



**East of England  
Liberal Democrats**

# **Climate Change**

**Policy Paper  
October 2007**

*'Policies are required to support the development of a range of low-carbon and high efficiency technologies on an **urgent** timescale'* (The Stern Report)

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Drought, flash floods and coastal erosion are just some of the implications of climate change for the East of England. Future weather patterns and long-term climatic conditions are not easy to predict, after all several years of drought followed by one of torrential rain and flooding have already led to different predictions for the UK. What is clear is that, despite historically high rainfall in 2007, temperatures are around the average (source: *The Independent* 26 July 2007), unusual when it's so wet, and a sign, perhaps, of global warming. Scientific evidence links such change to human activities, especially associated with carbon emissions. And there is a realistic expectation that temperatures could rise by more than 3°C if human behaviour is unchanged. This would have disastrous consequences globally, nationally and for the region.
- 1.2. The most significant danger for the East of England is flooding. Areas that were reclaimed and made viable by Dutch drainage systems are now in need of Dutch flood protection measures. If climate change continues at its present rate, by 2080 parts of East Anglia would be under water, Ely would once again be an isle and Cambridge a coastal resort. Summer droughts might have a severe impact on crops, while the higher temperatures might boost the wine industry.
- 1.3. Climate change will undoubtedly have an impact on the Region but can the Region offer any solutions? Clearly, global solutions are required if we are to minimise climate change and its effects, in particular holding the rise in temperature to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and holding the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere below the 450 parts per million recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.<sup>1</sup> Cooperative international arrangements are needed if we are effectively to tackle global carbon emissions. Thus, Liberal Democrats are strong supporters of the Kyoto Agreement and are committed to helping develop a post-2012 international framework when that Agreement runs out (*Climate Change Policy Paper* 2007). And we want Britain to play a leading role in any such agreement, working with our partners within the European Union, which has played a leading role in environmental policy. We support the EU's carbon emissions trading system and seek to strengthen it (see *Zero-Carbon Britain Policy Paper*, pp. 11-11).

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<sup>1</sup> See *Zero-Carbon Britain – Taking a Global Lead* (London: Liberal Democrats, 2007), pp. 4-5.

- 1.4. Yet, there are things that we can do at a national level and at regional and local levels. Liberal Democrats have the policies to do this – Labour and the Conservatives do not. Indeed, green tax take at below 3% of tax receipts is now lower in percentage terms than it was under Mrs Thatcher. Liberal Democrat policies on green taxation are a step in the right direction but they are only a start (See the Green Tax Switch). We will reform Labour’s Climate Change Levy into a carbon tax on fuel, once energy efficiency measures have been brought in to reduce the risk of fuel poverty. We will also increase Vehicle Excise Duty on the most polluting cars and introduce a per-flight Aircraft Tax designed to make airlines more efficient.
- 1.5. The Government has already set targets for carbon emissions reduction – 20% down from 1990 figures by 2010 (a figure that’s bound to be missed) and 60% by 2050. These targets do not go far enough. The target should be for the UK to become carbon neutral by 2050. Liberal Democrats call for 100% of the UK’s electricity to come from clean, non-carbon emitting sources by 2050 and seek the introduction of voluntary UK/EU average vehicle emissions targets. Similarly, we seek to reduce domestic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by requiring all new homes to be built to the GreenHouse standard no later than 2011 and would support improvements to existing homes with ‘green mortgages’ (*Zero-Carbon Britain* policy motion, para 4a).<sup>2</sup>
- 1.6. While some of these policies could only be introduced by a Liberal Democrat government elected nationally, much could be done by Liberal Democrat-controlled councils across the Region. At regional, local and individual levels there are things we can and must do to strengthen the UK’s commitment to meeting climate change targets.
- 1.7. Regional and local emissions targets and other climate-change related policies have a role to play in meeting national targets and Liberal Democrats at all levels support them. This is particularly important in the East of England, where domestic carbon emissions are among the highest in the country at the equivalent of 49.9 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2003, while walking and cycling are well below the national average, with fewer than a quarter of journeys made on foot or bicycle (Source: *East of England Factsheet 2005*<sup>3</sup>). While industry and commerce in the Region produce below average emissions levels, domestic and transport emissions are above the national average and must, therefore, be tackled.

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<sup>2</sup> The GreenHouse standard ‘is the best known standard for building homes that require no fossil fuels for their space heating’. Source: *Zero-Carbon Britain* policy motion, para 4a.

<sup>3</sup> The factsheet can be found at: [http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/progress/regional/documents/east\\_england\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/progress/regional/documents/east_england_factsheet.pdf)).

