

On the folly of promoting ECONOMIC GROWTH

- especially without considering its unintended consequences

Economic growth, especially if unlimited, has damaging consequences on climate and the environment, habitats and biodiversity, and inequality (and thus wellbeing and security), and is unsustainable. There are much better, more positive, happier, appealing alternatives with hope for the future...

By Dr Henry Adams as a member of SLACctt - South Lakes Action on Climate Change Towards Transition, 2018/19, with hope that Councillors and public body officials in particular will read it, and especially the SLDC, CumbriaCC.

CONTEXT then SUMMARY

online as www.bit.ly/growth-cc-intro-summary

The IPCC's Special Report for 1.5 degrees makes clear why we need to make rapid and urgent carbon emissions reductions in order to have any good chance of avoiding the additional severe harms of exceeding +1.5 degrees – which we are on course to exceed around 2030 to 2040, unless we take action now. This would mean the world halving its emissions by 2030 (preferably earlier), and for wealthy countries like the UK would mean becoming net carbon neutral by 2030 – a formidable challenge. Achieving such rapid change is technically feasible, but would need transformative change in our political, economic and social/behavioural thinking.

This document aims to contribute towards such change in thinking by re-directing our economic aims – to bring them within a climate and environmental context, and showing why reducing inequality is key to this. Changes in social/behavioural thinking is known not to be linear and can be abrupt from gradual, when a tipping point is reached, and that in turn can tip political thinking. I hope this document can help towards a tipping point in economic thinking, so needed now that we need to change course well before exceeding climate tipping points – when warming processes can become self-accelerating (when positive feedbacks exceed negative ones).

More specifically this document is a structured collation of summaries of studies which together show how economic growth, or GDP growth – if pursued as a priority aim or without taking into account consequences, is damaging to our climate and environment, biodiversity, vital finite resources, equality, wellbeing and happiness. GDP growth continues to be coupled to growth in carbon emissions (and resource/habitat loss and degradation).

The pursuit of GDP-measured economic growth is currently an assumed aim within not just the neoliberal ideology that underlies Conservative, Liberal Democrat, “New Labour”, and mainstream media (MSM) thinking, but also the neo-Keynesian thinking that is mainstream to non-City-type academic economics as well as McDonnell-type Labour thinking. Thus we have to change “both sides” of mainstream political economic thinking, towards green or “new economics” fit for purpose for prioritizing the vital needs this century.

Because many within the main target audience of this document (such as local government decision makers) are likely to assume that economic growth, whether GDP-measured or otherwise, is a top priority, I am not going to push upon them here the opposite to growth, i.e. de-growth, but instead will try to encourage readers to question and re-think their assumptions on growth – and at least to put tackling climate change (and other vital requirements this century) as a higher priority. This re-prioritisation is especially relevant now that Climate Emergencies are being declared by Councils, who then sadly stick to “compartmentalization” and prioritizing “growth and jobs” over climate when high carbon projects are put forward, despite the provision of thousands of green jobs being a core provision of green economics such as with Green New Deal type jobs. Climate and other vital needs should be the ‘frame’, ‘lens’, or “overarching” priority within which other policies are viewed.

So in section 11c I've ranked a list of steps by which readers can measure what changes they are making in their thinking from reading this document – and it could be read before, as well as after reading the document.

This document will also be changed, by updates from feedback etc: it is a working document or living document.

As the main body of the document is lengthy – I don't expect readers to read it all in one go but to dip in to sections that tempt their curiosity. The list of sections doubles up as a summary of main issues covered.

SUMMARY *Yet to be written – will aim to be a 2-sided sheet that can also be a stand-alone handout, with the url link to the main document. It is likely to be based on a filling-out of the list of sections.*

List of sections: (doubles-up as a summary)

1. **The push for economic or GDP growth is dangerous for our climate while it is coupled to growth in carbon emissions and other negative impacts.** Growth measured as global GDP is unlikely to decouple from emissions in the near future.
2. **We cannot continue with exponential economic growth in a world with resources that are finite.** Our economic activity must not transgress social and planetary boundaries, and economist Kate Raworth's 'doughnut' graphic helps us visualize this.
3. **The pursuit of unqualified economic growth is incompatible with what climate scientists say we must do to comply with the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement.**
4. **There is no leeway for any growth that increases UK emissions because we are "not on track".**
5. **GDP is a very poor measure:** it adds harmful activities as positives, such as fossil fuel burning.
6. a Thus it is not surprising that **GDP growth is also a poor measure.** Again – many studies show this.
b There are much better alternatives to GDP and GDP growth, such as GPI. Wellbeing is important.
7. **INEQUALITY**, wellbeing, growth and climate change are linked.
Economic growth can widen inequalities if in-equitable. The richest 10 percent of the global population is responsible for almost half of global carbon emissions from lifestyle consumption.
8. **'Prosperity without growth'.** Towards a **Post Growth** economy for Europe.
9. **ESCAPING GROWTH DEPENDENCY – Why reforming money will reduce the "need"* to pursue economic growth at any cost to the environment** – a Positive Money report. [* I've added the """]
10. **Alternatives to GDP growth are actually more positive**, and:
We need an economy to work for us, not the other way round.
11. A discussion section:
 - (a) **Adding an adjective in front of 'growth' does not per se resolve the growth problem or justify growth**
 - (b) **Green growth or de-growth, or both? Or "a-growth", or post-growth?** (discussion points)
 - (c) **Your response:** Could be one or more of a number of steps, because you need not be confined to the opposites of either growth as an over-riding priority OR de-growth. There are intermediate steps away from the mainstream growth mantra that you might initially prefer.

12. CONCLUSIONS

Local/Cumbria implications

PLANNING implications

I have also written a discussion document with the following title which is an annex to the present document: **The 2018 revised NPPF and the planning system in relation to economic growth and climate change** It is online as a pdf via this shortened link: www.bit.ly/growth-cc-nppf

Appendices: Other references and possible future additions

Link to full document: www.bit.ly/growth-cc