

+++ Downplaying Climate Change

++ Even the 'impartial' BBC downplays climate change

Under the influence of business interests - and the rich and affluent - the perils of climate change are downplayed by government and main stream media. Even "our" BBC, which I once trusted, reports business stories much more than climate stories.

For example, today, on 26 July 2023, the BBC website, had "business" and "climate" stories. All 7 main stories in the business section are new since yesterday. In the climate section there is only one new story in the climate section.

Back in 2012, I used to tweet using the name @TweetsToTheBeeb to complain about BBC coverage of climate change. Looking back, it was a bit desperate but the BBC was certainly dragging its feet on climate. It still is.

A study by Kings College reports the British public is badly informed on climate:

In the UK, the average estimate on whether climate scientists have concluded that human-caused climate change is happening is 65%. In reality, 99.9% of climate scientists have reached this conclusion.

Knowledge and misperceptions of climate change

As the BBC's mission is to inform, educate and entertain, it isn't doing well on the first two.

++ My technique for getting answers

I have been campaigning on climate change for well over 30 years and have first hand experience of how UK Government promotes business interests and downplays climate change.

Twenty years ago I used to pursue politicians and scientists much more than I do now. I'm now older and slower so trips to London are tiring - and now my travel budget smaller. However, a stronger reason for reduced activity is the lack of opportunities.

Twenty years ago I went to meetings of All Party Parliamentary Groups, The Fabian Society, the EcoBuild Exhibition, meetings at the London School of Economics, The Environment Agency & etc.

I found it possible to ask questions of policy makers and scientists, either by sidling up to them after their presentation or by putting up a hand at the start of Q&A - with a moderate speed to avoid seeming fanatical - and wearing a shirt of a noticeable colour.

Sadly, most of these opportunities have vanished. The best opportunities were when Colin Challen was chair of the All Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group (APPCCG) and organised informative meetings headlining top politicians and scientists.

Over the past decade or so mainline political organisations, even left-leaning ones, seem to have cooled on climate change. The Fabian Society aren't much interested - except in the creation of "green jobs" and promoting "green growth" (See later that growth is the enemy of climate change.) The Joseph Rowntree Trust have lost interest in the climate disaster instead promoting

"inclusive growth". There are now few climate related meetings I would want to go to.

++ Colin Challen

Unfortunately, Colin lost his seat as an MP after a constituency boundary change. I believe he was denied the seat that should have been his because it was given to Ed Balls, parachuted in by Gordon Brown's Labour Party Head Office. I guess Gordon Brown wasn't very interested in climate change.

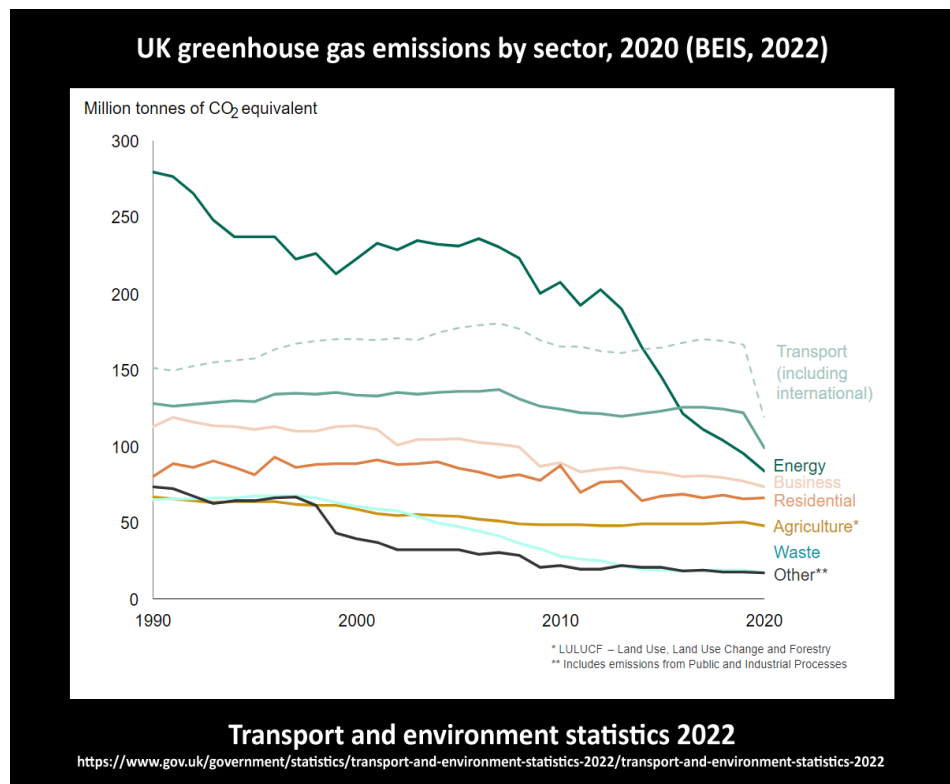
Colin's book [Too little too late](#) tells how the political system has failed us:

