

BUILDING FROM THE
CORONA CRISIS TOWARD
A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

SUSTAINABILITY FIRST
ART & ESSAY PRIZES

JULY 2020



IMAGE BY ARTIST
ESTELLE WOOLLEY

Sustainability
first

Foreword

*“We don’t want to see a return to ‘business as usual’.
We want to see a fairer and more sustainable ‘new
normal’ as we emerge from the corona crisis.”*

Lord Deben
Chair
Committee on Climate Change

The coronavirus has made us think about our lives, how we were living and what we might do differently. While in a pandemic it seems the world is changing totally, in many instances changes have been accentuated or speeded up. We were already using video conferencing and working from home, but now will do so more often. The pandemic has given us permission to try new things.

It has also helped us to see the impact our actions can have on global issues such as climate change and pollution. We need to seize the opportunity to make life cleaner, greener and fairer, with a just transition to a carbon-free economy.

Policymakers need to set parameters so it’s easier for businesses, institutions and individuals to act sustainably. Regulators need to make it harder to behave unsustainably, while incentivising good behaviour. Economic stimulus should support carbon-free projects, with costs shared fairly. Businesses must focus on people and the planet, as well as profit. The financial system is key here and investors are increasingly aware that performance on ‘Environmental, Social and Governance’ factors is central to future profitability.

Civic groups can also support wider societal change. The Pope has spoken of the coronavirus and climate change as symptoms of the damage we are doing to the world, urging greater care. We must equip young people with resources to address these global challenges – so they not only understand the issues, but also how to make changes. Refocusing the education system on sustainability is vital.

I’ve been impressed by the enthusiasm, radical ideas and variety of responses to the Sustainability First Art and Essay Prizes. Ranging from practical experience-based recommendations, to sensitive reflections on the nature of humanity and how we relate with each other. I hope this work will inspire policymakers, regulators, businesses and individuals to consider how we can all build from the corona crisis toward a more sustainable future.

Phil Barton
Chair
Sustainability First

As a lifelong advocate of sustainability and a practicing artist, I understand the importance of bringing in new creative perspectives to inform the work of policymakers and businesses. Through these competitions, Sustainability First has actively sought to understand from young and creative people how the coronavirus has impacted our society, economy and environment. We want to learn from their experience and ideas as we seek to address other global challenges including climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and social inequality. We don’t want to see a return to ‘business as usual’. We want to see a fairer and more sustainable ‘new normal’ as we emerge from the corona crisis.

This means redesigning and rethinking the way we run our economies and societies so that we value individuals, communities, education, creativity and nature – and not just economic growth. We need to value far more the health of environments and people; shifting away from a focus solely on gross domestic product (GDP) to wider indicators of sustainability – including life satisfaction and well-being.

It has been a privilege as a judge of both competitions to learn so much and be inspired by so many of the excellent competition entries. A big thank you to all the entrants on behalf of Sustainability First.

Tim O’Riordan
Emeritus Professor of
Environmental Sciences, UEA

I congratulate Sustainability First on their imagination and initiative by inviting artists and young people to share their visions and expectations for their sustainable futures. The starting point is the emergence of society from coronavirus and its deadly grip on the human race. In the split second of one month, the health of effectively everyone alive was at risk, though to wildly varying degrees. Nevertheless, in that nanosecond of the time period of humanity, which itself is a nanosecond of the expanse of life on Earth, what we took for granted is no more.

The excitement of these wonderful essays and artworks lies in the courageous and phenomenal hope expressed. We are entering a period of new possibilities. Arguably, the most enduring of these futures lies in sustainability. This is the dynamic of providing everyone with the knowledge, the skills, the drive, and the capability to help shape this magnificent planet.

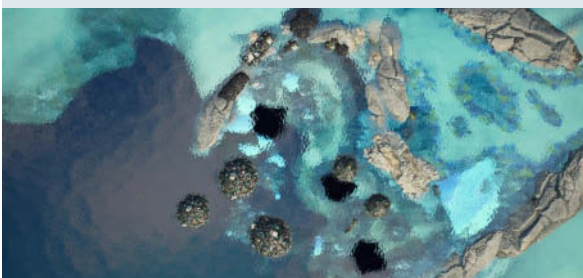
Of course, given the inequalities and injustices of the pre-virus age, and the manner in which the virus has magnified these, it will be a staggering challenge to achieve global sustainability. The essayists and artists think differently. They express themselves with optimism and passion, in ways that are compelling and credible. Above all, under the guidance of Sustainability First, they reveal that sustainability is indeed the only way out of the pandemic that can ensure a habitable planet and an equitable humanity.

*“The essayists and artists think differently.
Above all, under the guidance of Sustainability First,
they reveal that sustainability is indeed the only
way out of the pandemic...”*

Contents

Designed by MAD Ideas www.madideas.com

4	Preface
5	Introduction and Guide to this Book
9	Sustainability First's Recommendations on How to Build from the Corona Crisis Toward a Sustainable Future
15	Key Themes Emerging from the Sustainability First Art Prize
19	Key Themes Emerging from the Sustainability First Essay Prize
19	1. Cultural, Behavioural and Societal Change
26	2. Government Policy, Regulatory and Institutional Change
33	3. Business Leadership, Governance and Practice
41	Next Steps
42	Annexes
42	Annex A: Sustainability First Art Prize
42	Annex B: Sustainability First Essay Prize and Survey
43	Annex C: Art and Essay Competitions Procedure
43	Annex D: Acknowledgements
45	Shortlisted and Credited Essay Entrants
45	Shortlisted Artists
47	Art Prize Judges
47	Essay Prize Judges
50	References



Cover image: Estelle Woolley (Highly Commended)

Breathe, photograph self-portrait with moss, 2020

Estelle presents a self-portrait made during the first week of isolation in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The facemask, an increasingly familiar sight in the everyday world, is made using moss from the garden, acting as a filter.

Sustainability First is a think tank and charity that promotes practical, sustainable solutions to improve environmental, economic and social well-being. We are a trusted convenor on public utility issues and have a strong track record of bringing stakeholders together in multiparty projects in the public interest.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Sustainability First launched a Corona Build Back Better Work Programme to understand the implications of Covid-19 for sustainability and to help ensure a smart, fair and green recovery. **The Sustainability First Art and Essay Prizes** are a key part of this activity. The 'Next steps' section at the end of this book outlines our future plans in this area and explains how this fits into our wider work.

Sustainability First Authors

This virtual book provides a contribution to the emerging debate about the steps needed to deliver a sustainable future, after Covid-19. It has been written by Clare Dudeney, Amy Mallett and Sharon Darcy using the competition entries as a foundation for discussion, supported by the personal perspectives and insights of industry experts, our judging panel, and wider literature.



Clare Dudeney
Project Lead and Associate
Sustainability First



Amy Mallett
Research Assistant
Sustainability First



Sharon Darcy
Director
Sustainability First

Acknowledgements

We would like to warmly thank the over 1,200 entrants who submitted their fantastic works of art and essays to the competitions, our distinguished judging panels and the academics, sector leaders and others who have shared their ideas and helped us in this work – and our fellow Associates for all their support. A full list of acknowledgements is at Annex D.

The views in this virtual book do not necessarily represent the views of Sustainability First, or its Associates.

Contact Us

We would welcome feedback. If you have any comments or would like to discuss Sustainability First's Corona Build Back Better Work Programme and how you can support and get involved with this going forward – please contact Sustainability First's Director, Sharon Darcy at: sharon.darcy@sustainabilityfirst.org.uk



Visit us
sustainabilityfirst.org.uk



Email us
info@sustainabilityfirst.org.uk



Follow us
[@SustainFirst](https://twitter.com/SustainFirst)



Write to us
C/o IEEP, 3rd Floor,
11 Belgrave Road,
London, SW1V 1RB



YouTube:
www.youtube.com/channel/UCav-zSvntQznFlJj5pJ-cig

Introduction and Guide to this Book

The Sustainability First Art and Essay Prizes, launched in April 2020, invited original, radical ideas and visions in response to the question: **‘How do we build from the current corona crisis towards a more sustainable future?’** We had a fantastic response to these open calls, with over 1,200 entries. The judging panels included representatives from climate change and environmental policy, business, academia, arts and the media. This virtual book showcases insights from the essays, shortlisted artworks and reflections from the judges. It analyses key themes from the submissions and our survey on this topic and sets out some practical recommendations.

Throughout the document we reference the ideas and imagery of essay entrants and artists by highlighting their names in **green**.

The book has been written to be accessible to a wide-ranging audience. It is intended to act as a platform to share the work of the entrants but also to stimulate a dialogue between people from different disciplines and backgrounds at this major crossroads in all of our lives. We want to use this critical juncture for change to ‘Build Back Better’ and develop a more resilient and sustainable future.

Guide to this Book

This virtual book begins with Sustainability First’s recommendations of how we can build from the corona crisis towards a more sustainable future. These proposals draw heavily on both the Essay and Art Prizes entries, responses to our survey and our wider discussions with academics, decision-makers in government and business and civil society leaders.

The next section summarises the themes emerging in the Art Prize entries. The book then analyses the key themes emerging in the Essay Prize entries. These are split into three groups: cultural, behavioural and societal change; government policy, regulatory and institutional change; and business leadership, governance and practice. The book ends by outlining Sustainability First’s proposed next steps in this area.

Annex A contains a brief description of the prize-winning and shortlisted art competition entries. The prize-winning and shortlisted artworks and images are interspersed throughout the book. Annex B summarises the prize-winning and shortlisted essay competition entries with hyperlinks to these entries. The Annex notes that the works of many other highly scoring entrants are featured and credited throughout and summarises our survey.

Annex C sets out the procedure that we followed in running the competition. Annex D notes our many acknowledgements, including to all of the fantastic entrants and our distinguished judging panels, without whom this book would not have been possible.



The Corona Crisis

*The coronavirus has impacted people across the globe,
upturning everyday life in unforeseen ways.
The loss of life has been devastating.*

At the time of writing, the UK has the third highest recorded death toll worldwide. Global lockdown has slowed economies, leading to recession, with wider social impacts such as disruption to education, loss of employment and rising debt for individuals and businesses. Social isolation and lack of face-to-face personal interaction has exacerbated mental health issues. Existing inequalities have been exposed and accentuated. Ethnic minority communities have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus. Governments have intervened in economies in unprecedented ways and the lines between business and state have blurred. Public trust in politicians has been adversely affected when the response to the pandemic has been slow.

This sudden and dramatic change has also offered an opportunity for contemplation, to pause and reflect on the way we have been living: to question consumptive lifestyles, reassess work-life balance and refocus on well-being. There has been a visible increase in community spirit with local networks supporting vulnerable people and NHS volunteers and expressing gratitude for key workers. Businesses and individuals, who were able to, rapidly adapted to homeworking. Daily walks and bike rides have encouraged us to notice and appreciate local nature. We have enjoyed cleaner air from reduced emissions.



