

## SUTTON COLDFIELD QUAKERS

### Report on Climate Change meeting with Andrew Mitchell MP - 7pm 22/11/18

#### *Context:*

In Quaker Week we held a film and discussion event on Climate Change. A number of people from local churches and the Eco Sutton group attended then. This next meeting, with our local MP, was a natural follow on from that successful evening. It was advertised in relation to the December UN COP24 conference in Poland where the UK government would respond to the IPCC report especially re limiting to a 1.5 degree temperature rise and a rule book implementing the Paris agreement.

This event was publicised by email to local churches, contacts from the first meeting and Eco Sutton as well as by flyers in the immediate neighbourhood and local libraries. There were about 35-40 people present and a full meeting house.

#### *The Meeting:*

Andrew Mitchell spoke for about 25 minutes and this was followed by Q&As. The whole meeting took 1 hour 30 minutes.

Andrew's talk began with an overview/context for our discussion describing how the poor of the world are the ones who pay the immediate cost, with examples from West Indies, Sudan, Rwanda, and Bangladesh amongst others. He also outlined his general approach as a constituency MP and some of the distinctive characteristics of the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield, one of which is that it has the highest car ownership of any in the UK! He also stated he values the diverse faith communities present as a feature of the "Royal Town" and of Birmingham.

He also felt he had to address Brexit as this is at the height of finalising Theresa May's agreement with EU. This he felt was so dominating the agenda that he could find very little in recent times re climate change or COP24 in parliamentary proceedings. However he brought with him a (technical) statement from the government addressing COP24 which was a positive statement of support and commitment to the Paris agreement and the procedures. This is attached to this report. He referred to three key themes:

- Technology - development of climate-friendly modern solutions, such as electromobility;
- Man - solidary and just transition of industrial regions;
- Nature - achieving climate neutrality by absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> by forests and land, or by water management.

He stated that the government gave billions to mitigate climate change around the world. But the government could not brag about it as it would be criticised for not spending it in the UK. Particularly the goal was to help people lead meaningful lives where they were and not feel the need to migrate north. He added this also mitigates against recruitment to terrorism.

He felt the biggest global threat to maintaining a priority on climate change is the tension in the USA-China axis. He feels China are doing some positive environmental things but a trade war brings all down. The EU and the UK are working to harmonise this relationship.

He stated as a personal observation that we would probably be the last generation who eat meat the way we do!

He also commented on some local issues such as housing development plans which were taken

further in the discussion.

## Q & A

Points raised and discussed included:

- Brexit – his own position and reasons (remainer) and possible ways events could go in the near future in the expectation that the “agreement” is rejected by parliament.
- Fracking – he admitted personally to be undecided about it whilst admitting he would not like to see it Sutton Park. There were strong murmurings in the meeting of opposition to fracking. An energy consultant present said fracking (a UK invention!) had been going on in Britain since 1969 but with “mud” version. One problem being that Cuadrilla were using the American chemical version, which is more harmful to the environment.
- Transport – esp cars. When challenged that the goal should be getting rid of private car ownership he strongly disagreed. Practically he said he could not represent such a constituency and support such a position. Rather he wanted to see the development of electric car technology to become world leading here and thus a source of jobs and exports in time. He applied the same approach to development of renewable energies. He also saw a Birmingham congestion charge as a Birmingham City tax on his constituents.
- Housing – he was challenged about local development plans and was very clear about the problems with some proposed. He wasn't against developments but they needed to be the right ones in the right places. Some detailed interactions of local interest ensued. One idea which caught his attention to consider was raised by another energy consultant, that some parish councils (in Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and “the north”) had insisted locally that new houses must be zero carbon. The criticism of national policy is that much is left to local planning departments and some, eg Birmingham, left standards at minimum building regulations rather than pushing for greener standards.
- 2030 not 2040 (cars) 2050 (net zero carbon) targets – simply he said that would be great but it's unachievable and we mustn't let the ideal get in the way of the good.
- Re agriculture, land use and subsidies – he claimed a degree of ignorance as he has no farmers in Sutton Coldfield. He has long opposed the EU CAP and feels future farmer subsidies may well be more to do with looking after the environment.

Generally he had a pragmatic approach to the subject with a sympathy for the green agenda. He would refer to “both, not either/or” re power generation / fracking / cars ... ie deal with the present AND aiming for the ideal. He was challenged re providing leadership for changing behaviours. He reiterated he could not agree with diktats (don't eat meat, own cars....) but there are policies and actions which he believes the government are doing, which can bring change. “Don't belittle action on things like straws”.