Colin Challen MP - praised by Prime Ministers Blair and Brown for his work on climate change - writes a coruscating damnation of the indecision and lack of political courage which has characterised attempts to deal with the issue. Always plain speaking, his book exposes the wholesale inadequacy of current policy and demands an urgent change of course.

Blair and Brown may have praised Colin but the party machine denied him his seat in Parliament. Ed Balls lost that seat later.

++ The UK is a climate leader?

Before the 2021 UN climate meeting, COP26, the UK government boasted the UK was leading the way in climate action, [claiming](#) "British governments have grown our economy by 78% while cutting emissions by 44%". What they didn't say is that nearly all of the fall in emissions was due to the "dash for gas", where coal was phased out from electricity production in favour of gas.



In its entry on the dash for gas, Wikipedia climate change is not given as a reason:

The key reasons for [the dash-for-gas] were:

- (a) political: The privatization of the UK electricity industry in 1990; the regulatory change that allowed gas to be used as a fuel for power generation;
- (b) economic: the high [interest rates](#) of the time, which favoured [gas turbine power stations](#), which were quick to build.

[Wikipedia, Dash for Gas](#)

The "cutting emissions by 44%" is deceptive. It doesn't count international aviation and shipping or the emissions from goods when they are manufactured abroad. Fortunately, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which was stripped of its role on climate change does fund research which [includes these missing emissions](#).

This research estimates the greenhouse effect of the UK's consumption. Estimates of "consumption emissions" for the UK are significantly higher than "production emissions", which only count the emissions from activities within UK's boundaries. These were estimated by the UK Business Department (BEIS), which is keen to promote the UK as a climate leader, but also as a champion of business and economic growth. BEIS has now been abolished handing the climate brief to yet another government department.

As the Business Department's figures did not count the emissions from imported cement from China or the emissions from international air travel by UK citizens. This caused Greta Thunberg to refer to the claim that the UK is a climate leader to be a lie:

"There is a lie that the UK is a climate leader and that they have reduced their CO2 emissions by 44 percent since 1990, or whatever.

"And of course, if you don't include all emissions, that's, of course, the statistics are going to look much nicer."

[Greta Thunberg lashes UK! Activist says claims that nation is a climate leader are 'a lie'](#)

++ Different estimates of UK greenhouse emissions.

The "fair remaining carbon budget" of 48 tonnes CO₂ (carbon dioxide) per citizen set by Professor Gouldson for York, starts at the beginning of 2020. Here it is assumed this is 64 tonnes CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) - explained in *Appendix. Climate is worse than they say*. Here are some estimates of UK emissions at the start of 2020.

The Department of Energy, Business and Industrial Strategy gave [UK greenhouse emissions for 2019](#) as 454.8 million tonnes CO₂e. That's 6.8 tonnes CO₂e per UK citizen.

The website Carbon.Place gives the average personal emissions for the UK to be 8.1 tonnes per year.

