



Responding to the climate crisis

Future well-being of Wales: looking beyond Brexit

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1. Introduction

When this ‘think-piece’ was commissioned, [WCVA believed](#) Brexit to be *the biggest societal upheaval in Wales in the past decade*. The worldwide COVID-19 crisis has now dwarfed Brexit, but the climate crisis will in turn dwarf COVID. Indeed, actions contributing to climate change (such as deforestation) [may have contributed to COVID](#). This paper therefore calls for a sustained focus on the climate emergency even greater than that afforded to Brexit and COVID.

We are grateful to all those who agreed to be interviewed in difficult circumstances, completed our questionnaire or provided us with information. We are also grateful to staff of the Future Generations Commissioner who, following the publication of their [Future Generations Report 2020](#), took time to talk with us. We cite their report as FGC, and the parallel report [So, What’s Different?](#) by the Auditor General for Wales as AG.

We, of course, are responsible for the use we have made of these contributions. The full interview notes and questionnaire results were submitted with this report so that the evidence base is available. We hope that this short contribution will spur the Welsh third sector to prioritise responding to the climate emergency in the context of Brexit and pandemic recovery.

2. Climate action in the Welsh third sector

There was inevitably a degree of self-selection amongst those who engaged with our work. We spoke to the Welsh third sector organisations whose main purpose is climate action or more generally environmental. But the largest category of survey respondents comprised those who said, “We think that climate action is important and do what we can, but it is not a priority for us.” We suspect that they would be typical (in this respect) of much of the third sector in Wales.

When asked ‘What would encourage you to take more climate action?’ over half said ‘Access to better evidence and action about the right kind of action to take’ and ‘funding tied to climate action’. Cynnal Cymru’s [Carbon Literacy Project](#) and the Centre for Alternative Technology’s [Zero Carbon Britain](#) have developed tools to enable other organisations to take action within their own spheres of influence or with regard to their own carbon footprint. The faith sector across the UK has developed its own tools – [EcoChurch](#) (to reduce the carbon and environmental footprint of church activities), [Climate Sunday](#) (to encourage churches campaigning prior to COP26) and [EcoIslam](#).

There are some networks for collaboration, notably [Stop Climate Chaos Cymru](#) and [Wales Environment Link](#), but these tend to be limited to a small number of organisations rather than the whole third sector. The much wider coalition which helped forge the Well-Being of Future Generations Act, the [Sustainable Development Alliance](#), operates in much reduced form.

3. Brexit and climate change

Two thirds of survey respondents believed that Brexit would have significant influence over future climate action. Specific aspects mentioned in our interviews included:

- loss of EU regulations which have had a positive effect on tackling climate change

- possible loss of access to the EU Carbon Trading Scheme
- loss of a funding source for third sector climate action
- the danger of UK withdrawal from other international efforts, either because it has previously participated via the EU, or due to a shift away from internationalism at UK governmental level. Not surprisingly, international sector organisations were especially concerned about this
- possible reductions in international trade, and the consequent loss of its positive benefits, such as reducing global poverty by helping farmers in developing countries make a livelihood, promoting equality, peace, and human rights
- that the poorest countries will be an afterthought in trade negotiations.

Two areas were mentioned as possibly being more positive:

- Developing new land use and agricultural policies outside the EU. We heard a cautious welcome for Welsh Government’s development of [Sustainable Farming and our Land](#). (See also section 4a below).
- Developing local procurement policies as part of building up the foundational economy, which is discussed in section 4. (Although the [Trade Bill](#) currently before UK Parliament envisages the UK joining the WTO’s [Government Procurement Agreement](#), which will continue to inhibit some forms of local preference in public sector procurement. Welsh Government has [recommended](#) that the Senedd give legislative consent to this Bill. FGC has a particular focus on procurement, pp 127-152, but does not discuss the Trade Bill).

We agree with our respondents that these are areas requiring further urgent lobbying of government as post-Brexit legislation is developed and [future trade negotiations continue](#) – see our challenge to UK Government and third sector in section 6.

4. “It’s the economy, stupid”

A striking feature of our interviews was the number of respondents who apologised for lacking expertise in economics and, especially, in international trade. Outside the tiny number of specialists working in this field in Wales, and those who have access to such expertise at UK level in their organisation, this weakness is deeply felt.

It may be that this helps to account for the responses to the survey question which asked respondents to place themselves on a scale between the statements ‘The way our economy works now makes it impossible to tackle climate change’ and ‘The way our economy works is not a barrier to tackling climate change’. A (to us) surprising number of respondents are inclined to feel the climate crisis can be handled within the current economic system.

