbonisation%20measures.&text=It%20will%20reduce%20non-traded,4%20and%20Carbon%20Budget%205](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-decarbonisation-scheme-psds#:~:text=The%20Public%20Sector%20Decarbonisation%20Scheme%20(%20PSDS%20)%20provides%20grants%20for%20public,efficiency%20and%20heat%20decarbonisation%20measures.&text=It%20will%20reduce%20non-traded,4%20and%20Carbon%20Budget%205) on 2 October 2020.

Reducing exposure to cold homes through energy efficiency retrofits can prevent hospital admissions, reduce the need for primary and social care, reduce incidences of risky health-related behaviours, and enable timely hospital discharge and/or a rapid recovery from periods of ill health<sup>60</sup>. If carried out well, home retrofits can improve indoor and outdoor air quality, thus reducing the likelihood of respiratory diseases. In addition, better insulation also brings climate change adaptation benefits by reducing exposure to extreme heat during the increasingly frequent heatwaves.

Notwithstanding the advantages of improved thermal efficiency, without adequate ventilation and appropriate design, energy efficiency measures can worsen indoor air quality and cause overheating. To avoid any unintended health consequences of retrofits, including respiratory conditions, allergic symptoms and cardiovascular diseases, it is important to design and implement these measures carefully. Good design to provide homes that are warm in winter and cool in summer will also remove the need for homeowners and tenants to resort to carbon-unfriendly air conditioning and secondary heating.

Further significant steps are needed to ensure the short-term, green stimulus provided now to the housing sector is used as a launch-pad to a truly resilient, net zero economy in which green jobs created now are protected and health benefits continue to be unlocked long-term<sup>61</sup>. To avoid the 'boom-and-bust failures' of past schemes, continuity needs to be guaranteed – which means allocation of guaranteed longer-term funding. Moreover, government needs to set the direction by creating an ambitious Heat and Buildings Strategy. The Strategy should set out plans to retrofit the entire building stock and ensure that all buildings are 'future-proofed' against the impacts of climate change. Doing so will create and support skilled long-term jobs that are crucial to the recovery from Covid-19, whilst ensuring the health and well-being of the population.

## Recovery measures focusing on adapting to the impacts of climate change

### *Put adaptation measures for the health impacts of climate change at the centre of Covid-19 recovery*

Regardless of the future mitigation ambitions, the UK's annual average temperature has already warmed by 1.2°C compared to pre-industrial levels. Future warming of around an additional 0.6°C is expected by 2050, further exacerbating most health impacts of climate change<sup>62</sup>. Even if the necessary climate change mitigation measures are introduced, broad scale adaptation planning is needed to protect public health in a changing climate.

As the Adaptation Committee of the Committee on Climate Change commented in their 2019 report to Parliament, 'The Government has failed to increase adaptation policy ambition and implementation through its latest National Adaptation Programme - despite the increasing urgency of addressing the risks from climate change'<sup>63</sup>. The government must act now to address this shortfall by integrating adaptation planning into stimulus measures, thus supporting a resilient recovery from the pandemic. Covid-19 has demonstrated the importance of advance planning for systemic risks: now is the time to accelerate our resilience planning for the impacts of climate change, especially on human health.

<sup>60</sup> Munro, A., Boyce, T. and Marmot, M. 2020. Sustainable Health Equity: Achieving a Net-Zero UK. Health Expert Advisory Group Report for the UK Committee on Climate Change.

<sup>61</sup> Energy Efficiency Infrastructure Group. 2020. From the Green Homes Grant towards a resilient Net Zero economy.

<sup>62</sup> Brown, K. 2020. How much more climate change is inevitable for the UK? Accessed at <https://www.theccc.org.uk/2020/04/21/how-much-more-climate-change-is-inevitable-for-the-uk/> on 21 January 2021.

<sup>63</sup> The Committee on Climate Change, Adaptation Committee. 2019. Progress in preparing for climate change – 2019 Progress Report to Parliament.

## Recommendation 4: Couple the NHS net zero plan with a comprehensive adaptation strategy and include responding to climate change as a priority of the new National Institute for Health Protection.

