**HOW TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN**

**March 2023 UPDATES**

**COURT CASE** – some of us have been withholding our council tax payments in support of this campaign, holding it as a matter of moral and religious conscience to avoid handing over money that will perpetuate the climate and ecological emergency.

There is a related court case on March 22nd  2023 13.30

at Buckinghamshire Magistrates Court, Law Courts, Easton Street, High Wycombe HP11 1LR

Supporters of this campaign will be holding a protest outside the courts and aiming for maximum publicity. All welcome. If you’d like to be in touch, email BucksCTS@protonmail.com or just turn up on the day. Thank you!

**CORRSPONDENCE AND LOBBYING**

Over many months:

\*correspondence has continued unabated,

\*supporters have attended Pension Fund Committee meetings in person, and

\*questions have been asked at those meetings on our behalf by councillors.

**CURRENT FOCUS** –

1. Investments in fossil fuels are increasingly at risk of becoming stranded assets as energy markets shift towards renewables. If that happens, it is Bucks council tax payers who will have to pick up the bill. So the good of the planet, and the good of the pension fund finances, are becoming closely aligned.
2. It is crucial for financial investments to send clear signals that the fossil fuel era must end. Engagement as investors with fossil fuel companies has clearly not been working, leading some to take legal action against Shell directors.
3. Barclays bank continues to be the fourth largest banking funder of fossil fuels globally.
4. Bucks Pension Fund Committee is very secretive, largely managed behind closed doors, and resistant to questions from its own committee members. We are calling for much greater public engagement, transparency and accountability.

If you would like to see the evidence and the arguments behind these points, just get in touch.

BucksCTS@protonmail.com

**GUIDANCE FOR WRITING TO COUNCILLORS ABOUT DIVESTING FROM FOSSIL FUELS**

**Thank you for taking time to write to Buckinghamshire Councillors about the Council’s continuing investments in fossil fuels.**

**We have been assured by a sympathetic councillor on the Pension Fund Committee that it will make a significant difference if councillors receive many letters on this issue. Every letter will count! And it’s particularly significant if you are someone whose pension is with the Council.**

**Please find below:**

1. Template letter to use, which includes the key demands we’re making. You can just send in this basic letter if that works best for you, and personalise it/adapt it if you wish, of course.
2. *Optional*: a list of key arguments you could include, along with sources of evidence in support, for you to use according to your own preferences and priorities. Feel free to adapt them as you wish.
3. *Optional*: a list of key questions that some of us are putting to the council to follow up their replies to earlier freedom of information requests. You could include these also if you wish, and ask them to discuss them at their *next Committee meeting, in the presence of the public.* (The Pension Fund Committee tends to be very secretive, and much of the time the public are excluded.)
4. Send your letter to Timothy Butcher, who chairs the Pension Fund Committee (address is in the template letter) and copy it to:
	1. all Councillors on the Committee; details [available here](https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=341)
	2. your own particular local councillors; details [available here](https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1)
	3. laura.chappell@brunelpp.org CEO, david.vickers@brunelpp.org Chief Investment Officer, and [faith.ward@brunelpp.org](https://dtaction.co.uk/swap/buckinghamshire/faith.ward%40brunelpp.org)Chief Responsible Investment Officer, at Brunel Pension Partnership who manage the money on behalf of the Bucks Pension Fund.
5. **TEMPLATE LETTER – Adapt to your own words if you wish - Post and/or email – contact details here** [**https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgUserInfo.aspx?UID=113**](https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgUserInfo.aspx?UID=113)

Timothy Butcher                                                                                          **YOUR ADDRESS**

Chair, Buckinghamshire Council Pension Fund Committee

Gillingham House

Dodds Lane

Chalfont St Giles

Bucks HP8 4EL        **DATE**

Dear Councillor Timothy Butcher,

**Investment policies of the Buckinghamshire Council Pension Fund.**

**I write to make an urgent call on the BCPF Committee to instruct Brunel Pension Partnership to:**

1. divest urgently and completely from all fossil fuel investments by 2025;

**(2)**  prioritise the transfer of such monies to renewable energies and other environmentally sustainable industries that do not contribute to carbon emissions;

**(3)** set clear targets and monitoring for reaching these goals, with regular reports on progress made available to the public.

Such a policy for divestment will offer the greatest promise to fulfil the duties and responsibilities of the committee to use its public money to invest wisely for future pensions.

I hope very much you will agree that the time is now right to make such a shift of policy, and to engage with this call, so that Buckinghamshire can stop being part of the ‘litany of shame’ (António Guterres, 2022[[1]](#footnote-1)).