The Department of Food and Rural Affairs put [the UK's emissions for 2019](#) at 670 million tonnes. That's 10 tonnes CO₂e per UK citizen.

In the 2020 edition of his book, [How bad are bananas](#), Professor Mike Berners-Lee gives the average emissions of the average Briton as 13 tonnes CO₂e per year.

Assuming a steady (linear) decline in emissions from 2020 these figures imply these dates that net-zero must be achieved to keep within the fair remaining carbon budget for 1.5°C:

Source of 2019 emissions estimates	Year that net-zero is required
Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	2039
Website Carbon.Place	2036
Department of Food and Rural Affairs	2033
"How bad are bananas", Professor Berners-Lee	2030

Net-zero by 2050 will exceed the fair remaining budget for 1.5°C by a significant margin, whatever the source of emissions data. The UK government should admit this.

++ Tracking down "Greta's lie"

In July 2008, Lord Adair Turner, spoke to a meeting of Colin Challen's APPCCG. He agreed to take follow up questions by email so I emailed asking about the UK's greenhouse emissions missing from the UK's official count. After some prompting, I got an answer in October 2009, which included "We have not attempted to measure the UK's emissions on a 'consumption' basis. That means ignoring a lot of emissions.

In October 2017, at a meeting of the Royal Society, I asked Baroness Brown, deputy chair of the UK Climate Change Committee, about the difference between production and consumption emissions. She said that, as countries converged in their production emissions, consumption emissions would converge as well. Then there would be little difference between consumption and production emissions across countries.

This was a similar answer to the one I got from Ed Davey, Secretary of State at the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), after his talk at EcoBuild in 2014. His answer was prompt and I supposed it was a line he had learnt by heart. I also asked him about the appointment of the new Permanent Secretary, the chief civil servant at his department. He pointed me to his personal secretary.

++ Appointment of the Permanent Secretary at DECC

After my brief encounter with Ed Davey, I had a word with his private secretary. I followed this up with an email about the appointment of the new Permanent Secretary. The candidate that won the selection process, David Kennedy, had been Chief Executive of the Climate Change Committee. In the Guardian, Damian Carrington had written:

Kennedy was unanimously selected as the best qualified candidate by an eminent panel

and endorsed by the head of the civil service and the energy secretary Ed Davey. "In four years at the head of the CCC, Kennedy's intellectual rigour has won the support of both industry and the green lobby.

[David Cameron turns hit man over top energy and climate job, November 2012](#)

The chosen candidate of David Cameron was Stephen Lovegrove. Lovegrove previously had been a merchant banker. He later became Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence. Now, as Sir Stephen Lovegrove, he is [UK National Security Adviser](#).

In my email I asked if the Secretary of State would rather that [David Kennedy](#) had the post of Permanent Secretary rather than the one David Cameron imposed? I have no record of a reply.

In retrospect, I believe Ed Davey was trained to give his implausible answer by the civil servants in his Department. He can be [seen giving evidence to the Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee](#) wedged between Stephen Lovegrove and Phil Wynn Jones, Director-General for International Climate Change and Energy Efficiency at DECC.



I concluded from these events that politicians have less sway on policy and business interests within the UK Government really call the shots. As with the BBC, business beats climate.