### Box 5: Emissions from the healthcare sector

The healthcare sector is responsible for approximately 4.6% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (2017 data), and has a significant role to play in reducing emissions and thus helping to mitigate climate change<sup>64</sup>. As the largest employer in Britain, the National Health Service (NHS) is currently responsible for about 4% of national carbon emissions<sup>65</sup>. Under the direction of the NHS Net Zero Expert Panel, in October 2020, the NHS published its net zero report, setting out plans to eliminate its direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 and 2045 respectively (with additional interim targets)<sup>66</sup>.

The recent NHS net zero commitment is an important step to tackle climate change and mitigate its impacts (Box 5). But climate change already presents a risk to health and this will continue in the future<sup>67</sup>.

Almost all of the health impacts of climate change will make demands on the health system, including on its readiness, capacity and resilience to tackle climate-sensitive health risks. It is vital, therefore, that the healthcare system takes adaptation and resilience measures alongside mitigation efforts<sup>68</sup>. The health sector has a key role in protecting the health and well-being of populations from climate change. Strengthening the climate resilience of the preventative and curative aspects of health systems, as well as adapting it to the changing climate are crucial to ensure that it can respond successfully to climate change<sup>69</sup>.

Consequently, the NHS net zero plan needs to be combined with a comprehensive adaptation strategy to create a truly green and resilient health care system. Covid-19 has demonstrated the significance of resilience and preparedness in the health system. The lessons of the pandemic should be used to make the NHS more resilient to deal with the health impacts of climate change, as future pandemics and other health problems are likely to increase.

In addition, the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP), the new body replacing Public Health England, must include responding to climate change as a priority. Climate change was identified as the biggest global threat to health in the 21st century<sup>70</sup>, and one of the goals of the NIHP is to monitor, identify and be ready to respond to health threats<sup>71</sup>. The new institution should dedicate special attention to dealing with the health impacts of climate change. This way, it could play an important role in coordinating the adaptation and resilience measures of the health care system.

<sup>64</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. *The Lancet*. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

<sup>65</sup> NHS. 2020. Delivering a 'Net Zero' National Health Service.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> World Health Organization. 2015. Strengthening Health Resilience to Climate Change. Technical Briefing for the World Health Organization Conference on Health and Climate

<sup>68,69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Lancet and University College London Institute for Global Health Commission. 2009. Managing the health effects of climate change. Vol. 373: 1693–1733.

<sup>71</sup> Department of Health & Social Care. 2020. The future of public health: the National Institute for Health Protection and other public health functions. Policy Paper. Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-of-public-health-the-nihp-and-other-public-health-functions/the-future-of-public-health-the-national-institute-for-health-protection-and-other-public-health-functions> on 11 January 2020.

### Recommendation 5: Use Covid-19 stimulus measures to expand high quality green spaces.

With the introduction of social distancing, a survey taken during the first lockdown indicated that a majority (53%) of respondents said they appreciated local green spaces more and 63% felt protecting local green spaces should be a higher priority for the government<sup>72</sup>. Therefore, the government should demonstrate their environmental ambition by investing in restoring and expanding high-quality green spaces in cities. These measures have high benefit to cost ratios, increase resilience to many of the impacts of climate change and have numerous health co-benefits<sup>73</sup>. Expanding green space in cities would reduce the urban heat island effect, enhance air quality and improve mental health and wellbeing<sup>74,75</sup>. Alongside the health and environmental benefits, investing in the expansion of urban green spaces would bring positive economic impacts. A recent study demonstrated that the evaporative cooling provided by trees in urban areas translates into energy savings<sup>76</sup>. This cooling from urban trees could lead to savings of up to £22 million in yearly energy consumption in inner London alone whilst reducing the urban heat island effect<sup>77</sup> (Box 6).

