

# **Climate activists, I challenge you to give some real advice**

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What people truly need are guidelines on what to and how to do, not vague demands and loud words of street-marching activists in plastic fast fashion coats

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# Making demands only is flawed

After illegally blockading a road for multiple days, XR Cambridge defaced an iconic scene in the middle of Cambridge<sup>[1]</sup> - they dug up the lawn and the area around the apple tree in front of Trinity college - yesterday. Apparently if you're loud enough, this is not even a crime<sup>[2]</sup>. I know grass is a lot less good as wild fields, but like with statues or paintings, that particular spot was an ornament.

During the years in the UK I learnt to first read and try to understand other views, so I went onto their website and read their... mess.

For ages I've been getting very angry with people who say "X is bad, don't do it" without pointing at a realistic alternative. Extinction Rebellion seem to be made up completely of these people.

The quoted text are literally their demands.

## 1. The University of Cambridge must cut ties with the fossil fuel industry

That's one of the most vague sentences I've seen in my life and I worked for multiple big companies, so that's quite an achievement. If you follow the reasoning you'll see these: "Completely divest from fossil fuels." The rest is about how dare the Uni accept money from bad, bad companies and even do research for them!

Research allowed engines to become powerful with 1L petrol tanks. Diesel combustion engines are among the most power efficient machines humanity ever made. Yes, we need to phase them out, but research on making them more efficient and to produce less pollution is still a high priority.

We recently bought a house and had to re-wire the whole establishment, including replacing the main cutout (the big fuse). It was a 60A fuse, but we upgraded it to 100A (Our main electricity cable is a single phase one, limited to 100A.), considering we might be able to afford a plug-in car in the future. The car charger port on it's own is 32A. Now, imagine if a whole street suddenly starts charging their cars overnight in an area where the power mains was laid in 1954. The smell would be what we used to call "ampere smell" in college - also known as burning electrical equipment.

The house heating and hot water is on gas. Changing it to an electrical one was not possible: it's either that or the car charger; the 100A physically can't support both plus generic living equipment. Also, electric combi boilers run at a dangerously high temperatures - they are not ready for prime time yet. For heating, we could do with FIR<sup>[3]</sup>

panels and a backup wood burner, but that doesn't solve the hot water problem, plus a wood burner produces a lot of bad smoke - and I didn't touch the question of how on earth to afford this.

Now apply these problems to the power and heating system of the University.

Let's move on, to power plants. For those who hadn't learnt how power plants and grids work - I touched some high voltage topics at college -, an extremely quick summary: there are big, stable power plants that are very slow to turn on/off; these support the base needs. Then there are the small ones that are fast to turn on/off for additional power surges. In some rare cases these latter ones might even be able to "reverse the polarity", to turn them into power consumption units -because excessive power in the grid is dangerous: it can literally burn it down. The trouble with green energy is that when it's on, it's REALLY on, and you can't turn it off - hence events like "Germany paid people to use electricity over the holidays"<sup>[4]</sup> There is no technology to store extra energy yet. There are attempts, like Energy Vault<sup>[5]</sup>: stack concrete blocks to store it. It's not ready. Plus there's the issue of building out a whole new national grid, given the natural resources are all location bound<sup>[6]</sup>.

1. Cambridge City Council must hold a Citizens' Assembly on Climate Justice.

Yeah, no. Just no. The 'expert panel' idea is good, I'd get behind that, but not the generic citizen. There's 3000 years of history for a reason why these attempts are always bad, and I've heard enough stories about the 1956 Revolution in Hungary to know how bad this can end.

History books are your friend on this: democracy is slow, but it still the only one that's best for the most.

If you want to make an impact there's literally nothing stopping anyone to join or form a party and use the existing tools to move the world.

1. Cambridgeshire County Council must work with other relevant regional authorities to provide a plan for a just transition away from an inadequate transport system reliant on fossil fuels.

This might be the only one I can get behind: the public transport in Cambridge is horrible, slow, unreliable, expensive.

The thing is... the public transport in Cambridge is privatised, this is even mentioned as a problem. But that also means anyone could start a green minibus company to compete with the current ones and if it has the right pricing, message, routes, etc, people will use it. Right?

Maybe not. Maybe there's a reason why it's expensive.

# Real advice for everyone

For many years, we've been quietly trying to make a difference within our own reach with my wife. The principles are simple:

## 1. **Reduce**

Consume less. Buy better clothing that last longer. Don't follow the fast fashion. Don't fall for seasonal, temporary temptations. Always ask yourself if you need it or just want it<sup>[7]</sup>.

## 2. **Repair**

Buy repairable equipment and repair it. Get a lint remover and revive your clothes. Buy (used) business grade laptop and replace the gears if needed.

## 3. **Reuse and sell**

Try to sell or give things away; make less waste. Get used things if they can fulfil the need just as well as a new.

## 4. **Buy the one with the non-plastic packaging**

If you can choose between a product that's in plastic or another one that's in glass, buy the glass. Or the can. Or the paper. Or the PLA. The packaging is part of the product you're buying; take it into account just as much as the thing wrapped in it. *Many plastics advertise themselves as compostable - that is not the same as biodegradable: it means it falls apart into microplastic.* Obviously take away containers and coffee cups are a no go - stay there and consume it locally from a real cup or plate.

## 5. **Eat local, buy local**

It is outrageously hard to buy European made clothing. Shoes are OK, and though they are expensive, they are also pretty good. But palm oil, coconut wonders, cashew, clothing Made in China, etc are all imported and they travel a long, long way, usually on humongous ships that alone pollute the earth as much as a smaller country<sup>[8]</sup>. Try to minimise the transport it needed between you and it's place of origin. *This is where my problem with veganism comes into the picture: many vegan food comes from tropical countries, packed in plastic, transported across the globe. You're only doing good to yourself with that, not the planet, so please don't try to sell so.*

## 6. **Recycle**

This is a last resort: recycling is not cheap and can require a lot of energy.

## 7. **Travel less frequently for a longer periods**

A roundtrip with a plane takes just as much fuel for a 2 day stay as it does for a 14 days stay. A longer period of rest is better for you anyway; 1 or 2 days is never enough. Make your holidays worthy.

## Links

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-51534446>
2. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/extinction-rebellion-cambridge-police-protest-17766704>
3. <https://www.herschel-infrared.co.uk/>
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/germany-power-grid-pays-customers-christmas-sustainability-renewable-energy-a8141431.html>
5. <https://qz.com/1355672/stacking-concrete-blocks-is-a-surprisingly-efficient-way-to-store-energy/>
6. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/08/opinion/nuclear-power-germany.html>
7. <https://www.becomingminimalist.com/>
8. <https://newatlas.com/shipping-pollution/11526/>

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