Sustainable Recovery

As we emerge from the corona crisis, governments will focus on economic recovery and building resilience against future pandemics – and other global threats like climate change. In the UK there is an emphasis on the importance of a ‘green recovery’ and the need to ‘Build Back Better’. The corona crisis, climate emergency and calls for social justice, as seen through the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, are in many ways interlinked. Each of these issues calls on individuals, businesses, institutions and governments to question their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, and ask the question: How am I contributing to this problem and what can I do about it? This may feel daunting, but the corona crisis has shown us how everyday choices and actions can make a big difference. To build resilience at the scale and pace needed, however, individual actions need to be accompanied by structural changes in institutions and ‘the way society is run’.

Through the Sustainability First Art and Essay Prizes, entrants have highlighted that we cannot return to business as usual: with a focus on economic growth, high consumption and waste, and an unequal society. As essayist [Alicja Boryn](#) has said that we have ‘a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rethink

and restart ... we have gained the opportunity to consider what is truly important in our societies and finally noticed clearly some glaring shortcomings.’

To build resilience, we need a vision for the ‘new normal’, with different values and indicators of success, based on the health and well-being of people and the environment. This will require bold and brave leadership from governments (national, regional and local), policymakers, regulators, institutions, businesses and members of the public. The corona crisis has shown how government can act for a wider public benefit, dramatically limiting individual freedoms and offering a financial support package to those impacted. We are not advocating further use of such draconian measures, but this shows what can be achieved when there is a vital imperative, a clear goal and public understanding and support. Developing a new vision, particularly when faced by considerable uncertainty and complexity, requires an understanding of the context in which people live – as well as creativity. By bringing together the work of artists, students and young people, the Sustainability First Art and Essay Prizes begin the processes of collectively ‘reimagining’ a more sustainable future.

William Bock (First Prize)

May Daily #4 Illegal Dump, Ireland, 60 x 110 cm, photograph, 2020

During lockdown in Ireland, William captured daily encounters with the environment using his body and a camera. An illegal dump spoke of the complex human relationship with nature. To live sustainably we need to notice, engage with and understand who and what lives on the land around us.

Cathryn Ross, Group Regulatory Affairs Director at BT Group and Chair of the Government’s Regulatory Horizons Council – ‘It is essential that we get our economy going again and renew our focus on how we deploy the scarce resources we have to very best effect. That means improving efficiency and enabling innovation to create value. But it also means reflecting on how that value is distributed between different groups in society and between today and tomorrow – we need to come out of this crisis with a better balance.’

The coronavirus has demonstrated how the actions of every person can make a difference on a global scale.





Sustainability First's Recommendations for 'Building from the Corona Crisis Toward a Sustainable Future'

Through the Sustainability First Art and Essay Prizes and our survey on this topic, entrants have shared a vast range of perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for the UK and worldwide as we emerge from the corona crisis, with proposals for how to build a more sustainable future.

Sustainability First sets out below some recommendations developed as a result of this process, highlighting the issues that came out most strongly across both the art and essay competitions. Our proposals address the need for a balanced response to the crisis, which delivers economic, social and environmental well-being, in the short term and into the future.

Liz Elton (Second Prize)

Hill, 500 x 350 cm, compostable cornstarch, vegetable dyes from food waste, food colouring, food supplements, water miscible oil, silk and seeds from native medicinal plants, 2019

Liz considers the potential embedded in waste. Her paintings are made on compostable food recycling bag material, which is fragile and ethereal and floats like parachute silk with the movement of the air around it. She uses vegetable dyes from food waste and food colouring, sewing the pieces together with silk. The experience of viewing the work may be meditative, offering a sense of time suspended. The domestic setting in a garden, a reminder of the confines of lockdown, and a sense of hope that can be created from everyday materials.



Freya Moffat (Third Prize)

Untitled, 30 x 42 cm, Chromogenic Photographic Paper, 2020

Freya's sculptures in domestic settings offer an eerie reflection of the experience of lockdown. They explore the strangeness of existence without external stimulus, drawing on conversations with elderly people and friends who live in confined spaces. Her papier mâché creatures are made from the stuff that comes into our homes, including free newspapers and cardboard delivery boxes – abandoned, forgotten and unread materials.

Cultural, Behavioural and Societal Change

Well-being, community spirit and connection with nature

We can build on the positive societal changes seen as a result of the corona crisis – such as a wider focus on well-being, acts of kindness in communities, a renewed sense of connection to our local green spaces and appreciation of nature. When policymakers and businesses ask, ‘What is in the public interest?’ they need to consider well-being in the round. Identifying and focusing on mutual interests and ‘co-benefits’ – such as improved air quality from reduced traffic pollution – is important to ensure the risks and rewards from change are shared in a fair way.

Sustainable consumption and production

Many of the artists in the competition highlighted the impacts of high consumption and waste materials, including fast fashion, food waste and plastic pollution. Essay writers also considered supply chains, particularly for consumer goods – highlighting impacts on health, the environment and social exploitation. **Anneli Tostar**’s essay highlights how high-income countries are shifting their carbon footprint to low-income countries. While shops were closed, consumers bought online. Businesses have been impacted by premises being closed in lockdown, social distancing requirements and disruption to supply chains. They will need to develop more sustainable and resilient supply chains for the future. These should focus on ‘circular’ business models – which design waste out of the system. Consumer awareness, labelling and education are also important.

Sustainable transport

The corona crisis has changed the way people travel, avoiding unnecessary journeys, walking and cycling where possible, using cars instead of public transport. The lockdown led to a significant reduction in traffic-related pollution. **Arlene Barclay**’s essay argues that the government can encourage active transport by prioritising investment in pedestrian and cycle paths, instead of new roads. Governments need to carry out impact assessments to assess unequal exposure to risk in terms of travel choices as we emerge from the pandemic. For example, higher-income individuals may be able to travel independently in electric vehicles, while those on lower incomes may be exposed to greater health risks on public transport. The full cost of carbon needs to be reflected in transport costs, for example with a Fuel Duty Escalator. A tax on frequent fliers should also be considered.

Social justice and equality

Structural inequalities have been further exposed and accentuated by the Covid-19 crisis. Equality sits at the heart of a sustainable society. As shortlisted artist **Sam Schmitt** said: ‘The overwhelming number of events this year are a cascade of interconnected crises; we need to see a climate movement that is more intersectional’; this means understanding how social and political identities (such as race, class, gender, sexuality and disability) might combine to create systems of privilege, discrimination or disadvantage¹. This will require public engagement and institutional change at all levels – local, regional, national and global. For social justice to be meaningful, decision-making needs to be open, inclusive and representative of diverse communities.

Representative public engagement and participation

New ways of communicating online make technology-facilitated mass participation possible. We can take this opportunity to give people a stronger voice and sense of agency in decisions affecting their futures. This is essential to build trust and confidence in decision-making in a dynamic and disrupted world. This can be done through community-based listening circles across the UK, feeding into larger-scale, representational Citizens Assemblies. These can build on the work of existing Climate Assemblies and focus on the impacts of Covid-19 in terms of equality and the need for tax and welfare reform.

Education on sustainability and diversity

A greater focus on sustainability is needed in education and the national curriculum. Schools need to develop programmes to teach the next generation of citizens, politicians and business leaders how their actions impact on sustainability and to encourage debate on what resilient institutions and businesses in the twenty-first century might look like. Schools are already engaging with the UN Sustainable Development goals and the issue of climate change. This can be developed further to teach young people about how to enact change, understanding the interlinkages and trade-offs of environmental, social and economic issues, and on social justice.

Cathryn Ross, Group Regulatory Affairs Director at BT Group and Chair of the Government’s Regulatory Horizons Council – ‘Everyone should be encouraged to have a growth mindset. The idea is to move away from a ‘fixed mindset’ in which there is a ‘right’ and a ‘wrong’ answer and where you get praised for getting it right and shamed for getting it wrong, into a mindset where you can embrace change and ambiguity as an opportunity to learn, and where we value those who take on ambitious challenges, try their best and grow their capabilities as a result. If we had this mindset, we would not only be more innovative today, but we’d build our capability to innovate and adapt and grow through change in the future.’



Eleanor Shipman

60,000 Last Breaths, photograph of sculptures made with protective facemasks, 2018

Eleanor uses recycled air pollution masks in place of flowers to make six traditional Vietnamese funeral wreaths to raise awareness of the 60,000 air pollution-related deaths per year in Vietnam (WHO, 2018). The piece has taken on new meaning in light of the coronavirus crisis, with the need for protective masks and the reduced pollution levels resulting from global lockdown.

Government Policy, Regulatory and Institutional Change

Smart, fair and green recovery package

Smart, fair and green recovery package The Government's recovery package needs to be smart, fair and green. It needs to address social recovery and environmental resilience, as well as economic objectives. Government investment should be focused on smart and low-carbon industries and infrastructure – such as renewable heat, energy storage and full-fibre broadband – and climate adaptation (e.g. flood defences). This needs to be responsive yet strategic and joined up. Reskilling and training support are also needed for a post-Covid-19, net zero² and digital/artificial intelligence world, particularly in areas that have been 'left behind'. Radical, local and cross-sector water and energy efficiency programmes can help deliver this. All government support and public procurement need to be conditional on addressing environmental goals and social inequalities (particularly those exacerbated by the pandemic, such as race, gender and people without access to broadband). This work needs to be aligned with 'just transition' thinking to deliver a fair approach to decarbonisation and addressing climate change.³

Getting the balance right between national and regional decision-making – a new social contract

The coronavirus has impacted communities and geographies differently. Climate change is further exacerbating some of these impacts. While recognising that some issues require a national response, where appropriate, local regions should be empowered to do what is best for them, with adequate resources and power given to the devolved nations, and local and regional government and local leaders consulted on key strategic decisions (such as regulatory price reviews). This is essential for local leaders to be able to meet the needs of their areas and constituents. Listening circles and Citizens Assemblies are a key part of this change; they can help formulate local plans (for example, for health, housing, energy, water, waste, transport, communications etc.) and feed through into shaping national policy. These more participative 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' forms of engagement need to be brought together as part of a new social contract for a sustainable future.

Redefining value and developing sustainability metrics

Many essay writers and judges called for a national rethink in focus beyond economic growth and gross domestic product to take account of wider definitions of value. Many of the essays argued that policymakers and regulators need a new set of national indicators and metrics that measure social, environmental and economic outcomes, along with wider health and well-being. [Nurah Niazy](#) suggested bringing public health into the definition of sustainability.

Cross subsidies in bills have reached their limits – it is time for tax and welfare reform

Costs are increasingly passed on to customers through their utility and other bills. These often have unequal impacts. Cross-subsidy between different groups of consumers through billing is reaching its limits. Tax and welfare reforms are needed. First, to address the growing affordability crisis accentuated and also caused by Covid-19. Second, to ensure that prices capture the true cost of carbon and keep us on track to deliver net zero. This could start with a 'fuel duty escalator' in the Autumn Budget and move to removing fossil fuel subsidies and introducing new fossil fuel taxes. Citizens Assemblies could help deliver a fair and acceptable outcome on tax and welfare reform, considering proposals and advising policymakers on the implications and unintended consequences of different approaches.