#### Box 6: The urban heat island effect

The urban heat island effect (UHIE) refers to the fact that urban or metropolitan areas are often warmer than their rural surroundings. This results from a combination of diverse factors, including buildings, reduced vegetation, air pollution, narrow roads, traffic, energy use and industrial activity<sup>78</sup>. During daytime, the urban environment stores heat from the sun, which it then releases at night. Natural land is less effective at storing heat and loses heat more efficiently at night, making the UHIE especially noticeable at night<sup>79</sup>. The UHIE worsens the health impacts of heatwaves on urban populations. Under a high emissions scenario, the summer temperatures in UK cities could increase by 0.45-0.81°C per decade by 2080. As 90% of the UK population is projected to live in urban areas by 2050, it is important to mitigate the UHIE<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> Opinium. 2020. Poll for CPRE and the National Federation of Women's Institutes: Appreciation of green space grows during lockdown. Accessed at <https://www.cpre.org.uk/about-us/cpre-media/green-spaces-and-community-thrive-during-lockdown/> on 16 February 2021.

<sup>73</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2020. Reducing UK emissions. Progress Report to Parliament.

<sup>74</sup> Monteiro, M. V., Handley, P., Morison, J. I. L. and Doick, K. J. 2019. The role of urban trees and greenspaces in reducing urban air temperatures.

<sup>75</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2020. Reducing UK emissions. Progress Report to Parliament.

<sup>76</sup> Moss, J. L., Doick, K. J., Smith, S. and Shahrestani, M. 2019. Influence of evaporative cooling by urban forests on cooling demand in cities. *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*. Vol. 37: 65-73.

<sup>77,79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Lo, E. and Mitchell, D. 2020. How 'urban heat islands' will intensify heatwaves in UK cities. Carbon Brief. Accessed at: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-how-urban-heat-islands-will-intensify-heatwaves-in-uk-cities> on 29 January 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Lo, E.; Mitchell, D., Bohnenstengel, S. I., Collins M., Hawkins E., Hegerl G. C., Joshi, M., and Stott, P. A. 2020. U.K. Climate Projections: Summer Daytime and Nighttime Urban Heat Island Changes in England's Major Cities. Vol. 33. No. 20: 9015–9030.

## Recommendation 6: Frontload funding to create Sustainable Drainage Systems as a COVID-19 stimulus measure and launch stimulus packages that specifically focus on increasing Property Flood Resilience.

As the Committee on Climate Change recommended, government should also frontload part of the £5.2 billion funding announced in the 2020 Budget for the six year period between 2021 and 2027, to provide further green economic stimulus that simultaneously helps alleviate the health impacts of climate change<sup>81</sup>.

### Box 7: Government spending on flood defence

The government announced in July 2020 that £170 million will be spent on 'shovel-ready' flood defence projects that will start construction in 2020 and 2021<sup>82</sup>. This is a welcome step to ensure that the recovery from Covid-19 supports the creation of a flood-resilient infrastructure, ready to endure the increasing future flood risk due to climate change, while at the same time protecting more than 10,000 local businesses and safeguarding around 100,000 jobs through green stimulus<sup>83</sup>.

### Box 8: Sustainable Drainage Systems

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) refer to a collection of water management practices that aim to manage drainage locally, mimicking natural practices that encourage infiltration and passive treatment.

When allocating stimulus funding for the built environment, government should prioritise funds to create Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) not just the 'engineering' solutions stimulus funding has so far focused on (Box 8). Natural solutions provide long-term relief from increasing flood risk. Importantly, they provide green space and water to improve mental and physical health, and reduce urban overheating.

Therefore, as Policy Connect's 2020 Bricks & Water report highlighted, the government should switch from costly 'traditional' flood defences to green and blue solutions to make homes and communities more resilient to flood risk<sup>84</sup>. Investment in SuDS would help unlock specific health co-benefits, as SuDS can also improve water and air quality, provide green space for recreation, reduce urban overheating, sequester carbon, increase aesthetics and enhance community wellbeing (the importance of which has been emphasised by the Covid-19 lockdowns).

Similar to the Green Homes Grant Scheme which mainly focuses on energy efficiency measures and the installation of low carbon heating, the government should launch stimulus packages that specifically focus on increasing Property Flood Resilience. These measures make homes more resilient to floods by reducing the costs of restoration following a flood and allowing buildings to be re-occupied more quickly. Besides the potential to create new jobs and help revitalise the economy, encouraging Property Flood Resilience measures would help adapt to the health impacts of climate change.

<sup>81</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2020. Reducing UK emissions. Progress Report to Parliament.