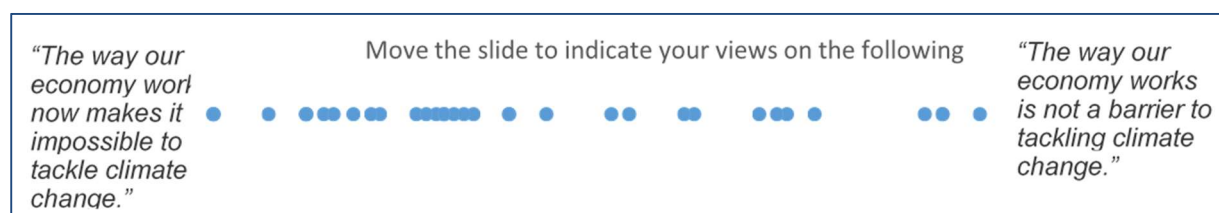


Figure 1 Survey responses – respondents were asked to move a slider to show their agreement with either statement

This contrasts sharply with the statements of FGC, *Our economic system is broken* (p. 165) and *The evidence is clear: our current economic and financial model has been achieved as a result of natural resource exploitation and environmental damage... As a result we are starting to hit environmental limits to economic growth... It is unsustainable, inequitable, and if left unchecked, will continue to drive humanitarian crises across the globe.* (p. 176)

The contrasting perceptions of the Commissioner and some in the Welsh third sector should be a focus for urgent thinking. When even the World Economic Forum concludes that the [top risks are environmental, but ignore economics and they'll be harder to fix](#) (a news release headline over the [2020 Global Risks Report](#)), the Welsh third sector's lack of economic expertise must be a cause for serious concern.

The Welsh Doughnut (Wales 2020)

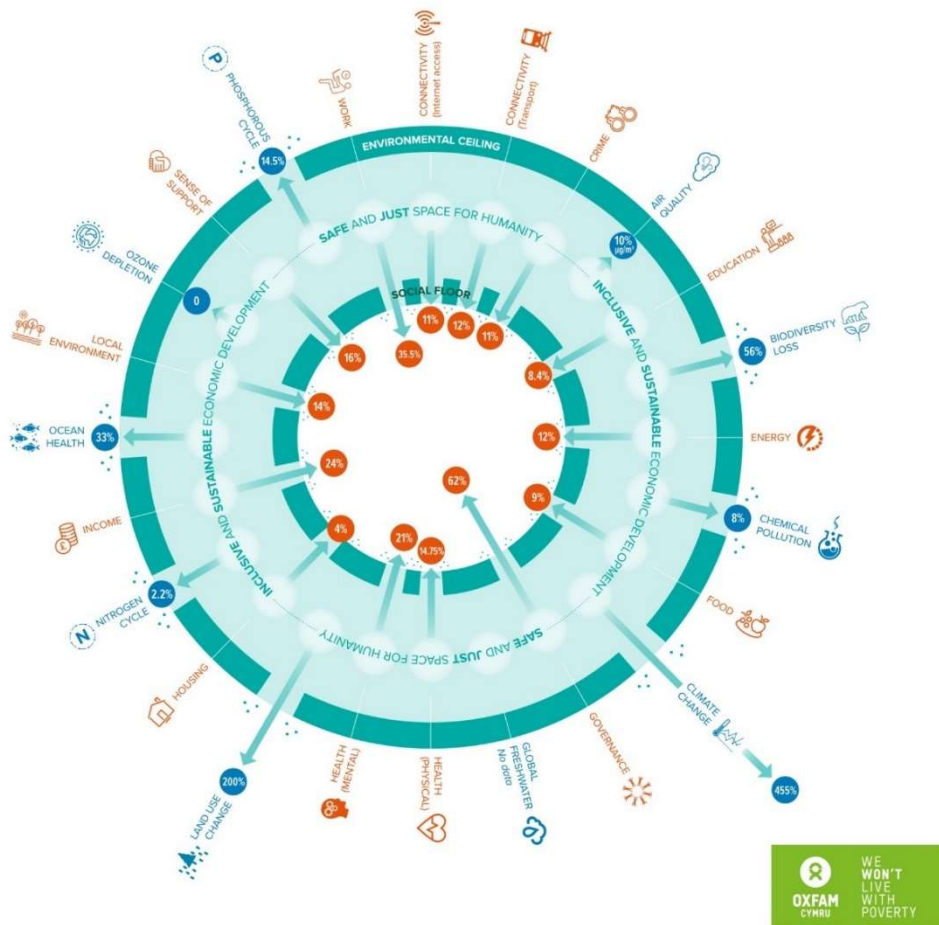


Figure 2 Oxfam Welsh Economic Doughnut Results 2020

Oxfam 2020 ©

In March, the [Welsh Doughnut 2020](#) was published – a modelling of the consequences of the current economic system in Wales. As well as indicating serious levels of domestic poverty and social exclusion, it also shows that the Welsh economy breaches planetary limits on climate change by 455%, and by