## *Conclusion*

It was a well attended meeting with a wide base of people generating an informative debate. Andrew Mitchell is an articulate and informed speaker and debater. He is clearly knowledgeable on local matters and issues. He is keen to listen to constituents and is sympathetic to environmental and climate issues. He was challenged on a number of fronts and responds clearly with reasons whether in disagreement or otherwise. He is also a pragmatic politician who works with the tension of what is ideal and what is realistic, both as a representative of the Royal Town and for the government.

Richard and Helen Begg, Sutton Coldfield Meeting.



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## Climate change policies: COP24 and Brexit

You asked for some information on what the Government hope to present at the forthcoming UN COP24 conference in Poland, and the impact of Brexit on the UK's climate change policies.

### 1.1 COP24, Katowice, Poland

The 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) will be held on 3-14 December in Katowice, Poland. The key plan for COP24 is to adopt a full package implementing the Paris Agreement.<sup>1</sup> The Polish Presidency plans to focus its message on three key themes:

- Technology - development of climate-friendly modern solutions, such as electromobility;
- Man - solidary and just transition of industrial regions;
- Nature - achieving climate neutrality by absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> by forests and land, or by water management.<sup>2</sup>

Background information on the Paris Agreement is set out in the Library Briefing Paper on the [Paris Agreement and Marrakech climate conference](#) (25 November 2016).

More up-to-date information on the climate talks leading up to COP24 is summarised by Carbon Brief on their [pages on COP24](#).

The EU is a Party to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, representing all member states. The UK is also a Party to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement in its own right. As the UK will still be part of the European Union in December this year, the EU's priorities and approach for COP24 are relevant.

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See more on the [COP24 webpages](#)

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See: <http://cop24.gov.pl/presidency/key-messages/>

## EU priorities

The following update was provided by the Minister of State for Energy and Clean Growth following her attendance at the EU Environment Council in Luxembourg on 9 October:

### **1 Adoption of conclusions on the preparations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Katowice, Poland, 2-14 December 2018)**

2 The Council adopted conclusions on the EU's priorities and approach for the negotiations at the 24th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP24) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

3 The conclusions focus on: the urgency of climate action, especially in light of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC's) special report, Global Warming of 1.5°C, published on 8th October 2018; completion of the COP21 Paris Agreement Work Programme (PAWP), which constitutes the implementing rules underpinning the Agreement; and the Talanoa Dialogue, the facilitative process culminating at COP24 for taking stock of collective progress towards the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement.

4 The UK intervened to underline the stark and sobering messages of the IPCC report, that current global efforts are insufficient, and that COP24 is crucial to making the Paris Agreement a reality. The UK highlighted the action the UK is taking to address climate change, including hosting Green Great Britain Week, promoted greater climate ambition and the EU updating its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) by 2020, and signalled the importance of continued collaboration on climate change. The UK also supported the inclusion of at least one net zero 2050 scenario in the EU's Long-term Strategy on emissions reductions and the need for common time frames for submission of NDCs to the UNFCCC.

5 The conclusions highlighted the EU's ambitious climate and energy policy framework to 2030 and acknowledged that recent increases to the EU's 2030 renewable and energy efficiency targets will have an impact on the EU's level of achievement. Ministers expressed that they looked forward to the European Commission's proposal for a Strategy for long-term EU greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the objectives and long-term goals of the Paris Agreement, underlining that the Strategy should include a 1.5°C scenario and at least one pathway towards net zero greenhouse gas emissions in the EU by 2050. The conclusions stressed that the EU is ready to communicate or update its NDC by 2020 and recalled the importance of striving towards common time frames for all UNFCCC Parties' NDCs.<sup>3</sup>

## UK Government

With the exception of the Written Statement above, I cannot find any Parliamentary material on the UK Government's planned approach for COP24.

More widely, you may also be interested in the [Library Insight on Net Zero Emissions: a new UK climate change target?](#) and the [Westminster Hall debate on extreme weather related to climate change](#) which discussed the UK Government's approach to climate change on 13 November 2018.

### 1.2 Brexit and climate change

The [Library Briefing Paper on Brexit: energy and climate change](#) provides information on the possible impact of Brexit on climate change policies (see section 6).