## **2. Impact of Climate Change on the Region**

- 2.1. If climate change continues unabated, there will be regular flooding in the Region and significant coastal erosion far beyond that seen to date. Paradoxically, drought is also likely to occur, leading to domestic water shortages and the possibility of crop failure, unless farmers shift their patterns of crop production to suit the new climate. In addition, there will be considerable impacts on development and tourism.
- 2.2. The East of England is scheduled to see considerable growth in the coming decade, as part of the Government's planned housing expansion. While such building is important for the Region, it will in turn have considerable implications for carbon emissions if there are not significant behavioural changes, since each new household will have a carbon footprint. It is vital, therefore, that local planning authorities in the Region do all they can to minimise the impact of development via sustainable local development frameworks, reducing as far as possible the need to commute and ensuring that newly built houses are carbon neutral. Moreover, it is vital that any development in areas in or near the flood plains be adequately reviewed by the Environment Agency and adequate mitigation measures put in place before any development begins in order to minimise the risk of flooding.

## **3. Mitigation**

- 3.1. Any actions taken to reduce carbon emissions in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will take decades to have any identifiable effect on climate change, but it is for this reason that it is all the more important the emissions are reduced now in order to reduce the likelihood of further climate change in the future. There are two areas in particular where the East of England should be trying to reduce its emissions: transport and domestic buildings.

### **A. Transport**

- 3.2. Transport is a key element in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with figures in the East of England among the highest in the country (2.4 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per person per year compared with a national average of 2.2 tonnes).<sup>4</sup> Emissions can be reduced by reducing the number and length of journeys made by car, buying more energy efficient cars, reducing car ownership and, especially, modal shifts. Regional and local targets are useful and can cumulatively help to achieve the required national reductions. Local authorities may try to reduce emissions with congestion charging and parking policies and have a key role alongside central government in trying to bring about modal shifts. However, transport is one area that demands closely integrated national, regional and local policies.

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<sup>4</sup> DEFRA figures for 2004. Transport figures do not include air travel, which would skew the figures even more, given that Stansted Airport is in the Region.

- 3.3. Major strategic decisions fall to national government, though the region can play a part in pressing central government to support more sustainable modes of transport. For example, we will only achieve significant modal shifts if the transport infrastructure is available; the evidence suggests that British people will not leave their cars behind unless there is a convenient train to catch – buses don't do the trick.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the present government's commitment to reform is lamentable. There will be no serious investment in the rail network over the next thirty years. And the Government refused to support a bid for EU funding for the vital East-West rail link which would move freight from road to rail, reducing both congestion and emissions in the East of England. Rather, it has decided to support bids for two road widening schemes instead - a sure-fire way to increase vehicle movements and hence pollution.
- 3.4. By contrast, Liberal Democrats would set up a Future Transport Fund to invest in key rail and light rail improvements (a move that could have been of huge benefit to this Region as an alternative to the Guided Bus), including High Speed Rail, by using the proceeds from charging road freight for using motorways and the proceeds from a climate change charge on flights originating or terminating in the UK (with the exception of 'lifeline' flights) (*Zero-Carbon Britain* Policy Paper, paras 3.2.12 and 5.4.3).
- 3.5. Local authorities can encourage modal shifts by working with bus companies and, through control of planning process and as the highways authority, encourage walking and cycling with improved cycleways, better signage for pedestrians and cyclists, adequate street lighting (here a balance has to be drawn between safety and light pollution). Attention should also be paid to giving pedestrians and cyclists priority at traffic lights, and to prioritising buses over cars. In addition, education is crucial to encourage people to cycle.
- 3.6. Councils should also encourage car pools, as Cambridge City Council is doing, and car sharing. Road user pricing should be introduced in relatively urban areas, at the discretion of the local councils. Councils could also require planning applications for large developments to calculate the likely carbon implications, and reserve the right to refuse applications that entailed excessive carbon costs. Carbon calculations should also be considered in decisions regarding local transport, with an allocation of funding for regionally prioritised transport schemes being made available specifically for carbon-reducing schemes.
- 3.7. The East of England has a major shipping industry, including Felixstowe. Ships, like airlines, currently benefit from duty-free fuel. The Region should thus be pressing for a reduction in emissions from sea-freight. We also oppose the expansion of air travel in the region.

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<sup>5</sup> Source, Ben Webster, 'Do not walk, forget the bus – Britons love the car', *The Times* (31 March 2007), p.26.