Business Leadership, Governance and Practice

Redefining company purpose and values

The Covid-19 crisis has put companies' approaches to responsible business practice to the test. Businesses have been forced to question their purpose and contribution to society – and how their activities can deliver for people and the planet, in a profitable way, when it counts. They have had to re-evaluate their resilience to future threats and disruption, such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Sustainability First recommends that businesses adopt a sustainable licence to operate approach⁴ – integrating and embedding a focus on purpose and the long-term public interest in all their work. This approach can particularly help companies that use private capital to deliver public value (such as public utilities) to be more proactive in how they deal with social and environmental issues – and give them the legitimacy to develop new opportunities (such as in the growing green economy).

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors and impact investing

Investors need to re-evaluate the core business models in which they invest and consider the genuine environmental, social and governance impacts of their investments. By engaging with businesses, regulators, policymakers and civil society on these issues, investors can maximise beneficial outcomes for customers, employees, the communities they put their money into and the natural environment. Before the crisis, there was an increased focus among investors on environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors in decision-making. This needs to be mainstreamed, with more thought given to the 'social' outcomes of investments, how these meet local needs – and the culture necessary to deliver these. Post-Covid-19 and in a deep recession, the focus needs to shift to 'impact investing' and how investors can use their money to more consciously drive positive benefits for society and the environment.

Diversity throughout organisations

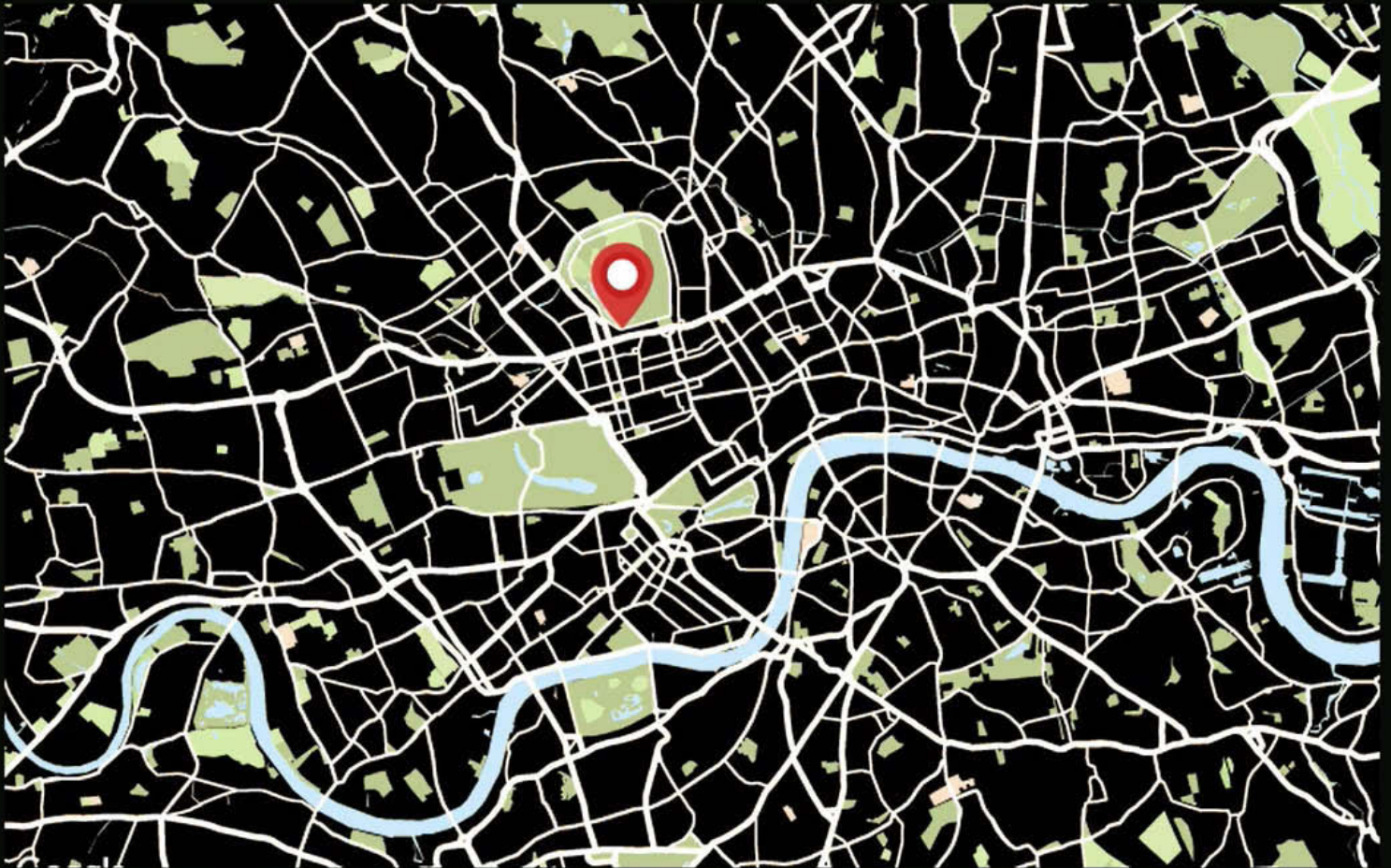
It is critical that all companies and government institutions consider diversity throughout their organisational structures. Diversity can build resilience to future shocks (diversity in thought and backgrounds helps overcome groupthink) and, particularly for organisations delivering public value, it can also improve public trust and confidence. Companies need to enact a range of measures, including diversity in recruitment; proactively training staff members, business leaders and board members to promote equity and combat discrimination; a fair pay structure; equal access to opportunities; internal and external communications about equality; addressing biased language; and to reflect the lived experience of their customers and communities.

Flexible and homeworking practices

The crisis has accelerated a shift to homeworking, which has brought benefits, including to the environment; reducing stressful commuting times, travel costs and pollution. Some staff will welcome this greater flexibility; others may struggle to put this into practice (e.g. those in overcrowded accommodation) or to maintain work–life balance when the boundaries are blurred. Businesses can support their staff by understanding and addressing the inequalities and other impacts and costs of homeworking. Taking responsibility for ensuring staff members have access to broadband and cyber security is critical, given our almost complete digital dependency through the pandemic and as business/service models evolve.

Jobs, skills and innovation

The pandemic has impacted jobs and risks damaging whole sectors of the economy. The government's support package has been helpful, including the furlough of staff, grants for self-employed people and small businesses. However, as we open up, unemployment is likely to escalate. And some people have not been able to access the benefits, including those on short-term contracts. A number of essayists, including [Patrick Hinton](#) and [Alicja Boryn](#), called for the retraining of people to work in green sectors – such as retrofitting homes and businesses to tackle and adapt to climate change; laying fibre optic broadband cables and ensuring cyber secure communications. Apprenticeships can help bridge the gap for young people and those changing careers and can help existing local businesses to innovate and train people in the skills of tomorrow. Essay prize finalist [Manjot Heer](#) advocated the establishment of sustainable innovation hubs led by universities and facilitated by government.



This work interprets a pollution dataset in London during COVID

Average reading dictates tempo. Lower readings produce richer chords per location.

Developing a Creative Network for Change

Ongoing dialogue

The network of students, early stage researchers and artists that we have convened through the Sustainability First Art and Essay Prizes process is part of 'participatory engagement' in action. It is a way of collectively charting our course through complexity, uncertainty and the unknown – that builds on 'crowdsourced' insights and challenge. Dialogues like this need to be continued. Sustainability First are looking for partners to join us in this collective endeavour.

Jeremy Till, Head of Central Saint Martins and Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of the Arts (Chair)
– 'The Arts have an incredible role to play in the imagination, anticipation and projection of new futures. We are facing a crisis that demands systemic change. We need scenarios of living and behaving that we simply don't have yet. This is where I think the creative sector, and artists in particular, have a really important role in this envisioning process.'

Key Themes Emerging from the Sustainability First Art Prize

The creative sectors have been particularly hard hit by the Covid-19 lockdown. As museums and galleries closed, artists lost both a source of inspiration and the opportunity to exhibit works. ‘Many artists found themselves without work, teaching, providing technical support or gallery work’.⁵ But artists and institutions have rapidly innovated to find new ways of sharing works digitally – sharing theatre, opera and ballet performances, creating virtual tours of galleries and live streaming events, particularly through social media. Initiatives on Instagram such as The Artist Support Pledge and Paper Patrons encourage generosity as artists pledge to buy another artist’s work when they reach a target of sales. The move to digital has helped people to stay inspired and connected during a difficult time, while also making performances and artworks accessible to a wider, and potentially more diverse, audience.

Across the entries as a whole there were a number of themes that came out strongly, including:

Air quality

Making the invisible tangible in imaginative ways. [Adam Sadiq](#) assigns musical notes to air quality data to depict rising and falling pollution over London during the coronavirus lockdown. [Stephen Bennett](#) shows the wilding of London, visualising air pollution data in March 2020 compared to March 2019. Highly Commended artist [Estelle Woolley](#)’s moss mask symbolises the importance of nature for human health. [Eleanor Shipman](#) uses recycled air pollution masks as flowers in funeral wreaths to raise awareness of pollution-related deaths. [Jasmine Pradissitto](#) makes sculptures from nitrogen dioxide absorbing ceramic geopolymers, so the works themselves help to reduce air pollution. [Sarah Strachan](#) brings together a collection of objects to share people’s experience of air quality around the world.

Tabish Khan, Art Critic, Londonist and Regulatory Manager, British Gas – ‘The fact that exhibitions and artworks can now be mapped 360° in virtual reality, is incredible. I can get close to experiencing the real thing from the comfort of my own home. The implications for accessibility are huge!’

Waste and plastic pollution

Second prizewinner [Liz Elton](#) considers the potential embedded in waste, making paintings with food dyes on compostable food recycling bag material, floating in the air like parachute silk. [Georgia Tucker](#) has created a virtual reality world to highlight the issue of marine pollution. [Maria Arceo](#) constructed a footprint-shaped light installation, made with plastic collected in forty clean-ups along the Thames from Teddington Lock to the sea. First prizewinner [William Bock](#) shares daily encounters using his body in the environment during lockdown, where an illegal rubbish dump spoke of the complex human relationship with nature.

Sustainable fashion

We had a large number of entries from fashion students working with sustainable and recycled materials to highlight the waste of fast fashion.

Adam Sadiq

Selected Ambient Air: COVID London 2020, audio-visual installation, Max MSP, Ableton, open data, 2020

Adam developed Selected Ambient Air (SAA) in collaboration with Po Hao Chi (Zone Sound) which is used to depict rising and falling pollution over London during the coronavirus lockdown. The work is designed to provide an emotional and intuitive experience of data, by applying musical values and sequencing to air quality data.



Geraint Ross Evans (Highly Commended)

The Closer We Are, 48 x 366 cm

Cardiff Rivers Group, 48 x 122 cm

Both charcoal on paper, mounted on oriented strand board, 2019

Geraint worked with the Cardiff Rivers Group, a voluntary litter-picking organisation. He depicts these volunteers as selfless guardians of their environment, removing litter from waterways, restoring the river through urban and rural environments. The Covid19 crisis has served to remind us of the importance of community action as a timeless force for good.