56% on biodiversity loss. Here is evidence that we are not just *starting to hit environmental limits to economic growth* but that we have ploughed through them.

In the last 40 years, says the Future Generations Commissioner, humanity has gone from using one planet's worth of natural resources each year, to using one and a half. We are on course to be consuming three planet's worth by 2050. (FGC p. 165). Over the same period, [carbon emissions worldwide have more than doubled](#).

A number of our respondents referred to **international trade** in this context – a topic raised in public consciousness by debates around Brexit. No-one, however, made the link between the dramatic rise in emissions and the major changes to the world economy over the same period. Naomi Klein in [This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate](#), in a section headed, *A Wall Comes Down, Emissions Go Up* (p. 72) sees the formation of the European Single Market across western and eastern Europe – along with the World Trade Organisation – as key to the “global warming” problem spiralling out of control. International trade itself generates carbon emissions through transport; it creates lengthy ‘just-in-time’ supply chains heavily dependent on this transport and enabling the outsourcing of carbon emissions and pollution generally to poorer economies; and it damages the [health of both people and planet](#). In other words, the “broken” economic model identified by the Future Generations Commissioner is the model of trade maximisation devised and implemented by the EU and WTO. (Not that those models are identical in their effects- the EU model also imposes social and environmental standards on traders, while such constraints are often [contrary to WTO principles](#) and overturned by its [disputes resolution procedure](#)).

A number of our respondents had contributed to the formation of the Welsh Government's [International Strategy](#), especially influencing its framing around the “globally responsible Wales” well-being goal. It is significant that the one chapter of the strategy which has no stated priorities related to this goal is the chapter on trade (p. 23), although the goal is referenced a few times in the text of the chapter. FGC p. 410 quotes Oxfam and WEN Wales's [Feminist Scorecard](#) (p. 12, published before the Strategy) in saying that *there is no publicly available evidence that global responsibility is a consideration when trade or other promotional decisions are being taken* [by Welsh Government]. The Commissioner recommends that *Welsh Government should seek to take advantage of opportunities to assist the UK Government to work out a new post-Brexit trade policy to promote values within trading relationships that are not exploitative of people or the planet...* (p. 422). Welsh Government's 2018 White Paper [Trade Policy: the issues for Wales](#) refers to *promoting fair and ethical trade* as one of a number of *overarching principles* for trade policy (p. 21), but contains no further detail.

We would have expected near universal scepticism in the Welsh third sector about an economic model based on current patterns of international trade, when the sector was instrumental in Wales becoming the world's first [Fair Trade Nation](#); Fairtrade is required because international trade is unfair. Continuing and enhancing EU [preferential trading arrangements for the world's poorest countries](#) is a key demand of the Fairtrade movement in its submissions to UK and Welsh Government consultations regarding future trade policy. [Fair Trade Wales](#) would like to see holistic risk assessments carried out on trade agreements which would consider sustainability, gender and impacts on third parties (eg

coffee producing countries which could be negatively impacted by our opening up markets to Brazilian coffee supply).

Several interviewees referred to the positive effect on community life and on tackling climate change of using more local suppliers, generating energy locally and shortening supply chains – not least due to the travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic. This links with the concept of the **foundational economy**, defined in the 2013 [Manifesto for the Foundational Economy](#) as *that part of the economy that creates and distributes goods and services consumed by all (regardless of income and status) because they support everyday life*. Lee Waters [suggested](#) in January 2020 that *It can be a progressive response to many of the underlying issues that drove people to vote the way they did in the EU referendum of 2016*.

The 2013 manifesto contains only one reference to environmental sustainability (p. 8) and none to climate change. The concept was applied to Wales by an FSB commissioned report [What Wales Could Be](#) in 2015, and to Swansea Bay in particular by [What Wales Can Do](#) in 2017. The only reference to the environment in the 2017 document is to Housing Associations' developing green space and Homes as Power Stations, and the report was written partly due to scepticism about regeneration based on the Swansea Tidal Bay Lagoon.

