

The Green New Deal and local government

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It's easy to think the Green New Deal is all about massive programmes for change. And in part that's true. But there is also a great deal that can be done locally. In anticipation of the local elections I offer these ideas:

1. What the Green New Deal is

The Green New Deal is a programme to:

- * Manage the rapid transition of the UK to become a sustainable economy, which is required if we are to stop an impending environmental crisis;
- * Whilst seeking to achieve this aim it will:
- * Tackle the damage caused to the UK by austerity;
- * Provide a unifying social, economic and environmental strategy for post-Brexit Britain;
- * Seek to solve emerging crises in the UK, including on housing, education, training, security of earnings, gender equality and access to work.

To achieve these goals the Green New Deal will:

- * Invest in the new businesses, technologies and skills that will be needed to achieve these environmental, social and economic goals;
- * Invest in the new infrastructure that will be required to manage a sustainable economy, including new power generation and supply networks, transformed transport systems and buildings that have low or no carbon footprint;
- * Create long term, well-paid employment to deliver this programme in, quite literally, every constituency in the UK with the aim of delivering environmental change, creating secure employment and so social stability, and a fairer and more equal society in which all can prosper;

- * Reform the UK's finances to make this possible. This will require change to banking, financial markets, our tax system, the ways we save and the role of government in making this work.

With the aim that we will build a fairer society where we can all coalesce around these goals that we all must share if we are to survive in the long term.

2. The Problem for subnational government

Local authorities, as well as the devolved authorities of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, would all face considerable funding constraints if they tried to promote a Green New Deal within the areas or countries for which they have responsibility. These arise because of:

- * Funding constraints imposed by the structure of and its equivalents, where appropriate;
- * Restrictions on the capacity of devolved governments to vary taxation rates;
- * Limited borrowing powers, which are also constrained by 'prudential borrowing' rules;
- * The limited reserves of many of these authorities;
- * The restriction on many of these authorities engaging in trading-related activity where risk to authority funds might arise.

3. The local interpretation of the Green New Deal

- * The Green New Deal is seeking to challenge a global problem;
- * However, the solutions it proposes are inherently local;
- * The GND aim is to create local transformation in
 - * Housing
 - * Transport
 - * Energy use
 - * Raw material usage and waste
 - * Food production and consumption
 - * Employment
 - * The way we live and work
 - * The way that the local economy supports itself - the circular economy.

- * Whilst it would seem that many of the GND issues require major upfront funding (and that is indisputable) as much can be done by highlighting how local people might work together to effect change. Simply writing out the above list makes this clear.

4. So what could a sub-national authority do?

a. Housing

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- * Promote energy efficiency schemes and exploit other grant funding as if it is a local programme;
- * Promote new carbon neutral housing schemes either as authority owned projects or with partners, and emphasise this is local planning arrangements;
- * Transform its own properties to maximise their own potential for energy production and saving;
- * Consider a local 'green building society' to fund such a policy.

b. Transport

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- * Promote energy efficiency in local transport;
- * Promote cycling;
- * Promote car sharing;
- * Consider car exclusion zones or access charges;
- * Promote the use of electric cars by providing charging points;
- * Consider innovative approaches to local transport and its licensing to overcome 'the last mile problem' that means so many commute by car when they would prefer to use other arrangements;
- * Improve public transport integration;
- * Consider how transport contracts can be used to promote green travel.

c. Energy use

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- * Promote low energy use;

- * Consider providing funding for solar energy installations on the basis of shared returns;
- * Review the authority's own energy use;
- * Consider an ESCO.

d. Raw materials

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- * Review waste and recycling policies.

e. Food consumption

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- * Is there a consideration here for school meals contracts or are these all outsourced to schools now?
- * Are there any licensing issues that could be considered?

f. Employment

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- * Is a local employment fund or even a local venture capital fund possible - or can it be encouraged by the council to provide match funding to supplement grants the authority can give? This is a longer-term goal and yet it seems to have much local savings potential.

g. The way we live and work in the local economy

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- * Promote a local currency;
- * Create effective ways to work at home;
- * Support people who want to do so;
- * Promote support services for local businesses;
- * Provide training for GND related businesses;

- * There is a great deal of potential here.

h. The important point

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- * Make it one policy;
- * Do not think it is all about big spending;
- * Make partnership possible;
- * Do the small as well as the big stuff;
- * Promote it, heavily.