As we emerge from the corona crisis, the art world may look quite different, with artists exhibiting and selling directly online, including through social media. Experimenting with new formats can change the works themselves, as well as how they are shared and enjoyed. Art can play an important role in terms of leading cultural change, nationally and within local communities, and crucially reflecting the experiences of diverse communities.

Experiences of lockdown and social isolation

Many artists shared their unique experiences of lockdown. Third prizewinner [Freya Moffat](#)'s sculptures explore the strangeness of existence without external stimulus, while being made from the stuff that comes into our homes, including free newspapers and cardboard delivery boxes. [Kathy Bruce](#)'s work captures the isolation, fear and distancing we have all been living with as the result of this pandemic.

Community spirit

Highly commended artist [Geraint Ross Evans](#) focuses on the importance of community action with a scene of voluntary litter picking in a local river. [Jacob Weeks](#) reminds us of the selfless sacrifice of those on the front line, depicting on leaves through a sustainable process an image of every NHS staff member and care worker who has lost their life during the pandemic.

Home and garden

Artists highlighted the importance of home as a space of security. [Tere Chad](#)'s carbon neutral construction is made from recycled bottles and earth. It is shaped like a shell, to bio-mimic the hermit crab's reusable home.

[Rebecca Harper](#) explores the emotional and heightened relationships lockdown; how this time has enabled a refocus on well-being and encouraged people to appreciate gardens and local green spaces like never before.

Sam Gare, Artist and Co-Founder, the Wilderness Art Collective – 'I'm a really keen advocate of trying to reconnect people with nature, to encourage people to see what's around them. Coronavirus might actually have improved our relationship with nature and continuing to enjoy and notice the natural world post-corona, may well have an impact on the behaviour change that we need for a sustainable future.'

Connection to nature

[Rachna Garodia](#)'s tapestries seek to bring the 'outside' in, evoking the simple pleasures of a woodland walk. All around the world we have been forced to pause, to stay at home and save lives. Her handwoven works are like a prayer in praise of the spirit of nature, its mutability and irregularity. [Rachael Mellors](#) captures the momentary shadow imprint of her body on a cliff, embedded with layers of soil and impregnated with shell fragments and fossils, layered over millions of years.

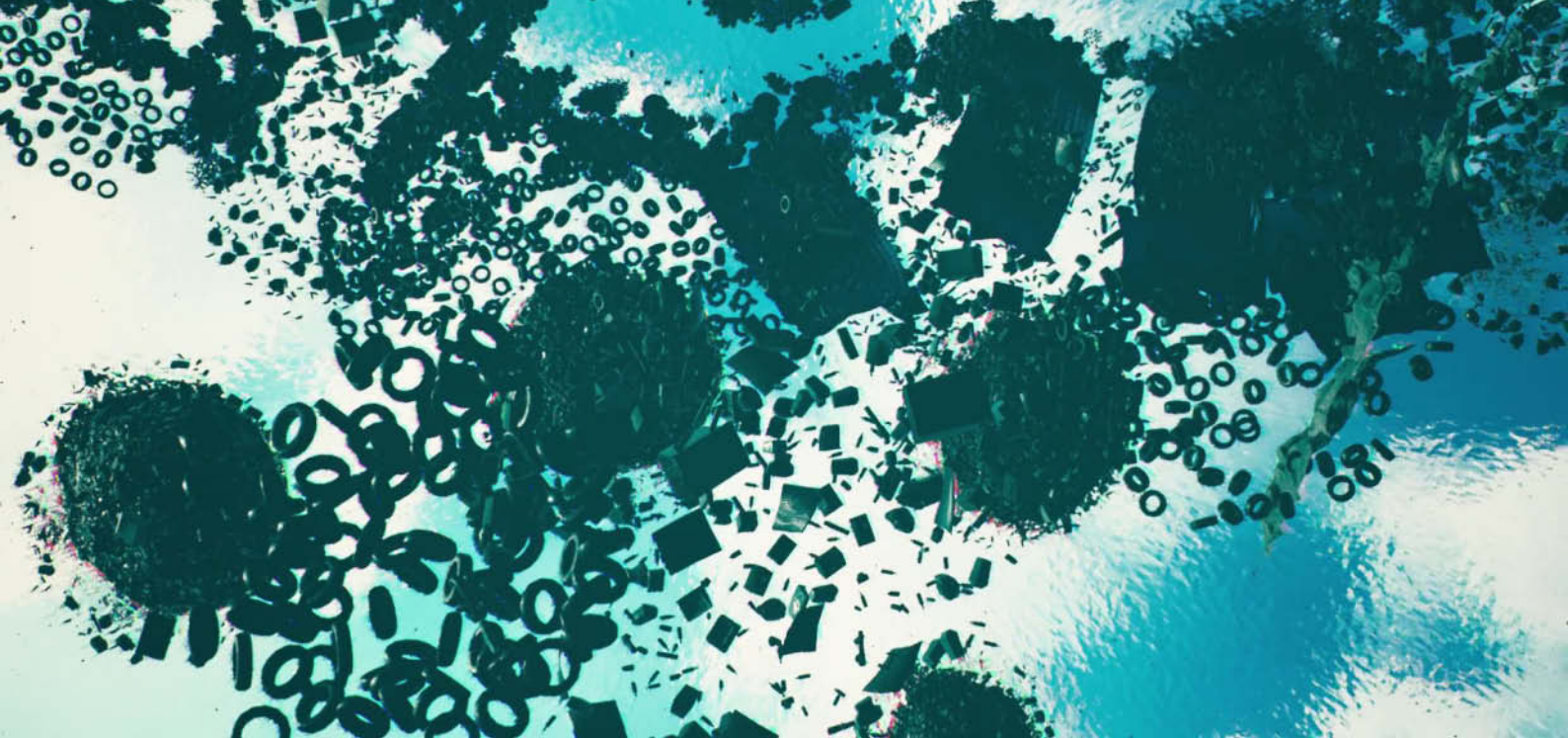
Geraldine Cox, Artist in Residence at Imperial College London – 'The artworks that most caught my imagination, and my heart, were the ones that embodied personal and tender observance of nature, as well as the recognition of our inseparableness from nature. To me, these seemed like the important thought patterns to nurture, if we are to thrive in the years ahead.'

Environmentally sensitive materials and processes

Many artists shared how they limit their impact on the environment through the use of sustainable and recycled materials including hand-ground pigments and environmentally sensitive processes. [Maria Arceo](#)'s approach of gathering and displaying waste plastic serves both to clean the environment and raise awareness of the ways we are damaging it.

Social justice

A few artists highlighted issues of social inequality and the need for social justice. Although the theme of social inequality came through in most of the essays, fewer artists addressed this, with the focus mostly on nature and the environment. The recent Black Lives Matter demonstrations have highlighted the importance of redressing the balance in the art world, the works showcased and how to address discrimination and institutionalised racism. [Sam Schmitt](#) suggests that the overwhelming events of this year are a cascade of interconnected crises. We need to develop a climate movement that is more intersectional.



Georgia Tucker

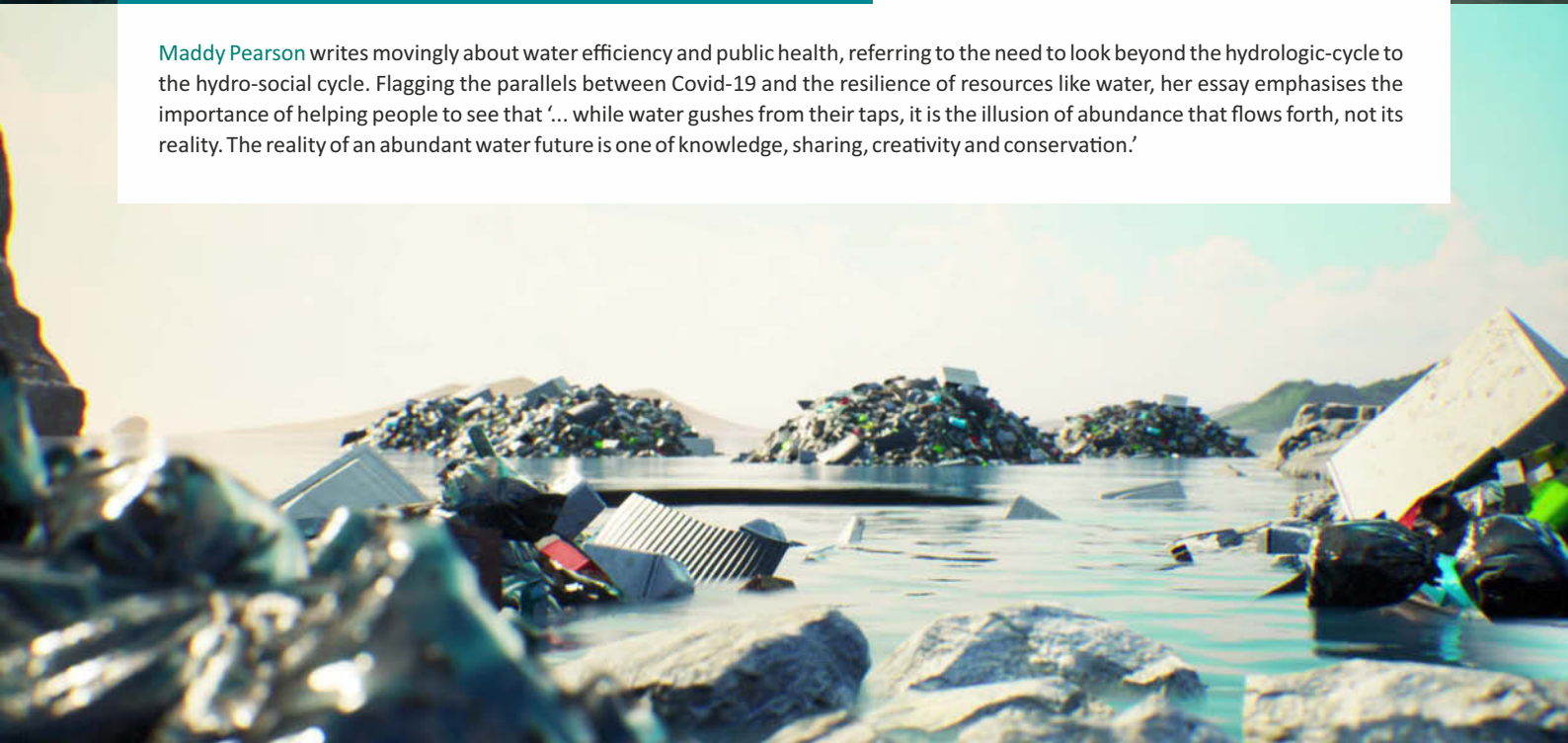
Conniveo, Virtual Reality Environment – Unreal Engine, 2020

Georgia uses virtual reality to tackle environmental issues and create speculative futures. She seeks to highlight the unhealthy relationship between natural environments and manmade materials. Conniveo focuses on marine pollution: particularly plastic pollution, oil pollution and dead zones. She feels that lockdown has made people more aware of their consumerism and personal impact on the Earth.