By 2020, however, the FGC Report is linking Wales becoming *a low carbon society with an ambition to procure goods and services fairly and locally, with the foundational economy developing local wealth and employment* (p. 167). The IWA has been key in [developing this concept for Wales](#).

Two of the most obvious areas – cited by a number of our respondents – where the foundational economy can contribute to a low carbon future are:

- a. **Food supply:** As recently as late 2015, [What Wales Could Be](#) could say that *the future of Welsh farming will be directly determined by EU-related politics not economics*. (p. 63). That is clearly no longer so. In [A Welsh food system fit for future generations](#), WWF Cymru apply the goals and ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to this topic. They say, *A new food vision for Wales should centre around re-localising the food system, restoring environmental, social and human capital to strengthen food security and capture more value locally. It should look at what we can sustainably produce in Wales, and tailor this to consumer demand and market opportunities*. (p. 7).

This raises fundamental questions not tackled in the Welsh Government's [International Strategy](#), such as what might *fair and ethical trade* be. For example, what food should Wales import from overseas (rather than produce locally) and how do we procure it ethically? How sustainable are our exports? Should we be exporting red meat from Wales as encouraged by the Strategy (p. 16)?

It may well be that the pandemic experience of disruption to supply chains has made these questions even more important: *The diversity of practices within an agroecological system creates a more robust and resilient system that is less vulnerable to international market dynamics* ([WWF](#), p. 7)

The 2014 [Deep Place](#) study of Tredegar proposed a more local food supply chain for that

community as part of a regenerated local economy, based on an understanding of the foundational economy (section 6.1). Such a vision would require significant changes in land use. As the [UK Committee on Climate Change](#) says in its report on [Land use](#) *Proposed new [post-Brexit] UK laws on agriculture and the environment means there is now a one-off opportunity to define a new land strategy* (p. 11).

- b. **Local energy generation.** We were inspired by our conversations with [Awel Amen Tawe](#) and [Partneriaeth Ogwen](#), who are developing the foundational economy of their areas on the basis of local energy generation. The development of Ynni Ogwen in the Bethesda area of Gwynedd took three years and has been a catalyst for more sustainable development actions. The partnership now has community electric vehicles, community growing initiatives and energy poverty schemes. They have provided a grassroots response to the COVID-19 pandemic, through mobilising volunteers and establishing [Cadwyn Ogwen](#). This scheme allows people to purchase local food online which is then delivered to the door in an electric vehicle. The vehicle is available because of funding from the EU funded rural development programme, [LEADER](#). Cadwyn aims to continue supporting local food businesses after COVID. [Deep Place](#) recommended an equivalent pattern of economic development for Tredegar, but was never implemented.

However, as the lack of reference to climate change in the seminal foundational economy literature indicates, there is no necessary link between developing the foundational economy and tackling climate change. **We recommend that the third sector work on forging that link**, building on [WWF's diagrammatic presentation](#):

Environment and Foundational Economy Conceptual Model

5.

The foundational economy is reliant on ECOSYSTEM SERVICES and economic resilience is affected if these services are undermined

RELIANCE ON THE ENVIRONMENT FOR ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND PRODUCTIVITY

Supporting
Soils
Nutrients
Biodiversity

Provisioning
Crops
Timber
Livestock
Fish
Energy

Regulating
Water Quality
Air Quality
Pollination
Carbon Storage
Reducing Flood Risk
Assimilating Waste

Cultural
Recreation
Health benefits
Historic
Landscapes
Sense of 'place'
Appreciation of nature

FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY 1.0

Collective consumption of daily essentials via infrastructure of networks and branches.

Covers some our basic needs within a 'place': food supply; infrastructure including (housing, transport, water, sewerage, energy and communication) and public service provision supporting daily life in our communities

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ARE CAUSED BY FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The foundational economy may undermine these ecosystem services through impacts of its activity on the environment

- land and soil degradation
- ecological footprint of consumption
- resource footprint of production.
- increasing biodiversity loss
- carbon and other emissions
- air, water and land pollution
- waste materials

FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY BUILDS LIVEABILITY & SUSTAINABILITY

Economic activity which supports ecosystem services, reduces environmental impacts, maximises nature restoration and builds resilience to environmental change.

Covers a communities' basic needs of food, infrastructure, energy, environmental protection, water and land management both now and for future generations..