<sup>82</sup> DEFRA (2020) Multi-billion pound investment as government unveils new long-term plan to tackle flooding. Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/multi-billion-pound-investment-as-government-unveils-new-long-term-plan-to-tackle-flooding> on 2 October 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Policy Connect – Westminster Sustainable Business Forum. 2020. Bricks & Water. Building resilience for England's Homes.



# Preparing for COP26

The UK will host the COP 26 summit in Glasgow in November 2021 and will also hold the presidency of the G7 during 2021. These are critical milestones for global progress on climate change and a clear opportunity for global cooperation in the recovery from Covid-19. The UK now has the platform to demonstrate global leadership on climate change and can take the following actions to ensure they lead the world on climate change in 2021.

## **Recommendation 7: Establish and lead a coalition of countries promoting a green, resilient and healthy recovery from Covid-19.**

The UK Government needs to use its leadership position as the host of COP26 to align global Covid-19 recovery plans with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and ensure that the pandemic and climate change – both representing global problems – are tackled through global cooperation. As COP26 President, the UK should set up an informal coalition or alliance of countries that work together for a shared vision of a green, healthy and resilient recovery from Covid-19. Similar to other informal alliances, such a coalition could play an important role to promote principles of a sustainable recovery, act as a platform of knowledge sharing and help coordinate efforts across borders for a green, resilient and healthy recovery. The UK should raise awareness of the global risks of climate change to human health, and use domestic examples to demonstrate the adaptation and mitigation measures they have utilised to begin addressing these risks. Working with health and sustainability professionals across different countries, it is also important to explore how healthy and green recovery measures could be adapted in countries represented at COP26.

## **Recommendation 8: Lead by example at COP26 through a set of ambitious domestic policies.**

To ensure that the UK has credibility as COP26 President leading a resilient recovery from Covid-19 at the global stage, it is important that the UK demonstrates strong domestic action. The UK can point to a strong historical record of emissions reduction: in the period 2008-2019, overall territorial emissions have reduced by 30% while the economy grew by 15% and this provides a strong foundation for the UK to lead on the global stage<sup>85</sup>.

To convince countries to take the necessary actions in accordance with the Paris Agreement, the UK will have to prove its credibility and ambition for the future, above and beyond historical successes. The UK is currently off track to meet its fourth (2023-2027) and fifth (2028-2032) carbon budgets<sup>86</sup>. This is particularly problematic, as the fourth and fifth carbon budgets were set under the previous goal of 80% reduction by 2050. Meeting the UK's Net Zero aligned sixth carbon budget (2033-2037) and Nationally Determined Contribution commitment will require the UK to outperform the previous carbon budgets<sup>87</sup>.

The government must scale up domestic policy initiatives to net zero and ensure stimulus funding facilitates this. This requires the UK to make progress on a number of policy initiatives ahead of COP26, most notably the Net Zero Strategy, alongside a number of different strategies that have important implications on health.

These strategies include: the Heat and Buildings Strategy; the National Food Strategy; the Transport Decarbonisation Plan; the HMT Net Zero Review; the England Tree Strategy; the Peatland Strategy; the Hydrogen Strategy; the Rail Decarbonisation Strategy; the Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy; the Zero Carbon Hospital Standard; the Greening Government Commitments; the next Contract-for-Difference allocation round with regards to renewables; and Ofgem's final business model approvals for the RIIO-ED2 period (which should accommodate network upgrades for electric vehicles and heat pumps)<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2020. Reducing UK emissions. 2020 Progress Report to Parliament.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2020. The Sixth Carbon Budget The UK's path to Net Zero.

<sup>88</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2020. Policies for the Sixth Carbon Budget and Net Zero.

### Recommendation 9: Emphasise the role of the healthcare sector in climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience at COP26.

Recognising parallels between the Covid-19 emergency and climate change, and the fact that tackling climate change will be conditioned by the impacts of and the response to Covid-19<sup>89</sup>, the UK should make health a central theme of COP26 and emphasise the role of the healthcare sector in climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience.