Sectoral Insights: Water

Maddy Pearson writes movingly about water efficiency and public health, referring to the need to look beyond the hydrologic-cycle to the hydro-social cycle. Flagging the parallels between Covid-19 and the resilience of resources like water, her essay emphasises the importance of helping people to see that ‘... while water gushes from their taps, it is the illusion of abundance that flows forth, not its reality. The reality of an abundant water future is one of knowledge, sharing, creativity and conservation.’



Key Themes Emerging from the Sustainability First Essay Prize

1. Cultural, Behavioural and Societal Change

Key issues

A highly transmissible, zoonotic disease has laid bare the fragile human–environment interactions that are so obscured from modern modes of living and working. Fundamentally it has illustrated how vulnerable our globally connected societies are to shocks, which should have been anticipated. The ensuing public health emergency and corresponding restrictions on movement have offered an opportunity for introspection and catalyst for behaviour change.

Shortlisted essays that focused on ‘*Cultural, behavioural and societal change*’ suggested that to build from the corona crisis to a more sustainable future, we must reconsider: What do we really value? Do we want to return to the way things were or develop a new ‘normal’? How do we address inequalities in society? And, at a practical level, what do we need to do to maintain some of the positive sustainable behaviours that have emerged in the crisis?

What do we value?

Though Covid-19 has undeniably caused a great deal of hardship (to our physical, mental and economic health), a recent survey commissioned by the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, found that fewer than one in ten people wants a full return to our pre-Covid world (Wood, 2020),⁶ suggesting an appetite to learn from this crisis and to embed some of the positive personal, social and environmental changes which have emerged.

Entrants identified our existing ‘Before Corona’ high consumption patterns as being diametrically opposed to our ability to deliver a sustainable future. Moreover, where individuals have been fortunate enough to reflect on the situation, without suffering the most urgent

repercussions of Covid-19 (including bereavement, ill health, job losses, precarious living conditions and reduced access to essential services), entrants suggest that existing travel restrictions, more flexible working schedules and the curtailment of regular activities has placed a renewed focus on the importance of well-being, public health, nature and human connection – as opposed to a focus on GDP and consumption.

How do we address inequality?

Entrants also emphasised that Covid-19 has highlighted and accentuated the inequalities in our society – and around the world – and the fragility of social support systems. Among other impacts, in the UK lockdown has increased the incidences of domestic abuse⁷ and has illustrated the linkages between poor mental health and financial inequalities.⁸ Evidence is emerging that Black and Minority Ethnic Groups are disproportionately affected by Covid-19,⁹ with Public Health England¹⁰ citing: socio-economic factors, access to health care and deprivation, among other reasons for generalised health inequalities back in 2017.

With the Black Lives Matter movement simultaneously gathering momentum in the US and the UK, shortlisted entrant [Anneli Tostar](#) makes the point that we cannot repair systems to what they once were. Her essay notes that at the core of any economic recovery plan, if we are to rebuild sustainably, we must rebuild inclusively. The World Economic Forum (2015)¹¹ has cited inequality as a central issue for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) and there is a growing body of evidence that inequalities in income and wealth cause: economic instability, a range of health and social problems, undermine social cohesion and curtail the adoption of pro-environment strategies and behaviours. Addressing inequality must be at the heart of how we build from the current corona crisis towards a more sustainable future.

Andy Johnson, Assistant Editor and News Editor, the i paper
– ‘It’s important these aren’t white middle-class issues. There are fundamental inequalities of race as well as class. We need to ensure that wealth and opportunity are equally distributed. Which, I would argue, comes from a massive investment in education.’



Solutions

Entrants highlighted the need to step back and create a **vision** for the future, which balances economic, social and environmental outcomes, rather than a return to business as usual. **Matt Madden's** essay draws on the thinking of Zamenopoulos (2008),¹² noting that major human endeavours are motivated by *shared representations* of reality. This emphasises the need for a **positive, unifying narrative**, which permeates every level of governance, businesses and different social groups, regarding how we rebuild in a post-Covid world.

To guide the development of this positive narrative for change requires us to ask: What is important? **What do we truly value?** In the starkest way possible, Covid-19 may act as a catalyst for this type of reflection. Put succinctly by prize-winning entrant **Dylan Ngan**, isolation has shown the importance of human connection for our well-being and highlighted how interconnected we are – especially when the repercussions of one rule-breaking indiscretion may have negative health consequences for others. Dylan argues that if we value life and our relationships with others most of all, then a human-centred approach to recovery is key. This means prioritising mechanisms that protect life and improve our long-term resilience. This is reiterated by other entrants, including **Nurah Niazy** who cites academics (Hakovirta and Deuwara, 2020),¹³ suggesting that we should reframe sustainability to include health as a fourth pillar, or a unifying thread which runs between economic health, environmental health and social health. **Aligning environmental policy more firmly with public health policy** seems sensible considering that human pressure and ecological degradation are the likely cause of the pandemic. Moreover, reframing sustainability in this way might help facilitate the behavioural changes and institutional transformations required for a sustainable future, through a persuasive focus on co-benefits.

Carbon emissions are key to short and long-term public health. Estimates suggest that these have dropped by up to 17% during lockdown, largely attributable to reductions in surface transport (Le Quéré et al, 2020).¹⁴ Moreover, to aid safe individual mobility, cities from Bogota to Berlin have reallocated space for pedestrians and cyclists, with some changes likely to become permanent. The public health implications for prevention of Covid-19 and corresponding reductions in air pollution represent a positive synergy, otherwise known as a **mutual or co-benefit**. Shorter-term co-benefits might also extend to the energy sector, which could use this period for radical energy efficiency retrofit programmes and to test demand side control and smart-metering initiatives, while people spend more time at home – as suggested by **Shilpita Mathews**.

Professor Nick Pidgeon, Cardiff University –
'Health and well-being come together in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, but we need to make the connection between well-being and sustainability more explicit.'

Jacob Weeks

To remember, recollect, think of, bear in mind: Amor Padilla Gatinao, 20 x 25 cm, leaf and frame, 2020

Jacob's works record the people who have lost their lives on the front line caring for the ones we love. He plans to produce an image of every NHS staff member and care worker who has lost their life during the pandemic, as a reminder for future generations of their selfless sacrifice. The images have been made through this period of lockdown, using the chlorophyll process, a completely sustainable process using natural light to burn an image onto leaves.



#BUILDBACKBETTER THURSDAYS

BE SUSTAINABLE

TRAVEL LESS

Help save 20,000 tonnes of CO2*

EAT LESS MEAT

Reduce food emissions by 60%**

CONSUME LESS

Reduce, re-use, recycle

**If the UK reduced car use for one day!*

***If everyone went veggie for 2/3 of meals*

BE KIND

BRIGHTEN SOMEONE'S DAY

To boost their mental health – and yours!

HELP YOUR COMMUNITY

Keep the lockdown spirit going

DONATE TO CHARITY

Help those in need recover

LOCKDOWN'S OVER...IT'S TIME TO BUILD BACK BETTER!

*Keep the amazing community spirit going – help build a better world.
Spread the message: do some good every Thursday to #buildbackbetter*

Find out more: www.buildbackbetterthursdays.com



#buildbackbetterthursdays



buildbackbetterthursdays

Entrant [Oliver Lack](#) and shortlisted entrants [Alicja Boryn](#) and [James Poston](#) (see Figure 1), also suggest that we should leverage the impact of lockdown changes, which have fixed us firmly to our **local areas**. Not only has there been anecdotal evidence for rising **kindness and community spirit** to support each other through this crisis (Waters, 2020),¹⁵ but it is clear that **local green spaces** have supported many people in coping. In such a difficult period, the ability to go outside to exercise, or simply break up the day, has remained one of the few constants. Safe access to these spaces is crucial for mitigating the wider health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic response, crucially for the maintenance of physical and mental health (BMJ, 2020).¹⁶

This **connection to nature** delivers beneficial public health outcomes, and may encourage longer-term pro-environmental behaviours (Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy, 2008).¹⁷ [Alicja Boryn](#) argues that these behaviours should also be encouraged post-Covid for their low-carbon value.

Nervousness about **international travel** in a post-Covid world, may offer a rare opportunity for growth in domestic holiday markets, while simultaneously reducing CO₂ emissions from aviation, which in 2018 accounted for 2.4% of global emissions from fossil fuels (Graver, Zhang and Rutherford, 2019).¹⁸ As suggested by [Oliver Lack](#), delivering economic benefits to socio-economically deprived coastal regions through domestic tourism could: support local and regional development, reduce social inequalities, improve our relationships with nature, deliver public health benefits and have a democratising economic effect on the country.

Entrants also made the case, that to deliver a sustainable future, reducing social inequalities – especially those exacerbated by Covid-19 – is unlikely to suit a national level, ‘one size fits all’ response. It seems that creating communities that are more resilient to pandemics, economic shocks, and climate change, instead requires a nuanced, **decentralised and local approach**, influenced heavily by **community participation**.

Making some headway into participatory engagement, the last two Citizens’ Climate Assemblies (which brought together people from all walks of life to discuss how the UK can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2050) were held online. This level of engagement still does not go far enough if we are to reduce inequalities and deliver a sustainable future.

Professor Fiona Stafford, University of Oxford – *‘Many people have never noticed spring unfold, as they have during this period of lockdown. It has been very good for mental health and terribly important for the environment, making people aware of the biodiversity we have in this country.*

In fact, it seems to be a new-found enjoyment for many people. Perhaps this situation will help green the curriculum and get nature into schools, because it is something that has been side-lined, yet is of fundamental importance for a resilient population.’

Shortlisted entrant [Anneli Tostar](#) suggests the need for dedicated representational task forces, while Professor Tim O’Riordan suggests the use of community-based listening circles. These would ensure that under-represented groups are sought out, so their opinions are heard and accounted for. These more **tailored forms of engagement**, which actively seek to know what people need and want gained momentum when the Welsh were planning their Well-being of Future Generations Act in 2015. Now Scotland is taking a similar approach, as

part of their Just Transition Commission, to advise on a net-zero economy that is fair for all.¹⁹ Among other groups, they have made a commitment to ‘specifically seek and consider the views of young people’.

Another aspect of inclusion and community engagement was noted by shortlisted entrant [Parth Devalia](#) whose essay refers to the 750,000 people who volunteered for the NHS in just four days. This highlights the ability of communities to come together in times of crisis. Parth notes that we are already living in a world of **technology-facilitated mass participation**, whether organised via a mobile responder app, or social media. This offers a huge opportunity for grassroots change, as well as inclusive, participatory engagement processes, which can feed into decision-making, at a local, regional and national level. Illustrated by [Alexander Oxley](#), Plymouth’s online Crowdfunding initiative has provided a successful way to support projects that improve the local environment or support local businesses and are paid for by the local council and citizens on a 50/50 basis. This has created a citizen-led approach for how the council’s funds are distributed (RTPI, 2019),²⁰ clearly contributing to beneficial economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Laura Sandys, Chair of the Government Energy Data Task Force – *‘The use of virtual communications in this period is a perfect analogy for the utility of distributed networks. Centralisation simply hasn’t been giving enough people agency.’*

To summarise this chapter, **Nick Pidgeon (Professor of Environmental Psychology at the University of Cardiff)** suggests: *‘there is a clear appetite for a more sustainable future. Covid has shown that behaviours can change, but we need to put pressure on those with political and financial levers to invest in the significant structural changes that are needed to support people’s choices in an appropriate way.’*

Figure 1. [James Poston’s Build Back Better Poster](#), as part of a campaign encouraging positive lockdown behavioural changes to stick.



