

Speech from Weds 11<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019 – Environment Panel meeting.

As I sit in my messy garden, (rewilding), pausing the conversation about the burning Amazon to let another plane roar overhead and feeling the rumble of another HGV rolling past, it's easy to lose hope for the future of our beautiful planet and its delicate eco-systems.

I'm watching developments popping up everywhere, but where are the new green building technologies? The Passivhaus standard designs, solar panels, energy saving lighting, water collection measures, wildlife considerations, trees, green spaces and natural gardens? Where are the pedestrian areas, cycle paths, public transport links, charging points?

NHDC declared a Climate Emergency on the 21st May 2019. That's great, but you'd never know. Nobody knows. I've asked a lot of local people and nobody knows. Where's the announcement? Where's the urgent plan of action – the 'Stop, Drop & Roll'? PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. They say 'it can't be that serious or our Government, who protects us, would be telling us what to do'.

NHDC are doing some things – some really good things. Publicly launching new recycling initiatives and water fountains, but, at the same time, quietly approving a thirsty concrete plant development. Publicly monitoring poor air quality and encouraging cleaner taxis, whilst quietly allowing extra HGVs onto already dangerously polluted roads. Holding clean air days at primary schools, whilst Luton Airport expands on our doorstep (not so quietly!). Lecturing about single use plastics whilst putting on events at the Hitchin Museum literally designed around the sale of single use plastics. There is no logic or consistency. We seem strangely content to allow human suffering to be disregarded in the pursuit of profit.

The situation has changed. The goal posts have been moved and we cannot continue to blindly follow out-dated rules and processes. We have to stop, clear the slate and start afresh with fundamental acceptance of the precautionary principle as a policy guide at all levels. This principle implies that 'there is a social responsibility to protect the public from exposure to harm when scientific investigation has found a plausible risk.' Plausible risk - 97% of scientists agree. It continues: 'These protections can only be allowed to relax if further scientific findings emerge that provide sound evidence that no harm will result'. No harm.

Imagine this: Your children are having a little nap in the caravan after a lovely afternoon on the beach, whilst you sit outside having a quiet drink in the evening sunshine. You always have a drink at this time of the day. There's an alarm going off indicating there is a carbon monoxide leak in the caravan. What do you do? Why not finish your drink? Just get the BBQ going – you're feeling a bit hungry and you always have a BBQ in the evening. Don't want the kids to be grumpy when the burgers aren't ready – they always have burgers after swimming. Maybe you should empty the wet

stuff out of the bag and hang the beach towels up – don't want them to get smelly for tomorrow, and we always swim in the afternoon. We'll sort the leak out tomorrow. Tell you what, why don't we get a pipe from another leaky caravan and pump it in too, even though we know it's already dangerous in there, and while we're at it invite all the other children in for a sleepover. The fumes won't kill them immediately; they will have headaches, maybe some sickness, they'll struggle to breathe and fall into unconsciousness before they die. They might even try and sort the leak out themselves. Let's go to the pub!

Sound ridiculous? Well it is – and yet this is how we are behaving.

We are at a critical point in our planet's journey and it becomes more clear and terrifying by the day, as more and more scientific reports are released informing us that things are changing far quicker than had previously been predicted. We are hurtling blindly towards a catastrophic warming of 4 to 6 degrees, - forget the recommended 1.5 maximum - and we have to slam the brakes on immediately and STOP doing what we normally do. We need to completely change direction. It is so huge that it is nearly impossible to comprehend, but the first step in solving a problem is to accept that there is one and face it honestly. Unless we decide to be part of the solution, we are by definition part of the problem. We are the first generation to really feel the effects of climate change but the last generation who can actually do anything about it.

As the parent of two young people in their early twenties, I am constantly reminded of the desperate situation they are facing, and the fear and anger overwhelming their generation. What do we teach our kids? Work hard at school, for your future; carry on with your studies, for your future; learn to budget and save money, for your future; but now they are being told that their future is balancing on a knife edge and we are relying on them to fix it. What a burden to carry around on young shoulders! It's not fair.

Yet the apathy of my generation, fuelled by the inaction of our leaders, both local and national, is paralysing, as we selfishly cling on to our routines, thoughtlessly consuming and polluting, consuming and polluting in a deadly circle of hedonistic self destruction. Taking another flight? Carbon offsetting will help. It won't! It's like donating money to the RSPCA so you can carry on kicking your dog. Don't worry, the tech's out there for the next generation. The kids will sort it out.

Well, the science is clear and the kids can't sort it out. We have to stop now and reboot the whole system, if we want to leave any shred of hope for their future. There isn't time to wait for them to grow up, and even if we did have time, why on earth wouldn't we want to give them as much help now as possible? If you were taking your child to their first independent home, would you run in, flood the bathroom, smash the windows and tip your dustbin out on the living room floor, leaving them to it, saying 'it'll be lovely when you've sorted out all our mess'? There is so much we can and

must do now to set the wheels in motion, to prepare and lay foundations for the enormous changes that are going to have to take place for them.

This is serious – very serious. We have to act now. Together. And fast.

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