

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
COP President Designate
9 Downing Street
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An Open Letter

November 2021

Dear President,

Priorities for COP26

This summer a range of UK and international delegates convened at the biggest flooding and coastal erosion risk management conference (Flood & Coast 2021) to share and discuss the latest knowledge. Among them were many young professionals including from the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management's Early Careers Network.

The criticality of the climate emergency and the negotiations at COP26 were highlighted as central to the future management of flood and coastal erosion risk, both domestically and overseas.

This was identified no more strongly than by new professionals working in the sector who recognise the scale of the challenge they will be working to tackle and who have grave concerns regarding the consequences of a failure to make major progress during the talks. They are the experts of the future who will bear the burden of delivering effective solutions to the climate crisis under increasingly challenging and extreme circumstances and urge you to consider and act on the following:

Treat the climate crisis with the same urgency as the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pace of the global response to the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly around the development of vaccines, demonstrated what can be achieved with appropriate priority and urgency. Collaboration on activity such as genome sequencing proves what is possible and we need this collective drive on climate change. Whilst timescales around the gravest scenarios on climate change are far longer than those for Covid-19, the challenge is more complex and existential for humanity.

*Imagine if climate change was treated the same way as the pandemic. World leaders have implemented an emergency response to the pandemic, but the same level of urgency about climate change is yet to be seen. I'm not suggesting that we adopt such restrictive measures as the pandemic; just that leaders treat it like the emergency they have declared. - **Emily Shipton***

There must be renewed focus on delivering outcomes, not targets. The window of time for this is small and shrinking, and the risks to commitment to action of failing to keep global temperature rise within 1.5°C of pre-industrial levels are grave. We are confident in having the solutions to adapt to the impacts of less severe emissions scenarios, but this confidence rapidly declines with the increasing uncertainties attached to higher emissions scenarios.

*What I will remember most about the pandemic are the stories. I think everyone knows the story of a UK veteran who walked 100 laps of his garden to raise money for NHS workers. Leaders need to tell the story of climate change, for those who do not have a voice, and to inspire emotive action. - **Emily Shipton***

Share stories and channel society's willingness to act in the collective good and to change behaviours.

Society will face a need to live with rapid and far-reaching change if we are to remodel our economies and ways of living and working to be both zero carbon and resilient. This will require strong leadership and narratives but experience from the pandemic shows that society can embrace changes and limitations where it understands the imperative.

Building an engaging and compelling narrative around the need for collective action and a vision for a zero-carbon, well-adapted and resilient UK, as well as global community, is vital. This was highlighted by the Climate Change Committee in its recent [Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk](#).

The behavioural response risks highlighted by [Per Espen Stoknes](#) around distance, doom, dissonance, denial and identity all need a communications response to enable communities to understand how they can take ownership and respond to the risks and change they face. This requires leadership and support.

*These 5 barriers need to be addressed when communicating the solutions and new policy implementations to companies, stakeholders, and the general population. When people feel heard and valued, they are more accepting and engaged. This creates a united front against the threat of climate change. Only you can replace the five barriers and instead create a community, with hope, connection, acceptance, and one that celebrates identity. - **Phoenix-Jane Hayward***

Climate action presents opportunities to work with nature, share knowledge and nurture community.

We are past the time for simply protecting anthropogenic landscapes from climate change and can no longer view environmental and human systems as two separate entities. Our social and physical infrastructure should be working with, not around or against nature. Nature and climate must be front and centre of decision-making across governments locally, nationally and internationally.

Climate resilient communities must work with the natural environment. Nature-based solutions will be key to driving this forward, delivered at catchment and landscape scale to solve carbon, biodiversity, water resource and flood risk challenges.

In creating more sustainable and green spaces, working with rather than against the natural environment, we can create incredible opportunities for community action, engagement, education, and social inclusion.

*We need to be weaving social outcomes throughout our climate action. We need to be approaching climate action as an opportunity for growth of understanding and community, creating a united front in the fight against climate change. Nature-based solutions will be key to driving this thinking forward. - **Megan Barnes***

Children are our future and our hope for a climate resilient, harmonious world. Listen to them and give them the knowledge they need to respond.

Young people engage not only with the need to make changes to the way we live to combat emissions but also embrace practice around resilience. Our concerns around the future we face and the emotional pressure this places on young generations – manifested in the compulsion to protest and emergence of climate anxiety appears lost on Ministers and wider government.

*We need to get into schools and educate true early career professionals, the children of the world, in climate change, its causes, impacts and encourage them to develop ideas to tackle climate change and adapt to it in the future. We need to show them how we are adapting and working hard to make changes, so that they continue the process so climate resilient methods will become the norm. - **Marcus Woodward***

Crack-downs on protest and culture wars do nothing to embed the confidence that our leaders care about our future or are invested in fostering the compassion and togetherness needed to respond *en masse*.

The removal of climate change from the National Curriculum was shameful and must be reversed. Rather, it alongside nature recovery and resource efficiency should be a cornerstone for learning around appreciation of natural systems and their centrality to human survival, the direction of technological development, new economic approaches and behaviours.

*In Cambodia, the benefits of education were seen following a flood risk awareness campaign under the Flood Emergency Management Strengthening project. Teachers conducted school sessions communicating flood risk reduction strategies to children. Following the scheme of learning, children exhibited positive behavioural changes that demonstrated understanding of the content taught, shown by the increased number of flotation devices brought to school during the flood season. Such a simple action will save lives. – **Elinor Kinrade***

The next generations of professionals needed to manage and recover from the current climate and wider environmental crises are within and entering education now. Every opportunity should be taken to prepare them with the knowledge to navigate through the challenges to come.

*As we inherit decisions made today, lets better prepare our future leaders as they embrace tomorrow. This is our climate, our future. - **Adam Sennitt***

Build local economies that are more efficient and resilient to a world exposed to growing stresses.

The exposure of just-in-time global supply chains to disruption from a range of pressures has become apparent through the Covid-19 pandemic and potentially exacerbated by wider factors.

*We need to take climate change away from the limelight and recognise that over-consumption is driving the climate crisis. We are focusing on the symptom of the bigger problem. A doctor wouldn't relieve your symptoms without investigating the cause, so why are we doing this to our planet? - **Sophia-Harri Nicholaou***

*I think an important issue to focus on is addressing a country's food needs via its own resources, encouraging efficiency and the local economy, and not outsourcing such an essential service, where not necessary, for the sake of globalisation and trade deals. - **Melisa Vural***

The resilience of more local economies and societies, less reliant on global systems is known and is likely to become more apparent in coming decades as these systems come under further strain. Understanding of local societal resilience, risks and responses should be factored into policymaking, particularly around movement and supply chains, local planning and development and infrastructure.

*Countries appear to have implemented their own rules and legislations however this will not be enough and therefore there is the need for everyone to determine a climate friendly approach for adapting to coastal flood risk that can be implemented universally. Regardless of whether a country has G7 status or is classed as developing. - **Xavi Terry***

We leave you with this:

We need to start tackling the climate crisis from grass roots level, bringing early careers professionals into the conversation to encourage innovative thinking and new approaches to challenges that are our past, our present and will shape our future.

As early careers professionals, the outcomes of COP26 will shape our careers and lives for years to come, so it is vital that our voices are heard now so we can help to shape the approaches to the challenges we will be tasked with tackling in the future.

- **Megan Barnes**

We would welcome any opportunity to discuss these issues further with you or your officials.

Yours sincerely,

Emily Shipton

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