



Our Meeting with Karen Bradley, MP for Staffordshire Moorlands

12th January 2024

Sally Perry and James Firkins met Karen Bradley in her Leek office. They had been given a 15-minute slot and the meeting lasted about 20 minutes.

Listed below are the questions that we provided a week or so before the meeting and our record of the responses¹. It was hard to press her on any one answer, given the limited time available. However, they got some insight into her interests and opinions, which should inform our agenda for future meetings.

We approached the meeting with the aim of co-operating in future and it seems we have already had some success!

Q1. Local Public Transport

We know you're very active on getting the Leek to Stoke rail line revived, and we wish you well with that project. But bus services in the Moorlands are in a parlous state. **Could you tell us what you're doing to save what we already have and bring back the kind of routes that can help residents get to work, education or even hospital appointments?**

KB's response

Karen said she was very pleased with the possible future train link to Stoke. She mentioned the building of a new platform on the SE side of Stoke station and the aim of having some direct trains from Leek to Manchester.

On buses, Karen mentioned £5,000,000 in funding for Staffordshire, but didn't know at that stage how much would go to the Moorlands. She agreed that bus services need to be a lot better. She would like MCA to work with her, both suggesting routes and promoting the use of rural services, including Moorlands Connect. She thought that the way Moorlands Connect works doesn't suit everyone but pointed out that if we can prove a need, there would be a better chance of getting funding and improving things. We mentioned the difficulty of getting to Stoke railway station and getting to hospital appointments by public transport. We also drew Karen's attention to the recent CPRE report "[Every Village Every Hour](#)".

STOP PRESS: Karen has since agreed to our subsequent suggestion that we take a joint ride on the Moorlands Connect to publicise the service!

Q2. Wind / Solar Energy

The UK has been a world leader in decarbonising its electricity sector. But most experts agree that expanding onshore wind is the cheapest and most effective way of getting the industry to Net Zero – and the government has recently loosened the effective ban on wind turbines. **What is your personal view on this?**

KB's response

Karen agreed that relaxing the rules on onshore wind was a good idea but could understand people's opposition to it. If turbines 'blighted' their views they would object unless they benefited from them. She pointed out that farmers erect wind turbines for their own use and only the landowner benefited. When asked, she said she would support community projects where the local community could benefit - not just wind but also solar energy. Interestingly, while talking about the CO₂e of our energy sector, she said she thought the national CO₂e audit should include the embodied CO₂e contained in our imports and exclude the CO₂e of our exports.

Q 3. Rental Housing and Insulation

Government figures show that the Moorlands has some of the most energy-inefficient housing in England. That's not only bad for our emissions targets but high energy costs are hitting hard-pressed private renters, such as young people and single parents, in their pockets. The government recently delayed measures requiring landlords to improve the energy ratings of their properties. **Don't you feel that is a backward step?**

KB's response

Karen seemed to think backtracking on the new legislation for energy standards in rented homes was the right thing to do. If landlords spent more money on properties, rents would go up. She then went on to explain how her own well-insulated flat in London was very economical to heat and seemed to agree with us when we suggested the backtracking was a short-term economic fix and in the longer term well-insulated properties would save tenants money.

Q 4. Local Councils, Law, Powers and Funding

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has made tackling climate change a priority under both this and the last administrations. But like other councils it is not required by law to act on this and is finding it hard to obtain the funding or the powers it needs. **What you think you can do at Westminster to help?**

KB's response

She agreed that councils need more powers and funding but had found in the past that if something is made a statutory duty, councils will only do what is required by the law and little more. She said Westminster had to lead on it, encouraging and empowering councils, but gave no details how this would happen if it was not statutory.

Q 5. Farming

You are rightly very engaged with the important farming sector in the Moorlands. But farmers are facing a whole range of challenges in making the change from a system of basic payments to one where they are rewarded for public goods, such as protecting the environment. **How do you think the farming sector in the district will look in, say ten years' time – will farmers be planting far more trees, for example?**

KB's response

She was vague on her vision for farming in 10 years' time, and particularly the question of tree planting. She mentioned ELM (Environmental Land Management) schemes, was glad that farmers could be paid to preserve / replace habitats and was happy to encourage and promote this with Moorlands farmers, especially small, family-owned farms. When it was suggested that to meet our national CO2e targets we might need to reduce our meat and dairy consumption, she pushed back hard and didn't think people could be asked to eat less meat or that products that produce CO2e should be taxed accordingly. As we left, we gave her a section of a Friends of the Earth spreadsheet highlighting SMDC's area as having the highest tree planting potential in England.

Karen said she would like to work with us more closely in future, and there were various projects we could help to promote. When asked, she said she would be happy to meet us again and for longer.

¹ We asked if we could record the interview and she asked us not to. Since we didn't have time to take notes our recollection of the conversation is from memory but recorded immediately afterwards.