BOTH NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

- investing in ecosystem restoration as a core part of wellbeing economy.
- maximises the opportunity for income / liveability through activities that are based in nature restoration (tree planting / agroecology / eco-tourism / food manufacturing. reduce biodiversity loss
- maximises carbon sequestration and storage and minimises GHG emissions
- maximises opportunities to improve natural resources that communities rely on: air, water land, soils landscape
- maximises resource efficiency in production of goods and services
- minimises the ecological footprint of consumption in the community including waste
- supports communities and economies to deal with increasing risks from climate change (essential infrastructure – roads; energy; utilities; buildings; housing; water and flood management)

Figure 3 Netherwood Sustainable Futures and WWF Cymru 2020 ©

6. “Stuff happens”

As we were writing this report, the COVID-19 pandemic broke and this not only affected the practicalities of our work, but also influenced our respondents’ perceptions of the original questions.

- a. When asked what the most important factor was in determining future climate action, a majority said “how we recover from the pandemic”. Previous campaigning and action plans cannot simply be restarted – perceptions of priority and risk have changed.
- b. Sadly, the failure to implement the *Deep Place* proposals may well have contributed to Wales Online on 5 May 2020 being able to describe Tredegar as [*The impoverished Welsh town where lockdown could be ‘the final nail in the coffin’*](#). This depressing story was inspired by the report of the Centre for Towns, [*Covid-19 and our Towns*](#), which offers a desk-based statistical analysis of the potential damage of the “lockdown” across towns in England and Wales. [Lee Waters](#), writing in January 2020, said of foundational economy businesses, *They are ... critical to our wellbeing, because the interruption of their supply undermines safe and civilised life, but they are also more resilient to external economic shocks*. This theory will now be severely tested.
- c. We are concerned at lack of scrutiny of continuing trade negotiations with the EU and other countries, resulting from the distraction of the pandemic and funding crises in academia and third sector. This increases the danger of these deals being focused on growth and deregulation.
- d. Respondents were also concerned at the postponement of the [COP26](#) international conference on climate change in Glasgow – although it was surprisingly low amongst most of our respondents’ priorities. Those who did refer to it considered it to be important that radical actions resulted from it, but few had yet worked out how to participate or on detailed proposals.
- e. As we were writing, a movement was growing to seek a [just recovery](#) from the pandemic, parallel with the notion of a [just transition](#) to a low carbon economy. Scotland had already established a [Just Transition Commission](#), which reported a few weeks prior to the pandemic. With regard to the pandemic and to climate change, recovery has to be international and not national. In a statement on the first anniversary of its declaration of a climate emergency, Welsh Government [made an explicit link](#) between the two and joined the [Well-Being Economics Governments Network](#). This is part of the [Well Being Economy Alliance](#), which is calling for the world to [Build Back Better](#). However, many of our respondents were sceptical as to whether Welsh Government could resist the pressure simply to ‘go for growth’ post-pandemic and post-Brexit with no regard for climate change.
- f. We now know what an emergency looks like. Some worry that the response to the pandemic has demonstrated poor global leadership and coordination, an intense inward focus at the expense of others (e.g. competing for PPE driving prices up) and terrible [cuts to funding for food programmes](#).

The Future Generations Commissioner, on the other hand, suggest that it has *shown that*

it is possible for international governments and citizens to act appropriately and together, when faced with the science surrounding global emergencies and crises. I hope that leaders, who have been repeatedly presented with the facts surrounding the nature and climate crises, will now act with the same level of urgency (FGC p 405).

Amsterdam is [seeking to build recovery within its ‘doughnut’](#). We hope (although we are not yet convinced) that the Commissioner’s verdict is true also for Wales. If so, then the proverb cited in [What Wales Could Be](#) (p. 10) *adfyd a ddwg wybodaeth, a gwybodaeth ddoethineb* (crisis brings knowledge and knowledge wisdom) may be proved correct as we seek the knowledge needed to tackle the climate emergency with wisdom.

7. Challenges to us all

Emergencies demand not only ‘think-pieces’ but action, and the pandemic has forced action we wouldn’t previously have thought possible. So as one emergency recedes, we challenge stakeholders in Wales to commensurate action to tackle the climate emergency.