Tere Chad

The ReEnlightenment, 120 x 160cm, Cob, recycled bottles, stones, wood log and bees wax, 2018
Carbon neutral construction made through collaboration that reflects on if the rational ideas of the Enlightenment brought us the wealth we wanted. Brings the news light enhancing the sun and wind through recycled bottles. Speaks about the urge of not forgetting our ability of sensing the world through our hands, and not forgetting that our planet is alive. It has the shape of a shell bio-mimicking the hermit crab's recyclable houses. Hermit crabs use shells as houses and as they grow, they change to a bigger shell and leave their previous house for a younger hermit crab.

Essay Commentary – Tim O’Riordan, Emeritus Professor of Environmental Sciences, UEA

All of these essays have merit and in many ways are all connected. The idea of citizens’ conversations, especially led by the young, looking at various themes for creating a sustainable society and economy on a regenerated planet is the most important requirement. This is about leadership from the people who have borne the brunt of all of this and must be given their full say in its aftermath.

In such conversations the issues of: governance; localism; community creative experiments; reconnecting with nature as our supportive host; new forms of defining well-being and betterment; and new ways of experiencing urban; suburban and rural life – can unleash a socially supportive, innovative and sustainable society.

Sustainability First’s Conclusions and Recommendations on Culture, Behaviour and Societal Change

We are living in a period of dynamic change. As boundaries blur and people realise we are part of a complex and interconnected system, we are starting to ask fundamental questions about what we value in society. We now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ‘rethink’ and build a more sustainable future.

Everyone needs to play a part in the recovery process. For this to happen, we need a positive vision for future society that addresses inequality in the short and long term. This needs to be focused on delivering co-benefits and approaches that make a difference on the ground in the places where people live. This vision needs to be developed and tailored through:

- **Co-ordinated public engagement at the local, regional and national levels** – which gives people a voice and sense of agency in their own futures. Investment in social infrastructure and capacity building among local communities and resourcing of local and regional government are key for this to happen and to ensure a ‘fair’ recovery.
- **Supporting sustainable behaviour change** – Covid-19 recovery packages need to be framed with social justice and environmental goals in mind. They need to help the positive behaviours from the pandemic to stick and to move behavioural interventions from nudge to radical to facilitate more sustainable lifestyles.
- **Increased focus on sustainability (in its broadest sense) in education and the national curriculum** – to raise awareness and make change as easy and attractive as possible. Young people need to be taught how to enact change in all aspects of their lives – including through a focus on values and well-being, sustainable consumption and the power of their own financial choices.

2. Government Policy, Regulatory and Institutional Change

Key issues

Economic growth usually measured as gross domestic product (GDP) is seen as a foremost measure of success and prosperity globally. But with Britain's economy likely to suffer the worst damage from Covid-19, of any country in the developed world – according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Inman, 2020)²¹ – how can we build back better? How can we ensure that government policy, regulation and guiding institutions deliver balanced social, environmental and economic outcomes, which are more resilient to future system shocks? Shortlisted essays that focused on *Government Policy, Regulatory and Institutional Change* suggested that to build from the corona crisis to a more sustainable future, we must consider: What outcomes should government seek in guiding a post-Covid economy? What should be the role and scale of government interventions? And what kind of governance, leadership and modes of accountability do we need to deliver the transformations for a sustainable future?

Desired outcomes and government interventions

A return to a 'normal', business as usual, model of growth is undoubtedly tempting to world leaders. Following this period of global lockdown and economic contraction, the pressure to choose the most immediate path to bolstering economic growth and returning citizens to work will be intense. However, entrants suggest that the government needs to take a longer-term view. Summarised by [Arlene Barclay](#), we must learn from the financial crash of 2008 and seize the opportunity to align economic resilience with sustainability.

Unsubsidised renewable energy is now cheaper than fossil fuels (IRENA, 2019)²² and, according to the Global Commission on Adaptation (2019),²³ investing in the green sector is one of the most effective ways to stimulate economic growth after a recession. The New Climate Economy (2018)²⁴ suggest that pursuing low-carbon and climate-resilient growth could generate \$26 trillion in economic gains and 65 million jobs over the next ten years. Capitalising on the clean energy transition has the capacity to deliver immense short-term benefits, aiding the recovery from Covid-19, while making us more resilient against threats like climate change. However, a 'green recovery' will require a raft of government interventions. Crucially, according to [Parth Devalia](#), the level of state intervention to protect businesses and social welfare during this crisis has shown that the government is capable of leading, rather than leaving progress to market forces, when threats loom.

Governance, leadership and accountability

Entrants highlighted a lack of accountability and siloed thinking as a barrier to the policy measures and regulatory changes needed to deliver a sustainable future. Many also mentioned the need for greater international coordination and cooperation to deal with global systemic threats such as epidemics and climate change. According to shortlisted entrant [Alicja Boryn](#), piecemeal policy statements made on all sides during the UK 2019 election campaign (such as the unprecedented attention on tree-planting), lacked true radical spirit (Sharma, 2019).²⁵ At the highest level of governance, this suggests that a narrow framing of sustainability still persists and without pressure from business, civil society and the third-sector, we may miss the policy window for more substantive positive changes which can help deliver sustainable outcomes and resilience as we come out of the crisis.

Solutions

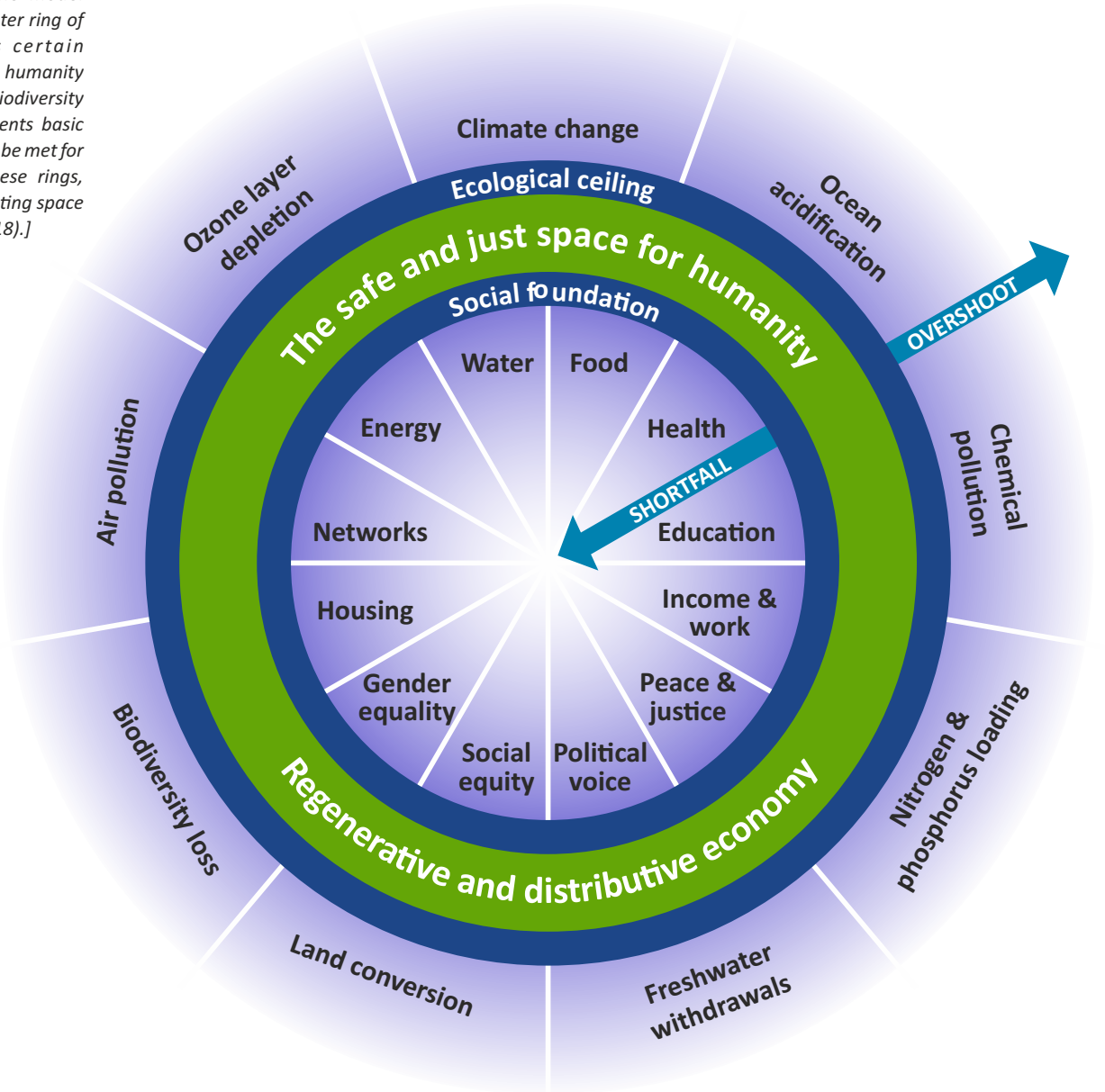
To deliver a sustainable future and prepare for future shocks, policy frameworks, regulators and institutions need to refocus on what society values and what the intended outcomes of economic activity should be. The government needs to adopt **national indicators that measure and give value to social and environmental welfare**, not just the pursuit of economic growth and a higher GDP. These indicators might include health, education, life satisfaction and air quality. According to van den Bergh (2011),²⁶ this does not mean dismissing economic growth entirely, but placing the emphasis on achieving environmental and social welfare instead.

Prize-winning entrant [Yash Dewan](#) urges the adoption of Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics Model. This model suggests that **the goal of economic activity should be about meeting the core needs of all, but within the means of the planet.**²⁷ Already at a municipal scale, Amsterdam has pledged to embrace the model to mend the post-Covid economy (Boffey, 2020).²⁸ For the UK, placing this concept at the heart of future policy decisions could begin with the near-term policy measures and fiscal stimulus packages required to kick-start a 'green recovery'. Summarised by shortlisted entrant [Sergiu Jiduc](#), if public spending drives the recovery, public funds should be used wisely, with the long-term view in mind.

Professor Tim O'Riordan, UEA – 'We are going to need some kind of wealth tax, though the phrase is arguably damaging. It should be packaged as redistribution, a central theme to the sustainability message. Companies must be forbidden from investing in offshore tax havens. We need wealth-based council taxation, because the financing of local government is still hugely regressive. Part of this, and more controversially, is the idea that we need a greater contribution from the older and more wealthy members of society, as part of a social investment in the next generation.'