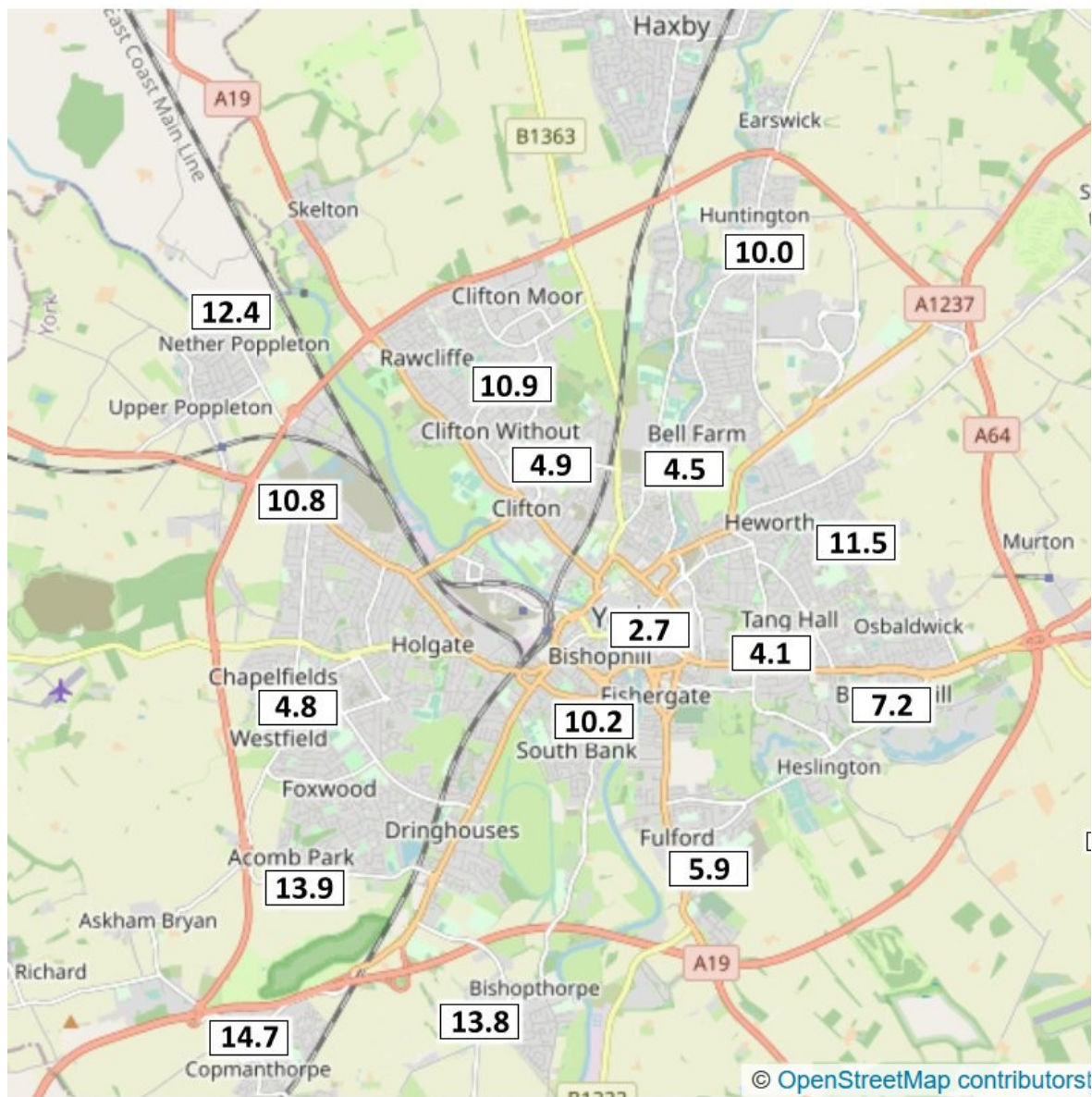
++ Business wins over climate in York too

The *Appendix, York exiles the poor* is part of the evidence I have unsuccessfully tried to give to the Inquiry on the York Local Plan. There, I made estimates of the planning gain for the new housing projected in the York Local Plan. One estimate was that landowners would benefit by £2.55 billion from the planning permission to be allocated by the York Local Plan.

The limited supply of new housing in the recent decades has meant that house prices in York have risen by hundreds of thousands of pounds each. The total value of house price increases is likely to be of the order of £10 billion.

Land owners and house owners are beneficiaries of York's housing market. People that rent are the losers. Those that rent, the younger and poorer amongst us, have the least influence. These are also the groups with the lowest emissions of greenhouse gases.

This is a map of York, annotated with estimated greenhouse gas emissions in tonnes CO₂e per year with data from the website carbon.place.



