Professor John Barry (Queen’s University Belfast)

John Barry is father of two children and Professor of Green Political Economy and Director of the Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action at Queens University Belfast. What keeps him awake at night is the life opportunities and future wellbeing of his children. His areas of academic research include post-growth and heterodox political economy; the politics, policy and political economy of climate breakdown and climate resilience; and socio-technical analyses of low carbon energy transitions. His latest book is The Politics of Actually Existing Unsustainability: Human Flourishing in a Climate-Changed, Carbon-Constrained World (Oxford University Press). Since January 2020 is co-chair of the Belfast Climate Commission and was a Green Party councillor from 2011-2018 on Ards and North Down council.

‘This what a real emergency looks like: what the response to Coronavirus can teach us about how we can and need to respond to the planetary emergency’

Unlike the coronavirus, there have been official political declarations of ‘climate and ecological emergencies’ from in many parliaments in the EU, UK, Ireland, Canada, France and at sub-state level across dozens of countries. But, unlike the determined and swift actions of most governments around the world to the public health threat from Covid-19, there is little evidence of the same governmental determination to take radical and tough decisions on the climate and ecological crisis. Could it be that all these declarations of ‘emergencies’ are just that? Some ‘in tune’ public and ‘politically correct’ rhetoric and associated positive media coverage forced by mobilisations like Extinction Rebellion and the Youth Strike for Climate? Cheap talk about recognising there is an emergency…. But in reality not believing it really is? Why is it that our political leaders listen to and make decisions informed by the science in the case of coronavirus – closing schools, restricting travel, putting in place financial support for furloughed workers – but not when it comes to the planetary emergency? And how can we ‘build back better’ as we emerge from the pandemic?