Doughnut economics

Made of concentric rings, much like a Doughnut (from which the model takes its namesake), the outer ring of this model represents certain ecological thresholds, that humanity should not cross, such as biodiversity loss. The inner ring represents basic human needs, which should be met for every person. Between these rings, exists a 'safe and just operating space for humanity' (Raworth, 2018).]



With the EU announcing their 'green recovery' package at the end of May (Carrington, 2020)²⁹ and with other leading charities also urging the Prime Minister to do the same (Harvey, 2020),³⁰ a precedent for a recovery that can increase economic growth, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and prevailing inequalities has been set (Hepburn et al, 2020).³¹ Entrants [Yash Dewan](#), [Patrick Hinton](#) and [Sergiu Jiduc](#) suggested a number of near-term measures that could set our economy on track to deliver a more sustainable future. Measures for a **resilient and fair recovery** included:

- The use of sustainability checklists by policymakers to guide economic recovery interventions. An example might include the use of **conditional bailouts** for the aviation industry (World Bank, 2020).³²
- The **removal of fossil fuel subsidies and redirection of funds into clean energy projects and sustainable infrastructure**, such as smart grids, electric-vehicle charging infrastructure and digital connectivity. This is timely, given the low cost of borrowing.
- 'Poverty tackling solutions' which counter immediate unemployment and precarious employment concerns, while increasing the workforce needed for a sustainable transition. An example could be the provision of subsidies and tax cuts for construction firms, local authorities and renewable energy providers to **reskill workers** (Costa et al, 2020).³³

Professor Jeremy Till, Head of Central Saint Martins – 'There could be a tax on frequent fliers, so everyone gets an allocation of permissible flights, beyond which passengers are taxed for their carbon emissions.'

Sectoral Insights: Energy

[Shilpita Mathews](#) discusses the role of the energy sector in the economic recovery and proposes a social justice framing to guide the sector. Shilpita's suggestions included targeted energy efficiency schemes (i.e. retrofitting social housing to address fuel poverty and adaptation issues, as well as using the fact that more people are at home to pilot new metering schemes) and heat decarbonisation initiatives (such as financing for heat pumps and addressing perceptions about heating).

[Patrick Hinton](#) suggests that the government redirects unemployed people into water and energy efficiency initiatives, such as the installation of rainwater collection systems, solar panels and battery storage. Meanwhile, [Alicja Boryn](#) suggests that these initiatives could be modelled on Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps following the Great Depression ([Baichich, 2017](#)).³⁴ At the time, this was a lifeline for young people struggling to find employment. It provided a fixed monthly income in exchange for their work on labour-intensive projects. It is quite clear that green recovery plans have the potential to create a wealth of benefits including energy security and just transition opportunities for displaced workers – and to restructure the economy for a digital/artificial intelligence age.³⁵ Entrants suggest that these policy initiatives must be paired with **tax reforms**. Shortlisted entrant [Anneli Tostar](#) calls for a marginal tax rate of 90% for those with income greater than £5 million. While [Parth Devalia](#) suggests a one-off wealth tax, to raise funds while avoiding further austerity measures as a way to pay off debt incurred during this crisis.

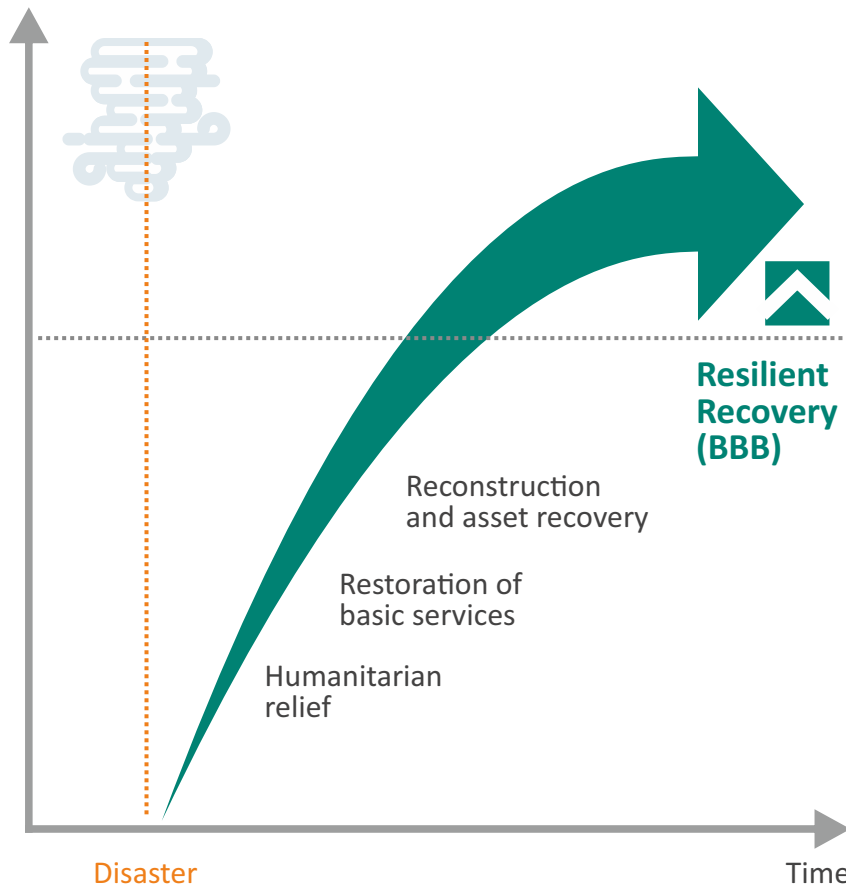
[Professor Nick Pidgeon, Cardiff University](#) –
'Much like the 2008 Climate Change Act, we need a cross-party consensus that there will be a green recovery.'

Entrants suggest that both ideas have the potential to redistribute wealth and help reduce inequalities by making funds available for income support policies, as well as to fund investments in sustainability projects. Tax reform is not new and certain academics suggest that the barriers to adoption are largely political.³⁶ The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has just joined Tax Justice UK and other progressive groups in calling on the government for 'Tax reform to support a fairer and greener future',³⁷ post-pandemic. Although, there is broad agreement that a good tax system is sustainable, procedurally fair and horizontally equitable, these objectives are not central to our current system ([Tetlow et al, 2020](#)).³⁸

Entrants also suggested that to deliver a sustainable future, we must reevaluate **governance structures, the type of political leadership and accountability mechanisms** that we currently have. Summarised by [Paloma Ortega](#), there needs to be the political will to align government plans to tackle Covid-19, with existential threats like climate change and biodiversity loss. According to research conducted by [Rebecca Willis \(2019\)](#),³⁹ this political will – which exceeds superficial gesturing – is yet to emerge, as climate change issues are rarely raised in debate about the economy and within the Westminster Parliament there can be a general hostility to politicians who bring these points into discussion.

To enable long-term resilience thinking and a political paradigm shift away from short termism, entrant [Joey McAleese](#) suggests the use of an **adaptive governance framework**, intended for use by decision-makers following natural disasters. In practice, adaptive governance is a non-traditional approach to disaster risk reduction and is built on changes to institutional capacity, including the need for greater collaboration, multilevel collective action, continuous learning for knowledge development and the management of social-ecological systems ([Munene et al, 2018](#)).⁴⁰ The Build Back Better (BBB) framework suggested by Joey, encourages governments to pursue stronger, faster and more inclusive post-disaster reconstruction ([Rentschler et al, 2018](#)).⁴¹

An illustration of the post-disaster recovery and its three phases



The vertical axis refers to a range of aspects, from the stock of assets, to the income, consumption and well-being of the affected population. Building back better means that the recovery process is stronger compared to pre-disaster levels, but also faster and more inclusive.

By framing Covid-19 as just one in a string of global shocks, governing institutions could focus on strategy and policy implementation that supports resilience. Naturally these solutions would be socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

However, holding leaders accountable for delivering these changes is another matter. Entrant [Alicja Boryn](#) suggests that we need clear **legal and institutional backing**, which holds politicians accountable for meeting the sustainability goals to which they commit. Although the UK has now legislated for Net Zero by 2050 (2045 in Scotland) and has existing regulatory commitments under the Climate Change Act (2008), regulators still have some way to go to realign their responsibilities in this area. More work is needed to break down policy and regulatory silos so that they take account of long-term citizen interests and facilitate proactive collaboration between government departments, and regulators, and to identify any legislative gaps which may undermine public health and sustainability in what is a fast-moving and dynamic environment. By redesigning regulation and effectively communicating these new arrangements, the efficacy and adaptability of policy implementation should be improved and the social contract between governing institutions and citizens, from the grass roots to the top, is strengthened.

Essay Commentary – Rose O’Neill, Principal Specialist Natural England

The thing I liked about the essays was that there was so much potential there to rebuild and recover, both the economy and people’s health, in ways that can tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis on a scale that is needed. The upswell in ideas and research is encouraging. There has been a shift in thinking to consider what the art of the possible is. Even before Covid-19 there was a sense of a movement building, with the number of people thinking about the environment at a 30-year high. I think this has continued despite Covid-19, with a real demand from the public for a change in the social contract, especially with the ongoing Black Lives Matter protests. We need to make sure regulators and companies are in tune, that they are listening and that they are responding to this expectation for change.

Laura Sandys, Chair of the Government Energy Data Task Force –
‘Sustainability should be made a health and safety issue, taken up by the HSE. This would level the playing field and make everyone accountable for their judgements, as a baseline for policy and business decisions, rather than a ‘nice to have’ criteria.’

“To get change at the scale and pace needed to stop systemic threats such as future pandemics, corrosive inequality and climate change, we also need deep structural change”



Jasmine Pradissitto

Famine, 40 x 35 x 25 cm, noxtek, 2020

Jasmine makes sculptures from nitrogen dioxide absorbing ceramic geopolymers to highlight air pollution. The symbol of the inhaler asthma sufferers also reminds us of those who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus.

Sustainability First Conclusions and Recommendations on Government Policy, Regulatory and Institutional Change

Changes in individual lifestyles and behaviours are necessary but not sufficient for a sustainable future. To get change at the scale and pace needed to stop systemic threats such as future pandemics, corrosive inequality and climate change, we also need deep structural change. Young people and artists recognise the urgency of these issues and expect action.

Government has to lead the way out of the crisis and to take a long-term view that aligns economic resilience with social and environmental sustainability. This requires an acknowledgement that no one has all the answers and the route map to the future is unlikely to be straightforward and 'linear'.

Devolved and regional governments need to be able to help shape this vision and be empowered and given the resources to play their part. Government can begin by:

- **Rethinking our focus on GDP** – policymakers and regulators need a new set of national indicators and sustainability metrics that measure and value social, environmental and economic outcomes, along with wider health and well-being.
- **A conditional Covid recovery package and public procurement** – that is tied to addressing environmental goals and social inequalities (particularly those exacerbated by the pandemic such as race, gender and people without broadband). Strategic green investment at scale is vital to stimulate climate resilient economic growth. This needs to be accompanied by reskilling for green jobs with a focus on those hardest hit by the pandemic.
- **A Citizens' Assembly to tackle the thorny issues of tax and welfare reform** – cross-subsidies within essential services have reached their limits and cannot be relied on to get us out of the Covid affordability crisis or to pay for net zero and climate adaptation. To ensure a fair and resilient recovery, a fundamental reform of tax and welfare is needed at the national and local levels. A fully representative Citizens' Assembly should be established to tackle this difficult issue, and to help ensure an outcome that balances economic, social and environmental considerations. This needs to build on local public engagement, with a new social contract linking national and local activity.