## **B. Construction**

- 3.8. Poorly insulated and fuel inefficient buildings have a significant impact on carbon emissions, with housing in the East of England a particular problem. Much could be done through local planning guidance to ensure that new properties are carbon neutral and that existing properties are made more energy efficient than at present. For example, planning authorities should put carbon reduction measures into their Local Development Frameworks. Such targets can be aspirational in a way that Building Regulations are not since the latter are set nationally.
- 3.9. In terms of new build, LDFs should demand that dwellings be carbon neutral. In relation to existing buildings, Councils should do more to encourage people to reduce energy lost through poor insulation and, where possible, give consideration to solar energy generation. The model of Uttlesford District Council might be one to follow: Council taxpayers are given a one-off £75 reduction in their Council Tax if they insulate their lofts, while applications for home extension must be accompanied by proposals for energy saving measures in the original building. Liberal Democrats support 'WarmHomes' packages of improvements for existing houses, funded by 'green mortgages', which people would pay back from the savings they would make in their fuel bills. We would encourage building societies in the East of England to promote such mortgages.
- 3.10. For commercial buildings, Councils in the region should seek to work with companies through their Carbon Action Plans. This is especially important with respect to small companies, which may be less persuaded than large enterprises of the benefits of reducing carbon emissions.

## **C. Alternative sources of energy**

- 3.11. Despite the Government's stated commitment to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the UK is far from meeting its targets. Energy efficiency is far lower in the UK than in Scandinavia, the Netherlands and parts of Germany and the UK has made less progress in use of renewable resources.
- 3.12. Planning authorities in the East of England should review their planning policies to put more emphasis on low energy building and encouraging home electricity generation, which would reduce the need for additional power stations.
- 3.13. Local authorities should press, through their Local Development Frameworks, for district-level Combined Heat and Power systems, which would generate electricity and reuse waste. This would be particularly relevant in the growth areas, as they could be put in place at the outset.

- 3.14. The East of England will meet its targets for renewables ahead of schedule, thanks to significant wind power. Liberal Democrats will press for higher targets for the Region, which could be met by other forms of renewable energy, notably biogas, owing to the amount of industrial waste in produced in the Region. Biofuels should be used to generate gas for transmission through the normal gas supply, as is done in Germany, which has far higher use of renewables than the UK. This is particularly important in the East of England, since there is a larger than average number of people not connected to a mains gas supply and who could thus potentially be converted to biofuels. North Norfolk District Council is currently negotiating with Renewables East for district-level provision and this practice could be adopted by other councils, since it offers cost savings and ensure quality.
- 3.15. Green waste should be seen as a resource not a cost as at present, since it can be turned into energy, while anaerobic digestion should also be considered as an energy resource and not simply as a form of waste treatment, e.g. the residue can be burnt after the process of anaerobic digestion is complete. Further wind turbines should be installed in areas where they are likely to be effective. Given its significant production of sugar beet, East Anglia could produce ethanol, which could be used to fuel vehicles.

## **4. Adaptation**

### **A. Behavioural changes**

- 4.1. Alongside major approaches to minimising carbon emissions in new developments as they are determined by local planning authorities, there are many changes that can be introduced at relatively low cost to bring about behavioural changes at the local and individual level.
- 4.2. We welcome the fact that all Liberal Democrat Councils in the Region have signed the Nottingham Declaration and introduced Climate Change Strategies. We call on others to do likewise as a matter of urgency. We acknowledge that the Government has set standards for energy performance in dwelling with the standard assessment procedure, or SAP rating, but do not think the standards are ambitious enough. We therefore support a more aspirational policy in the Region.
- 4.3. Education, especially at primary school level, can ensure people realise the dangers of climate change and the advantages, both to the environment and to their finances, of reducing energy consumption and replacing lightbulbs. Such lessons need not go much beyond the dictum ‘reduce, re-use, recycle’ to be effective. Apart from educating the next generation, persuading youngsters about climate change has the added benefit that many children will then seek to convince their parents to alter their behaviour too.

- 4.4. While education works at the individual/domestic level, it may not translate into changed behaviour at work. We therefore encourage businesses to adopt higher standards re energy efficiency, for example by signing up to Councils' climate change commitments and producing their own climate change action plan. One simple but effective initiative in Cambridge is 'Close the door', a campaign encouraging shoppers (and shop assistants) to close the doors of shops in order to minimise heat loss on cold days, though the scheme would be equally applicable to air-conditioned outlets in the summer.

## **B. Flooding and flood protection**

- 4.5. However effective the Region's attempts at reducing carbon emissions, climate change will continue to make flooding more likely. Regional and local authorities should thus work more closely with the Environment Agency to ensure that adequate flood defences are in place in existing communities and to ensure that new developments are protected.