1. The Welsh third sector:

(a) The sector responded swiftly to the COVID-19 emergency, making it core to every [Third Sector Partnership Council](#) (TSPC) agenda since March 2020. Similarly, **the climate emergency should be on every TSPC agenda.**

(b) The sector responded to the Brexit emergency not only through TSPC but also by forming the [Wales Civil Society Forum on Brexit](#) and participating in the four nations [Brexit Civil Society Alliance](#). We now need **a stronger Sustainable Development Alliance in Wales**, and a four nations alliance to commission research and enable intelligent lobbying of UK and devolved governments on matters such as trade. We must grasp the opportunity of postponement of COP26 to co-ordinate activities around that conference and beyond. Working with academia (including [CAST](#) and [SPRI](#) at Cardiff University), business and trades unions will be essential, as will the genuine inclusion of BAME communities. COVID and Brexit-related hate incidents have both disproportionately affected Wales’s BAME communities; the climate emergency hits hardest countries with diaspora communities in Wales. We must not perpetuate the situation where the [third sector in general](#) and in particular [the climate lobby](#) is dominated by white people.

(c) The more we worked on this paper, the more we became aware that the lack of economic expertise within or utilised by the Welsh third sector makes fulfilling challenge (b) very difficult. *Part of the problem is the small size of the Cardiff policy community where many are primarily engaged by non-economic issues. Hence, the problem of group think about economic problem definitions as much as solutions.* ([What Wales Could Be](#) p. 11). Oxfam and WWF, as GB or UK-wide organisations, are already contributing, as is the IWA. We would encourage [wider Welsh third sector engagement](#) with their work and with [Economy](#). **We urge WCVA to seek co-ordinated funding to produce independent third sector-led research** on the foundational economy (see Section 4) and a low-carbon Wales.

(d) We should not neglect the little things that reduce carbon footprint. We recommend [The New Normal](#), designed for small business but also useful for small third sector bodies wishing so to do.

2. **The Future Generations Commissioner:** We welcome the focus on climate change in the FGC report, and much improved engagement with the Welsh third sector in the past year. We would now urge the Commissioner:
 - (a) to **join with the third sector in the Alliance** described in challenges 1(b) and 1(c), perhaps by commissioning jointly with it research on the foundational economy in the light of leaving the EU, focussing especially the farming, food and drink and energy generation sectors. This would update *What Wales Could Be* for post-Brexit, post-COVID, climate emergency Wales.
 - (b) As part of this cross-sectoral alliance, we urge **re-establishment of the [Climate Change Commission for Wales](#)**, to provide specialist research and input that the wider alliance will need. To avoid duplication, this might also carry out the functions of the proposed but not yet established Welsh Government Climate Justice Advisory Group (FGC p 181) or Climate Justice Commission (p 315).
3. **Welsh Government:** The Well-being of Future Generations Act, and Welsh Government's work on a [low carbon economy](#), [decarbonisation of the public sector](#), [climate change adaptation](#), the [foundational economy](#) and the [Economic Contract](#), provide a framework for Wales's tackling climate change. But *as in so many policy areas, there is a significant implementation gap* (FGC p 502 cf p 177, p 699, p 705). *A key challenge will be how the Welsh Government and other public bodies can ensure a fair transition to a low carbon economy, and how they can protect the most disadvantaged from the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss* (AG p 49). Many of the steps necessary in the next ten years are already articulated in [responses to the low carbon pathway consultation](#). WWF's work (see end of Section 4) shows how the low carbon and foundational economy strategies can reinforce each other. **We urge concerted, co-ordinated co-produced implementation of these strategies.**
4. **UK Government:** The climate emergency demands new priorities in international trade. We urge the UK Government to grasp this opportunity to **negotiate the first trade deals to take this emergency seriously** and focus on ethical as well as purely 'economic' values (see Section 2 above), and support the Future Generations Commissioner's call that *Welsh Government should seek to take advantage of opportunities to assist the UK Government to work out a new post-Brexit trade policy to promote values within trading relationships that are not exploitative of people or the planet...* (FGC p. 422).

8. Conclusion

Some aspects of Brexit may be an impediment to the progress we, and the committed colleagues with whom we have spoken, would like to see in Wales. However, its impact is marginal compared to climate change.

So now is the time to bring our collective energy together for a [#justrecovery](#). This must tackle climate change, living within the '[doughnut](#)', forging new economies that create local resilience to meet people's needs, but also connect the local and global by developing trading and other relationships that stop exacerbating inequality and actively benefit the poorest in the world.

9. References and Bibliography

Below are listed all published material (print and web-based) which are referenced in the think-piece, and also other material which was recommended by our interviewees or has influenced our thinking. These are grouped by broad subject areas. This is not a comprehensive bibliography for any of these fields – many of the linked documents contain fuller bibliographies.

All weblinks were accessed on 19.05.2020.

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Climate change – faith perspectives

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