CO2e in tonnes/yr	Lower Super Output Area	ONS description
14.7	E01013424, Copmanthorpe	Comfortable suburbia
13.9	E01013354, Woodthorpe	Ageing suburbanites
13.8	E01013340, Bishopthorpe	Affluent communities
12.4	E01013427, Rural W. York	Ageing suburbanites
11.5	E01013389, Heworth Without	Ageing suburbanites
10.9	E01013431, Rawcliffe	Achieving neighbourhoods
10.8	E01013422, Rural W. York	Comfortable suburbia
10.2	E01013413, Micklegate	Achieving neighbourhoods
10	E01013408, Huntington	Ageing suburbanites
7.2	E01013402, Hull Road	Affluent communities
5.9	E01013365, Fulford	Highly qualified professionals
4.9	E01013349, Clifton	Constrained renters
4.8	E01013444, Westfield	Challenged white communities
4.5	E01013386, Heworth	Constrained renters
4.1	E01013399, Hull Road	Hampered neighbourhoods
2.7	E01033070, Guildhall	Cosmopolitan student neighbourhoods

The ONS give [explanations of their descriptions](#).

Note: All the areas with personal emissions greater than 10 tonnes CO2e per year have descriptions including 'comfortable', 'ageing', 'affluent' or 'achieving'. With the exception of LSOA E01033070, Guildhall, all the areas with emissions less than 5 tonnes CO2e per year have descriptions including 'constrained', 'challenged', or 'hampered'. The high emitters mostly own their own houses. The low emitters rent.

What are the activities that cause greenhouse emissions?

The table below shows the activities that cause greenhouse emissions from sample areas in York - a 'rich' area (perhaps 'affluent' is a better term. The super rich don't live here.) and a 'poor' area (but not poor by international standards).

The activity that causes most greenhouse emissions for the affluent area is flights i aircraft. [Note: York Council has no substantial plans for sequestering carbon so all emissions must reach zero by 2030 - according to their declaration of a climate emergency (see below). There is no sign of York Council trying to persuade this group to cut their holiday flights.

The second worst affluent activity is food and drink. The carbon.place estimate for the affluent being over four times that of the poor. It is unlikely that the affluent consume that many more calories than the poor. The difference may be due to the the carbon intensity of the food in the diets or the way food is consumed. If York Council were serious in tackling climate change, they

would be asking the questions.

Estimates of CO2e emissions per person per year by activity. Data from carbon.place.

Source of Emissions	A "Rich" LSOA All residents 1.7 people per car	A "Poor" LSOA All residents 4.4 people per car
	E01013424	E01013399
Electricity	407	344
Gas	1390	763
Other Heat	16	11
Public Transport	48	24
Car driving	1530	425
Van Driving	104	53
Flights	3380	0
Food and Drink	2390	543
Consumables	1210	278
Leisure	2230	599
Other Housing	648	224
Services	1330	875
Total	14683	4140
Source	carbon.place	carbon.place
% emissions from cars	16.30%	10.30%

Emissions are in kilograms CO2e per year

York's declaration of a climate emergency

York councillors voted for declaring a climate emergency in 2019:

Councillors voted almost unanimously in favour of declaring a climate emergency and the decision was met with applause from campaigners watching the meeting from the public gallery.

[York declares 'climate emergency' after young people demand action](#), York Press

The motion, proposed by leader of the Greens, Andy D'Agorne was:

Council notes:

1. Humans have already caused irreversible climate change, the impacts of which are being felt around the world. Global temperatures have already increased by 1 degree Celsius from pre-industrial levels.
Atmospheric CO2 levels are above 400 parts per million (ppm). The latest report from the InterGovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in October 2018 gave us 12 years to implement changes to keep global warming to a maximum of 1.5

degrees in order to avoid widespread drought, food scarcity, heat related deaths and loss of biodiversity including insects and vital food crop pollinators.

