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Economic recovery plan should be linked with achieving net zero, says citizens' assembly

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The government should link economic recovery with measures that help achieve the target of net zero emissions as the UK emerges from lockdown, a citizens' assembly has said.

An interim briefing¹ from the Climate Assembly UK suggests the government should limit or put conditions on investment in high carbon industries, rethink and invest in infrastructure, and support low carbon industries.

There was also consensus that the government and employers should take steps to encourage lifestyles that are more compatible with reaching net zero such as increasing home working and making changes to how people travel for work.

Assembly members said that the covid-19 pandemic is an "opportunity" for change and a chance to restart the country's economy on a greener pathway.

Climate Assembly UK was commissioned by six cross party select committees of the UK parliament to explore how the UK should reach its legally binding target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The 108 participants were selected to represent the UK's population in terms of demographics and levels of concern about climate change. The assembly met face to face for three weekends starting in January 2020 and then online across three weekends in April and May.

Assembly members wanted their views to influence debate on the government's economic recovery plan and so have published their interim report now, with a final report out in September. A statement from the chancellor of the exchequer on economic stimulus is expected before the summer recess. On 25 June, the Committee for Climate Change will deliver a progress update to parliament which will focus on the response to the covid-19 pandemic and will note the findings of the citizen's assembly.

The briefing found that 79% of assembly members "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that steps taken by the government to help the economy recover after lockdown should be designed to help achieve net zero. For example, there should be limits to bailing out high carbon industries, such as oil companies and aviation, and any incentives should be linked to green commitments.

Some 93% of assembly members "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that as lockdown eases, government, employers, and others should take steps to encourage lifestyles to change to be more compatible with reaching net zero, such as through greater home working, encouraging and incentivising cycling, and reducing business travel.

¹ Climate Assembly UK. Interim briefing: covid-19, recovery, and the path to net zero. June 2020. www.climateassembly.uk.