

## What are we walking for?

**A summary of our key messages so that we all present the same cohesive message/statements which focus on principle rather than politics:**

We are walking -

1. To give witness to our support for the welfare system which is an insurance for us all against worry.
2. To stand up and urge others to support principles which have formed the basis of our society for many years – that we all have equal worth, we all deserve to live a life of dignity with a right to basic needs being met – a home, food, clothing, health care, education and support when in need.
3. To challenge the narrative that we cannot afford welfare, that we cannot afford to care.
4. To remind ourselves that taxation is a social contract, payment made as a recognition of our interdependence, our common humanity, not to be avoided and evaded but paid for welfare of all, for the common good

**An expansion of these points:**

We are walking to **give witness to the value of our welfare system**. The very **fabric of our society** is being **torn apart**. The **cuts to our welfare system are deeply damaging**. And the continuation of them is a **collective abdication of responsibility**.

This system which has been **inclusive** is now under threat. This system which has recognised that **everyone is of equal worth** and has given all our children **equal opportunity** to flourish is being dismantled.

**Our welfare system has insured us all against the contingencies of life**, has provided a **protection for all** of us when faced with health problems, loss of work and the deterioration of old age. It is **a system worth investing in**.

Our welfare system allows us to be **free of worry**. When a baby was born prematurely, we did not need to worry about the cost. When our child broke a leg, we did not need to worry about the cost. When we lost our job through no fault of our own, we did not need to worry if we could afford to survive. When we were diagnosed with cancer, we did not need to worry if we could afford the treatment. When our parents became too old to look after themselves, we did not need to worry. When we too needed help in old age, we did not need to worry.

And we do not need to worry if we invest in our welfare system.

This is **a system we all benefit from, we all have a stake in**.

We are walking to give witness to and stand up for **principles which are central to our Quaker faith** and which have also been **the foundation of our country** since the establishment of the welfare state 70 years ago, **principles which are increasingly being eroded** – a belief in **social justice**, in our **common humanity**, that we are **all of worth** and that we are **all interdependent**, that it is our **moral responsibility to support the poorest and most vulnerable in society**.

Increasingly these moral principles which have underpinned our society are being undermined.

We are walking to appeal to the conscience of the nation, to everyone's sense of common decency.

We are walking because we **refuse to be indifferent**, to ignore what is happening. If we do not speak out, if we do not stand up for our welfare system, we are complicit in its dismantling, we are giving silent agreement to its erosion and the resulting injustices happening around us..

We are walking to **challenge the narrative that we cannot afford to support welfare for all** any more, to challenge the idea that has been promoted for too long that to pay as little taxation as possible and to simply look after yourself is the ideal.

We are walking to **uphold the principle that taxation is a recognition of our interdependence** with each other, it is a **social contract**, a contract first established..., a contract reinforced after the Second World War in the establishment of the welfare system. It is part of our **British values**. It is something we need to prioritise.

We are told we can't afford to pay for the level of care we have had; but we can if there is the will to think differently. In fact **we cannot afford not to pay**. The cost for our society will be much greater, not in terms of money but in terms of the breakdown of social cohesion and the general welfare of all. The most important investment we can make is in each other.

We are told we cannot afford to uphold the welfare system yet when we were significantly worse off, significantly poorer after the Second World War we invested in one of the most imaginative policies of all time, **we invested in the welfare system to correct the inequalities that divided us**. It was a system which **redistributed resources to address these inequalities through taxation**.

**Taxation** was once recognised as **a communal responsibility, as necessary and desirable**. In much earlier times it was paid to protect us from attack. In later times it has been paid to protect us through provision of services.

Parliament exists because of taxation. People demanded representation in government notably 400 years ago in the civil war and since until all had a vote last century in return for taxation. Our government representatives have been entrusted to collect and use it for the benefit of the people. We are bound together by this unspoken understanding. It is a social contract.

Most large towns had tax offices (Note: Barrow Tax Office is now closed) The tax officials were part of the local community, could be consulted, could advise, knew the circumstances of the families around. It was a service. With centralisation it has become a faceless body which we no longer relate to. It is seen as something done to us rather than something we gladly buy into.

Taxation has been represented as an evil, something to be avoided and evaded but it is **an investment in ourselves, an insurance when things go wrong**. And it's **an investment in others** as a sign that we respect and care and wish to ensure all can live life with dignity. **Taxation is for the common good**.

Our country is **built on Christian values** and this is intrinsic to those, to **love our neighbour, to support those in need**.

Relevant quotes:

George Fox in 1661: we all should treat each other “rightly, justly, truly, holily, equally”.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century Quaker, John Woolman said “Oppression in the extreme appears terrible, but oppression in more refined appearances remains oppression, and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive.”