2. At present the world is on track to overshoot the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C limit before 2050. In order to reduce the chance of runaway global warming and limit the effects of climate breakdown, it is imperative that we as a species reduce our CO₂eq (carbon equivalent) emissions from their current 6.5 tonnes per person per year to less than 2 tonnes as soon as possible. [Note: 6.5 tonnes CO₂e is lower than all the estimates given above,]

3. Individuals cannot be expected to make this reduction on their own. Society needs to change its laws, taxation, and infrastructure to make low carbon living easier and the new norm.

4. Carbon emissions result from both production and consumption.

5. City of York Council has already made some positive progress, but this is not enough. More can and must be done. The Independent Panel on Climate Change in its Oct. 2018 report was very clear that action from all parts of society is necessary and local government has a responsibility to lead the way.

6. City councils around the world are responding by declaring a 'Climate Emergency' and taking action to address this emergency.

Council believes that:

1. All levels of government (national, regional and local) have a duty to limit the negative impacts of climate breakdown. Local councils that recognise this should not wait for their national governments to change their policies.

2. Cities are uniquely placed to lead the world in reducing carbon emissions, as they are in many ways easier to decarbonise than rural areas.

3. The consequences of global temperature rising above 1.5°C are so severe that preventing this from happening must be humanity's number one priority.

4. Bold local climate action can deliver economic and social benefits in terms of new green jobs, economic savings and market opportunities, as well as much improved well-being for York residents – for example through reducing fuel poverty and energy bills, encouraging healthy, active travel and improving green spaces and access to nature.

Council calls on the Executive to:

1. Declare a 'Climate Emergency'.
2. Commit to a target of making York carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions (scope 1, 2 and 3 of the Greenhouse Gas Protocol).
3. Request a report within six months setting out the immediate actions the Council will take to address this emergency and a plan to measure annual citywide progress towards meeting the 2030 target.
4. Work with partners across the city and across the region to deliver this new goal through all relevant strategies and plans and drawing on local and global best practice.
5. Actively lobby the Government to provide the additional powers and resources needed to meet the 2030 target."

[Declare a Climate Emergency](#)

Following this declaration, York Council commissioned a report from Professor Gouldson and others, [A Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for York](#). It starts with some dire warnings:

Perhaps most worryingly, the science predicts that there may be a point where this process becomes self-fuelling, for example where warming leads to the thawing of permafrosts such that they release significant quantities of greenhouse gases leading to further warming. Beyond this point or threshold, the evidence suggests that we may lose control of our future climate and become subject to what has been referred to as dangerous or 'runaway' climate change.

[A Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for York](#), A Gouldson et al. 2019

It gave a remaining carbon budget, which amounted to 48 tonnes carbon dioxide per York Citizen. (Some confusion here, a strict reading of the document indicates 48 tonnes of CO₂ but it probably meant CO₂e, which amounts to a budget of 64 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent CO₂e.)

Despite the dire warning, the report ignores much of the emissions of York citizens:

This assessment does not include [York]'s broader carbon footprint – for example relating to longer distance travel or the goods and services that are produced elsewhere but consumed within York (i.e. it's scope 3 emissions).

More recently the council have produced [York's Climate Change Strategy 2022-2032](#), which says:

City of York Council

The council is taking a leading role in tackling climate change and will reduce corporate emissions to net zero by 2030; however, the council is directly responsible for less than 4% of the total emissions in York. The council's wider influence can extend far beyond this,

through purchasing decisions and local policy, but every aspect of our society will need to contribute towards achieving our city-wide ambition.

[York's Climate Change Strategy 2022-2032](#)

Reading between the lines, York Council has back-tracked from its declaration of a climate emergency. The declaration was bold, but for anyone that knows about personal carbon emissions, it was not credible without drastic action to persuade the citizens of York to change their lives to cut their carbon emissions. There have been no signs of this.

At the last local elections, in May 2023, the Labour Party took control from a Lib Dem and Green coalition. Labour are just beginning to take control.

Labour should be better but watch this space.