The emissions of the health care system globally have continued to rise (showing a 6.1% from 2016 to 2017) based on the latest global report of the Lancet Countdown<sup>90</sup>. However, latest trends have shown that national governments are increasingly paying attention to health and climate change and there is growing momentum in the health profession's engagement with climate globally<sup>91</sup>. It is important that the UK capitalises on these positive developments at COP26 and brings in health as a central theme of the summit.

#### Box 9: Emissions reductions by the NHS

Over recent years, the NHS has achieved a 57% reduction in the delivery of care emissions and 22% reduction in its supply chain emissions compared to 1990. This has been through the leadership of the Sustainable Development Unit founded in 2008 to ensure that the health service met its commitments under the Climate Change Act of 2008<sup>92,93</sup>. Furthermore, with the new NHS net zero plan, the NHS made a commitment to become the world's first net zero health system, further strengthening the UK's leadership position regarding commitments to mitigate healthcare sector emissions<sup>94</sup>. The NHS net zero report is a welcome recognition that the current public health and climate crises have to be addressed simultaneously. The report also rightly acknowledges that the health system also needs to take action to reduce its carbon footprint to meet net zero nationally and help mitigate the health impacts of climate change. Moreover, the release of this report ahead of the UK's COP26 Presidency has been well-timed to set a positive example for health systems across the world to follow.

The NHS has had a strong track record of reducing its emissions while maintaining high standards of care (Box 9). The UK should therefore actively use its leadership position regarding its commitments to mitigate the healthcare sector's emissions, and feature the NHS net zero target during COP26 to lead by example.

The government should also seek to present itself as world leader when it comes to the healthcare sector's climate adaptation and resilience. To enhance its leadership position, the UK should scale up its domestic efforts on adaptation and resilience measures in the health care sector. The October 2020 publication of the NHS net zero plan highlighted that the third Health and Social Care Sector Climate Change Adaptation Report will be published in the coming months<sup>95</sup> and it is important to ensure that this report outlines the practical adaptation and resilience measures the NHS will put in place. The NHS plan also highlighted that as part of the government's Health Infrastructure Plan a new Net Zero Carbon Hospital Standard is being developed<sup>96</sup>. To strengthen its leadership position as COP26 President and lead via best practice sharing, it is important that the government publishes these policy documents in the months ahead of COP26.

<sup>89</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. *The Lancet*. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

<sup>90,91,95,96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> NHS England. 2018. Public Health England. Reducing the use of natural resources in health and social care.

<sup>93</sup> Watts, N. et al. 2020. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. *The Lancet*. Vol. 397. No. 10269:129-170.

<sup>94</sup> NHS. 2020. Delivering a 'Net Zero' National Health Service.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

# Planning for the future

Besides focusing on the immediate policy questions of the COVID-19 recovery and COP26, it is important that there is the right governance and legislative framework for the longer term, focusing on ensuring the wellbeing of young and future generations.

## **Recommendation 10: Install the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care as a permanent member of the Climate Action Strategy Committee and Climate Action Implementation Committee.**

As the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) highlighted in June 2020, it is essential that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care regularly attends or has a permanent position in the Cabinet Committee on Climate Change<sup>97</sup>. The CCC recommended that this committee should play a central role in rebuilding the economy in a way that puts the UK on track for net zero. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care's participation in the committee would be key for this, 'given the resilience and health requirements that must be a central part of the recovery programme'<sup>98</sup>.

Since June 2020, the Cabinet Committee on Climate Change has been replaced by the Climate Action Strategy Committee and the Climate Action Implementation Committee<sup>99</sup>. The Climate Action Strategy Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister to 'consider matters relating to the delivery of the UK's domestic and international climate strategy' and the Climate Action Implementation Committee was set up to 'consider matters relating to the delivery of COP26, net zero and building the UK's resilience to climate impacts'<sup>100</sup>. These cabinet committee meetings play a crucial role in coordinating climate strategy and policy across departments and implementing the necessary measures to ensure the UK transitions towards net zero.

As a member of the Climate Action Strategy Committee, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care could ensure public health issues are considered when strategic decisions are made on climate mitigation and adaptation policy. Moreover, given the importance of making health a central theme of COP26 as the previous section of this report outlined, it would be important to include the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in the Climate Action Implementation Committee.

