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Speech to Full Council Meeting, Bath and North East Somerset Council.

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My name is Dr Alice Gardner. I work as a GP in Wiltshire, but I live with my family in Oldfield Park in Bath. I have two young daughters, and when I am at home I use my married name which is Alice Boden.

I feel that it is my duty as a mother and a health professional to fight for a safer, healthier future for my daughters and for my patients. This is why I am speaking in support of this motion to declare a climate emergency and work towards net zero emissions by 2030. We must do everything we can to effect rapid change, to reduce the risk of uncontrolled warming, climate chaos and mass extinction. As Sir David Attenborough told the UN climate conference last year, “the collapse of our civilizations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon”¹

This is a moment of crisis and we must act. However, I am here to tell you about the huge benefits of these necessary actions.

The World Health Organisation tells us that the costs of moving to a cleaner and more sustainable world are far outweighed by the health benefits of making these changes². The Zero Carbon Britain report “Rethinking the future”³ sets out strategies to net zero whilst maintaining and improving current living standards, including switching to 100% renewable energy, raising standards for new buildings, and retrofitting all existing buildings.

Increasing walking and cycling, planting trees and making public transport emission-free in BANCES will bring huge health benefits. For example, turning inactive people more active could prevent 1 in 10 cases of stroke and heart disease in the UK⁴. Trees and green spaces make us happier and healthier. If everyone had equal access to green space, the savings to the NHS are estimated at £2.1 billion per year in England alone⁵.

I’m sure that, after the debate over the Clean Air Zone, you are all aware of the dangers of air pollution. Similarly, cold, damp homes increase rates of childhood asthma⁶, and cold homes cause increased hospital admission for older people⁷. Improving insulation and ventilation in our homes is another win-win situation.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46398057> [Accessed 7.3.19]

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/05-12-2018-health-benefits-far-outweigh-the-costs-of-meeting-climate-change-goals> [Accessed 7.3.19]

³ The Centre for Alternative Technology (2016) Zero Carbon Britain: rethinking the future.

⁴ Public Health England (2014) Everybody active, every day – an evidence based approach to physical activity.

⁵ Natural England Technical Information Note TIN055 (2009) An estimate of the economic and health value and cost effectiveness of the expanded WHI initiative 2009.

⁶ Stachan, D. Damp housing, mold allergy, and childhood asthma. *Proceedings of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh* 1991; 1:140-6

⁷ Rudge, D., Gilchrist, R. Excess winter morbidity among older people at risk of cold homes: a population-based study in a London borough. *Journal of Public Health (Oxford)* 2005; 27(4): 353-8

The Zero Carbon Britain report recommends reducing food waste and increasing plant-sourced food. Agriculture produces about a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions⁸. A balanced diet, mostly from plants and with reduced meat, would cause a large drop in early deaths as well as reducing these dangerous emissions.

In a letter published in medical journals last month, a group of health professionals called on the UK Government to introduce legal changes to allow the UK to reach carbon net zero by 2030⁹. We must act quickly, to save the future for our children and the planet. But also, we must act quickly for better lives here in Bath and North East Somerset. Life can be better, happier and healthier right now, and in the future. To quote from the letter, “Our national history is made up of moments in which we have responded to crisis and realised a better world in the process”. Let’s start making that better world.

Thank you.

Distributed for reference:

UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (2016) Health and climate: co-benefits.

Centre for Alternative Technology (2014) Zero Carbon Britain: rethinking the future. Report in short: summary of key findings.

⁸ Springmann M, et al. Health and nutritional aspects of sustainable diet strategies and their association with environmental impacts: a global modelling analysis with country-level detail. *The Lancet Planetary Health* 2018; 2(10): PE451-PE461

⁹ Stott R, et al. Legislate for carbon net zero by 2030. *The Lancet Online [eLetter]* 20 February, 2019 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)30048-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)30048-0/fulltext)