



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council
Vale of White Horse District Council

By email: Emily.Smith@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Greg Hands MP
Minister of State for Energy, Clean Growth
and Climate Change

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Dear Cllr Smith,

Thank you for your letter dated 24 December 2021 to Victoria Prentis MP, sent on behalf of the Vale of Horse District Council, regarding climate change. Your letter has been forwarded to this Department and I am replying this matter falls within my ministerial portfolio. I apologise for the delay in responding, your correspondence has only recently been brought to my attention.

Achieving our net zero target must be a shared endeavour, requiring action from everyone in society. I am grateful to you and the Vale of White Horse District Council for your enthusiasm and commitment to action to achieve our climate goals.

With regards to the Climate and Ecology (CEE) Bill, the UK already has a world-leading legislative framework in place, the Climate Change Act 2008, to mitigate climate change and ensure that the Government works towards meeting its net zero emissions target by 2050. The combination of our innovative system of carbon budgets, oversight afforded by the Climate Change Committee and ambitious policy action has seen the UK achieve record clean growth in the last three decades with our economy growing by 78% and our emissions decreasing by 44%. This is the fastest rate in the G7. In order to oversee progress, the Act established the Climate Change Committee (CCC) – an independent, statutory body to provide expert advice to Government on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The Climate Assembly UK brought together 100+ people from diverse backgrounds to discuss how the UK should meet our net zero target. Through government's response to the BEIS Select Committee's Call for Written Evidence and Oral Evidence in their inquiry, we gave a comprehensive view of the Citizen Assembly's work. We responded to all the major areas of the Climate Assembly UK Report and the recommendations that received the greatest support from Assembly members, providing our views on them and details of what Government is doing and has planned in those areas.

Through the Net Zero Strategy, Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan and a range of plans to decarbonise key sectors of the economy, we have set out concrete steps we will take to build back greener from the pandemic and reach net zero emissions by 2050. The UK's sixth carbon budget puts into law a world-leading target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels – another decisive step towards net zero by 2050 as we build back greener. This latest bold step demonstrates our continued leading role in tackling climate change, with a domestic target consistent with the Paris Agreement temperature goal.

We are committing to restoring at least 35,000 hectares of peatlands in England by 2025. We will aim to restore approximately 280,000 hectares of peatland in England by 2050. We will boost the existing £640m Nature for Climate Fund with a further £124m of new money, ensuring total spend of more than £750m by 2025 on peat restoration, woodland creation and management. This will enable more opportunities for farmers and landowners to support net zero through land use change.

I note your concerns about the resources, powers, and funding available for local government to deliver on net zero. Local authorities already have a combination of existing powers and responsibilities across housing, planning and transport which gives them autonomy to deliver net zero. Local Authorities also have significant spending power for net zero. In 2021-22 the Government increased the core spending power for English local authorities from £49 billion in 2020-21 to up to £51.3 billion, a 4.6% increase.

In addition, the National Audit Office Report into Local Government and Net Zero identifies £1.2 billion in specific grant funding available in 2020-2021 for local authorities to act on climate change, and notes that this is a sixteen-fold increase on the previous year. The NAO figures do not include in this total the extensive funding with broader purposes that enable local authorities to incorporate net zero action into their wider functions. The Government has also established the UK Infrastructure Bank with an initial £12 billion of capital for the twin goals of tackling climate change and levelling up. One of the bank's core objectives is to support regional and local economic growth through better connectedness, opportunities for new jobs and higher levels of productivity.

In addition, the Net Zero Strategy outlined our plans to enable local areas to deliver net zero. It outlined Government's intention to continue the Local Net Zero Programme. Almost £19m has been invested in the programme to date for local places to build capacity and capability to deliver on net zero. This includes provisions to continue the Local Net Zero Hubs to support all areas of England to reach net zero; to promote best practice and support local authorities to develop net zero projects that can attract commercial investment; and to increase knowledge sharing to demonstrate and share successful net zero system solutions.

Government does, however, recognise that longer term and more co-ordinated funding streams can enhance innovation and investment, reduce bureaucracy, and encourage more efficient and integrated decision making. The Net Zero Strategy outlined government's intention to explore how we could simplify and consolidate funds which target net zero initiatives at the local level. We will also work across Departments to explore how we can give certainty to investment in longer-term programmes supported by regeneration initiatives.

I hope you will find this reply helpful.

Yours ever

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'G Hands', written over a faint circular stamp.

THE RT HON GREG HANDS MP
Minister of State for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change