In order to 'build the UK's resilience to climate impact'<sup>101</sup>, the government must recognise the health risks posed by climate change and listen to leading health experts. By including the Health Secretary in both committees, health would get representation at the highest level of UK climate strategy and implementation, which is crucial to ensure a green and healthy recovery from COVID-19. The involvement of the Health Secretary would provide an important signal to the Department for Health and Social Care and its executive agencies to focus on future climate policy development to make sure the health co-benefits are fully recognised.

<sup>97</sup> The Committee on Climate Change. 2020. Reducing UK emissions. Progress Report to Parliament.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid: 158.

<sup>99</sup> Institute for Government. Explainers. Cabinet Committees. Accessed at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/cabinet-committees> on 11 February 2021.

<sup>100</sup> Cabinet Office 2020 List of Cabinet Committees. Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-cabinet-committees-system-and-list-of-cabinet-committees> on 24 January 2021.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

### **Recommendation 11: Support the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill to enshrine in law a duty on public bodies to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations.**

Government and Parliament should support the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill, to make sure there are legal provisions to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations<sup>102</sup>. This Bill would require the Government and its agencies to assess policies against health, economic, social and environmental wellbeing goals to ensure a more holistic and long-term approach to policy making. The Bill builds on the Welsh Parliaments' Wellbeing of Future Generations Act of 2015 and at the time of writing, has received the backing of more than 70 MPs and over 20 peers representing all the major political parties in the UK and every one of our four nations<sup>103</sup>.

The Bill would establish a 'Commissioner for Future Generations for the United Kingdom' who would promote the needs of future generations by monitoring and reporting on the progress of public bodies against their well-being objectives. As a complete package, this legislation could help consistent, long-term policy making and ensure health and climate risks could not be ignored by future administrations.

<sup>102</sup> Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill [HL] 2019-21. Accessed at <https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2019-21/wellbeingoffuturegenerationsbill.html> on 21 January 2021.

<sup>103</sup> <https://todayfortomorrow.org.uk/who-we-are/> Accessed on 21 January 2021.

# About this report

## Policy Connect

Policy Connect is a membership-based, not-for-profit, cross-party think tank. We bring together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business and civil society to inform, influence and improve UK public policy through debate, research and innovative thinking, so as to improve peoples' lives. We lead and manage an extensive network of parliamentary groups, research commissions, forums and campaigns. We are a London living wage and disability confident employer and a Member of Social Enterprise UK, and have been operating since 1995. Our work focuses on key policy areas including: health & accessibility; education & skills; industry, technology & innovation; and sustainability. We shape policy in Westminster through meetings, events, research and impact work.



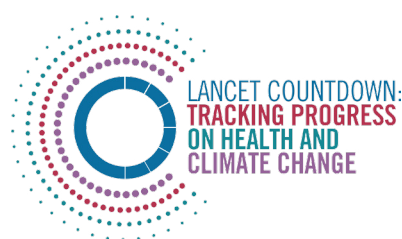
## Acknowledgements

Funding support for this report was kindly provided by the Lancet Countdown.

Policy Connect would like to thank all the different organisations and individuals who contributed to this publication.

The authors would also like to thank

Anne Coleman (Operations Director, Lancet Countdown),  
Jessica Beagley (former Policy Manager, Lancet Countdown),  
Dr Frances MacGuire (Policy Manager, Lancet Countdown),  
Emma Frost (Communications Manager, Lancet Countdown),  
Dr Alice McGushin (Programme Manager, Lancet Countdown),  
Robert McLaren (Head of Health and Accessibility, Policy Connect),  
Claudia Jaksch (Head of Sustainability and COO, Policy Connect),  
Oona Muirhead CBE (Business Adviser, Policy Connect),  
Jonathan Shaw (CEO, Policy Connect),  
Jacob Ainscough (Senior Researcher, Policy Connect),  
Becky Rice (Policy Manager, Policy Connect),  
Susannah James (former Media and Communications Manager, Policy Connect).





# CONTACT

Policy Connect  
CAN Mezzanine  
7-14 Great Dover Street  
London SE1 4YR

 @Policy\_Connect  
 policy-connect  
 info@policyconnect.org.uk  
 0207 202 8585