I wait to hear a positive response from you, when Buckinghamshire Council can proudly and convincingly demonstrate to Buckinghamshire voters its support for the energy revolution that is needed if humanity is to avoid the breakdown of civilisation as we know it.

Yours sincerely,

2. OPTIONAL: **KEY ARGUMENTS THAT COULD BE INCLUDED:**

1. Bucks Council Pension Fund still has £63M invested[[2]](#footnote-2) in fossil fuels, despite Bucks Council declaring a climate emergency in 2019.
2. The evidence from the IPCC report is absolutely conclusive, signalling code red for humanity, that global greenhouse gases have to start to decline immediately[[3]](#footnote-3), and to be reduced by 43% by 2030, to limit global warming to around 1.5C.[[4]](#footnote-4) Fossil fuels are by far the main contributor (approaching 75%) to such emissions.[[5]](#footnote-5)
3. The International Energy Agency has stated there must be no new oil, gas or coal developments if the world is to reach net zero by 2050.[[6]](#footnote-6)
4. Without radical reductions to greenhouse emissions, the future will see the breakdown of civilisation as we know it, with the fossil fuel era central to such global consequences for all humanity[[7]](#footnote-7). Even existing fossil fuel projects exceed what can be permitted: *‘…nearly 40% of committed emissions from existing reserves must be avoided to stay below 1.5 °C. This implies a policy need… to revoke some existing licences and prematurely close some already producing fields and mines*.’[[8]](#footnote-8)
5. Yet, this industry is firmly committed to the expansion of fossil fuel production,[[9]](#footnote-9) despite the scientific evidence so clearly saying there can be no new fossil fuel production. The UN General-Secretary, Atónio Guterres, has described this as ‘*moral and economic ma*dness’[[10]](#footnote-10). ‘*The global energy system is broken and bringing us ever closer to climate catastrophe. Fossil fuels are a dead end — environmentally and economically*’.[[11]](#footnote-11)
6. Buckinghamshire Council’s preferred strategy to date has been to engage with fossil fuel companies to urge them to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. This approach has been seen not to work, either for Buckinghamshire Council Pension Fund[[12]](#footnote-12) (as apparent from Brunel’s own Outcomes Report, detailed below, see Appendix), or more broadly[[13]](#footnote-13), at either the speed or the extent needed. The IEA reported that 95% of expenditure by fossil fuel companies was still going to fossil fuels in July 2021, and UK gas extraction produces energy that is four times more expensive than new solar or wind energy.[[14]](#footnote-14)
7. The financial risk of investing in fossil fuels is high and this is increasingly the case[[15]](#footnote-15): these are highly volatile investments, and they are at great risk of becoming worthless stranded assets[[16]](#footnote-16), an outcome which could happen very rapidly, particularly in light of the broader divestments underway ($40 trillion worldwide[[17]](#footnote-17)) including Europe’s largest pension fund[[18]](#footnote-18). The real risk now is from failing to withdraw investments from fossil fuels.[[19]](#footnote-19)
8. As Councillor Butcher has himself pointed out in previous correspondence, if the pension fund ends up as insufficient to meet its commitments, it will be council tax payers who have to make up the shortfall.
9. By continuing to fund fossil fuel companies, the pension fund is failing to meet its responsibilities:
	1. for future pension beneficiaries, in terms of the financial risks involved, and also in terms of contributing to a future in which all normal financial markets and calculations will be irrelevant;
	2. for all current and future generations, concerning the ethical imperative to use this public money for stewardship of the earth and the future of all life, otherwise risking the end of a liveable planet.
10. At the same time, there are major opportunities for rewarding investments in the transition to the new fossil free economy. [[20]](#footnote-20)

3. OPTIONAL: **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO PUT TO THE COUNCI, with a request that these questions be included for discussion in public at their next committee meeting.**

**These questions build on freedom of information requests that we have already made to the Council, and the arguments and evidence offered above.**

**(a) Overall viability of the fund in relation to the CEE:** Is the Committee aware that pension funds themselves have the power to determine their own strategy and policy position in relation to sector-wide divestments?[[21]](#footnote-21) If so, why is the Committee currently retaining investments in fossil fuels? On what basis do they consider that the benefit to the fund is greater by staying with Fossil Fuel investments rather than disinvesting from them?

(b) **Existing products**: Is the committee aware that Brunel’s clients already have product offerings from Brunel which have zero fossil fuel reserves exposure?

(c) **Investment in renewables**: Has the fund made any assessment of its progress towards investing in more sustainable energy generation/storage and transport technologies? Is this a concern and a priority that has been raised with Brunel by Bucks council pension fund committee?

(d) **Engagement:** Is the Committee satisfied with the outcomes of the engagement activities recorded by the Brunel Outcomes report? [*This refers to Brunel’s Outcomes report referenced in the Appendix below]*

(e) **Risks:** What strategy is the fund using to avoid the risk of assets becoming stranded in fossil fuels? How have they assessed the risks arising from the volatility of fossil fuel investments? (and see rising risks of failing to divest, as above)

NB If the first question is answered by a positive commitment to divest from fossil fuels, then questions (d) and (e) become redundant.

**Appendix: the engagement aspect** of the Brunel Outcomes report

<https://www.brunelpensionpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Brunel-Outcomes-Report-2021.pdf>

In regard to that bit of their report which relates to **engagement,** the report states:

"*Engagement during 2020 made significant progress. EOS [who undertake the engagement work] undertake engagement over three-year cycles. During 2020, EOS engaged with 881 Brunel-held companies on 1,050 milestones. At least one milestone was moved forward for about 51% of objectives during the year.*

*Engagement covers active equity portfolios, please note this does not include engagement undertaken directly by Brunel or its managers*."

Looking at the bar charts presented on p55 of the report, there are four different areas examined, with 'Environment' just one of these four. Under the heading of Environment as a whole, 165 made no progress at all, compared with 248 who made progress on just one environmental milestone. This also therefore appears to show that EOS didn't engage at all on environment issues with 53% of the 881 Brunel-held companies that EOS engaged with overall.

Breaking it down further, there are three different areas for engagement work listed within 'Environment':

Climate Change

Natural Resource Stewardship

Pollution, Waste and Circular Economy

Additional info is provided about reaching environmental milestones for their top ten holdings [**which include Shell]**, and this shows that only 6/10 made any progress at all on climate change. Additionally, two made no progress at all on any of the three environmental areas for engagement work.

In relation to the engagement milestones, managed by EOS, there are four steps along the way, and it is only with milestone four that 'The company implements a strategy or measures to address the concern'. There is nothing to indicate how they assess the adequacy of the strategy or measures taken. Engagement takes place over three year cycles, so four milestones could presumably take 12 years to reach the fourth milestone even if proceeding at highest speed.

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8rlLaT8v4Q [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.divest.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UKDivest\_Report.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-61110406> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-3/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://ourworldindata.org/ghg-emissions-by-sector> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Pathway to critical and formidable goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 is narrow but brings huge benefits, according to IEA special report - News - IEA](https://www.iea.org/news/pathway-to-critical-and-formidable-goal-of-net-zero-emissions-by-2050-is-narrow-but-brings-huge-benefits) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://futurism.com/the-byte/mit-prediction-civilization-collapse-on-track>

<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-08-10/four-reasons-civilization-wont-decline-it-will-collapse/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ac6228#references> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2022/may/11/fossil-fuel-carbon-bombs-climate-breakdown-oil-gas> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8rlLaT8v4Q> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://unfccc.int/news/antonio-guterres-time-to-jump-start-the-renewable-energy-transition> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.brunelpensionpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Brunel-Outcomes-Report-2021.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://www.cser.ac.uk/resources/divestment-advantages-cambridge/> and <https://www.corporateknights.com/responsible-investing/divestment-study/> and <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidcarlin/2021/02/20/the-case-for-fossil-fuel-divestment/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. #  Mark Campanale, Founder of Carbon Tracker, 23rd May 2022, ‘Securing climate-friendly pension investments — webinar for councillors’, UK, Divest

 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.ft.com/content/beaed1d3-1478-49c1-ae9c-4fe5ade62b5d> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://theconversation.com/who-really-owns-the-oil-industrys-future-stranded-assets-if-you-own-investment-funds-or-expect-a-pension-it-might-be-you-183706>

 <https://energytracker.asia/stranded-fossil-fuel-assets/>

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/21/climate-stranded-assets-show-the-need-for-rapid-energy-transition-carney-says.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2021/10/26/climate-movement-hails-mind-blowing-40-trillion-fossil-fuel-divestment-pledges> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://350.org/press-release/huge-win-for-climate-campaigners-as-europes-largest-pension-fund-announces-divestment-from-fossil-fuels/> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://savepensionsandplanet.org/blog-article/> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidcarlin/2021/11/01/iea-5-ways-for-finance-to-accelerate-the-net-zero-clean-energy-transition/?sh=5fe994339862> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Confirmed in a meeting between South West Action on Pensions, and agreed in a record of that meeting, available here <https://dtaction.co.uk/pensions/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)