3. Business Leadership, Governance and Practice

Key issues

During the crisis, key workers have put their lives at risk to continue to provide essential services. Some businesses have radically innovated or repurposed their activities to help tackle the pandemic. While the lockdown has impacted businesses of all sizes, some business leaders are calling for multimillion-pound government bailouts to survive. Difficult choices need to be made as to which businesses and sectors receive government support to kick-start the economy and avoid a prolonged recession – while at the same time building towards a more resilient future. These issues are problematic, without considering the supply chain implications of a virus that breaches national boundaries, and which will negatively affect low- and middle-income countries the most (Guan, Wang and Hallegatte, 2020).⁴² Shortlisted essays that focused on *Business Leadership, Governance and Practice* suggested that to build from the corona crisis to a more sustainable future, business must reframe: What survival and success mean in a disrupted world? What role businesses can play in delivering a sustainable future?

What do survival and success mean in a disrupted world?

Entrants suggest that Covid-19 has shown that some businesses and their underlying business models are not geared to cope with external shocks. **Sophie Corcut** suggests that Covid-19 raises questions for business about how they prepare for impending disruptors (like climate change, or artificial intelligence), while continuing to rebalance business models in light of changing patterns of consumer behaviour and consumption. She argues that Covid-19 has increased the pressure on businesses to prove their ‘essentialness’ to society, especially if they want to exist long term. Work undertaken on Sustainability First’s ‘Fair for the Future’ project, emphasises the importance of corporate purpose, values and culture, especially in times of crisis. Prize-winning entrant **James Poston** argues that the need for businesses to take a long-term view, is in contrast with the prevalent culture of shareholder primacy, which permits and promotes the maximisation of shareholder profit (Posner, 2020),⁴³ arguably to the detriment of wider environmental and social welfare. To deliver a sustainable future will require resilient, purposeful businesses, which create positive social, environmental and economic outcomes. But what practical changes to business leadership, governance and practice do we need to achieve this?

What role can business play in delivering a sustainable future?

Where changes in business practices, approaches and models were already happening, in many cases the pandemic has catapulted this forward. **Alicja Boryn** and **Manjot Heer** suggest that businesses can not only ride this wave but play a vital role in helping us adapt to and build from coronavirus towards a sustainable future, both as employers and innovators.

Sustainability First – Fair for the Future Project

Sustainability First’s Fair for the Future Project is carrying out significant work on purposeful business and public utilities.

Covid-19 has provided a test-bed for companies to turn their talk about responsible business practice into action.

Our ‘Sustainable Licence to Operate’ proposals provide a framework for responsible business – both in ‘peace time’ and ‘war time’. Why? Because embedding this approach means business rewards are realised through increased legitimacy, access to emerging environmental markets and greater business resilience (to deal with Covid-19 and future shocks), while delivering fairer, more sustainable outcomes.

Rachael Mellors

Illumination, digital image of artist’s shadow at sunrise, Gargarou beach cliff 2019 (no manipulation) Rachael has developed a series of digital images of her shadow on the cliff face, taken in the few moments after the sun rises, over several weeks of the year. She captures the momentary shadow imprint of her body embedded with layers of soil and impregnated with shell fragments and fossils, layered over millions of years. She feels that a deeply bonded relationship with the natural world is needed to recover from the Earth’s emergency. The corona crisis has enabled quietness unknown this century, an experience of living with less, and a chance for appreciation of nature.

Professor Paul Dewick, Keele University – ‘The idea that technology can be at the heart of recovery is long-standing.’

Jo de Montgros, Founder of Renewable Energy Consultancy Everose – ‘There seems to be a universal recognition that a recovery from Covid-19 has to be sustainable long-term. Over recent weeks I’ve been heartened to see that many major UK companies are making the same arguments. In the short term, we need to keep people in employment. This also needs to be balanced against the longer term.’

There are so many things that we just accept as business as usual. There has been a push back among some business leaders to reevaluate how we approach shareholder returns, to say that maximising profit is not the only, or most, important thing.’



Solutions

Parth Devalia suggests **investor action** can be a driving force in delivering a sustainable future, noting that over the last ten years the consideration of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors, as alternative measures of company performance, has been growing. These criteria are used by investors to assess investments based on their social and environmental impact, and to better determine the future financial performance of the companies they invest in. To this end, the impact investor movement, built around a shared belief that finance can and needs to be a force for good, is growing. Prize-winning entrant James Poston notes how these initiatives encourage individual and institutional investors to reward good business practices and punish unsustainable or unethical businesses, via their investment choices. Correspondingly, at a recent annual meeting, members of the impact investor community have been asking how the pandemic affects their ability to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. And how best investors can engage with decision-makers – including businesses and regulators – to make sure that sustainability and social impact become part of the “new normal” after the crisis (Krivaneck, 2020).⁴⁴ Evidence is mounting that having a positive environmental and social impact is also financially beneficial in times of crisis.

With the caveat that this is just a snapshot in time and that past performance is no guarantee of future returns, Schroders have recently reported that during the Covid-19 pandemic, stocks with a better sustainability profile saw better share price performance than their less sustainable counterparts (MacDonald-Brown and MacLennan, 2020).⁴⁵ In addition to the financial benefits of adaptation and a green recovery detailed in the previous chapter, the economic case for sustainable business seems clear. As inferred by James Poston, perhaps coronavirus provides the catalyst for mainstream banks, institutional investors and national governments to support businesses to achieve a sustainable transition.

Although investor-led encouragement for changing business practice is important, the desire for purpose-led, sustainable business must also come from within.

Business leadership and governance are critical. Taking inspiration from sustainable food systems literature and building on criticism of the private sector for designing sustainability strategies behind a corporate veil (Brunori and Galli, 2016),⁴⁶ Sophie Corcut suggests the use of ‘transitions thinking’ within business governance. Summarised as structural, holistic and evolutionary, the concept emerged to avoid the pitfalls of corporate sustainability strategy, which has generally failed to consider: Who should be sitting around the table? Whose sustainability is it? What might the unintended consequences of business decisions be? And what opportunities for creativity and innovation are being missed, by the pursuit of specific (albeit necessary) targets? (Spaargaren et al, 2012:⁴⁷ Kirwin et al, 2017).⁴⁸

As discussed in previous chapters, inclusivity in decision-making is key to delivering a sustainable, equitable future. The same applies to business **board level governance**, with other entrants also picking up on the need to improve and diversify representation at a board level. Parth Devalia suggests appointing sustainability representatives to the boards of large companies. Extending this point further, academics Haffar and Searcy (2019) found that improved and inclusive **stakeholder dialogue** was a key factor in enabling companies to successfully navigate complex sustainability tensions.⁴⁹

Sectoral Insights: Food Systems

Ellen Fletcher’s deep-dive essay reviews the impact of the pandemic on cooking, food waste, local sourcing and other food cultures and behaviours. She assesses the vulnerability of food systems and supply chains in the UK and behavioural changes needed to build resilience and help develop a sustainable future. Holly Ayesha Smith’s essay notes the importance of government support packages to include greener agricultural processes and the role these can play in climate adaptation.

*Lord Deben – Chair of the Committee on Climate Change –
‘It’s about People, Planet and Profit. For businesses,
sustainability means being here in 125 years’ time. This
means working with, rather than degrading, the
environment and society on which they rely.’*

Rachna Garodia

Woodland Walk, 103 x 98 x 3.5 cm, handwoven wool, cotton, jute, linen, raffia, bark (London plane, palm) cinnamon, wheat pod and grass held in handcrafted frame in oak, 2018

Rachna’s tapestries seek to bring the ‘outside’ in, evoking the simple pleasures of a woodland walk. All around the world we have been forced to pause, to stay at home and save lives. Her handwoven works are like a prayer in praise of the spirit of nature, its mutability and irregularity. She juxtaposes natural yarns like cotton, linen, wool and silk with found and gathered materials like paperbark, seedpods and twigs. She combines unexpected textures – where voids in the weave created by bits from nature act like the silences between notes in music.



Sectoral Insights: Communications

Adeola Awoyomi's essay is focused on cyber-security being essential for a sustainable and resilient future – when we are all dependent on digital communications for every aspect of our lives. In his essay, Matthew Bone examines the move to homeworking accelerated by the pandemic, noting that younger employees were already more concerned about the effects of commuting and work travel on the environment, and would be prime candidates for future telecommuting.

Many entrants highlighted the important role business can play in facilitating some of the behaviour changes outlined in previous chapters. Alicja Boryn and James Poston discussed the move to **remote working practices** during this crisis. Though this is not feasible, or desirable for some sectors, a shift to flexible, remote working patterns has a range of co-benefits, which can help us move towards a more sustainable future. Summarised by James Poston, more distributed business models could increase access to talent pools for employee recruitment and improve access to jobs for those not in commuting distance of major cities, therefore helping to reduce regional inequalities. It could also minimise the financial burden of transport costs, while reducing pollution and congestion. Alicja Boryn also suggests that flexible, remote working could help improve the work-life balance of individuals, especially those with childcare duties. Yes, many of these changes were already afoot, but Covid-19 has forced businesses to adapt. With social distancing restrictions likely to last for some time and the viability of distributed business models proven, some business leaders, including the CEO of Barclays bank already acknowledged that: 'putting 7,000 people in a building may be a thing of the past' (White, 2020). [50](#)

Prize-winning entrant Manjot Heer focused on **innovation**. Building on his experience as part of Kings College London's Entrepreneurship Institute, Manjot suggests the use of a 'Greenship' to help the renewable energy sector to expand. This idea evolves from the concept of green entrepreneurship by combining it with behavioural economics (in particular nudge theory) and government intervention. Among other ideas, the essay calls for the following:

- Government to establish a Department for Sustainable Innovation (DSI) to coordinate with different university-led entrepreneurship institutions to support innovative, student-driven green initiatives. This is inspired by the role played by local government in China (Ji, 2020). [51](#)
- Company-led collaboration, focused on mentorship and engagement, to facilitate the growth of grassroots ideas and highlight key issues facing the renewable energy sector.
- A requirement for companies to invest in renewable innovation by mentoring start-ups and sharing resources.

Manjot suggests that Greenship could have a multiplier effect in terms of culture and behavioural norms, as the start-ups that develop, due to DSI and the concept of Greenship, will naturally embody sustainable purpose. This will support the creation of a responsible company culture, where sustainability is considered in all manner of decision-making (Venter, 2016). [52](#) One of the most novel ideas to emerge from this essay competition, Greenship offers an interesting opportunity to integrate government with educational and private bodies to ignite entrepreneurship, for a sustainable future.

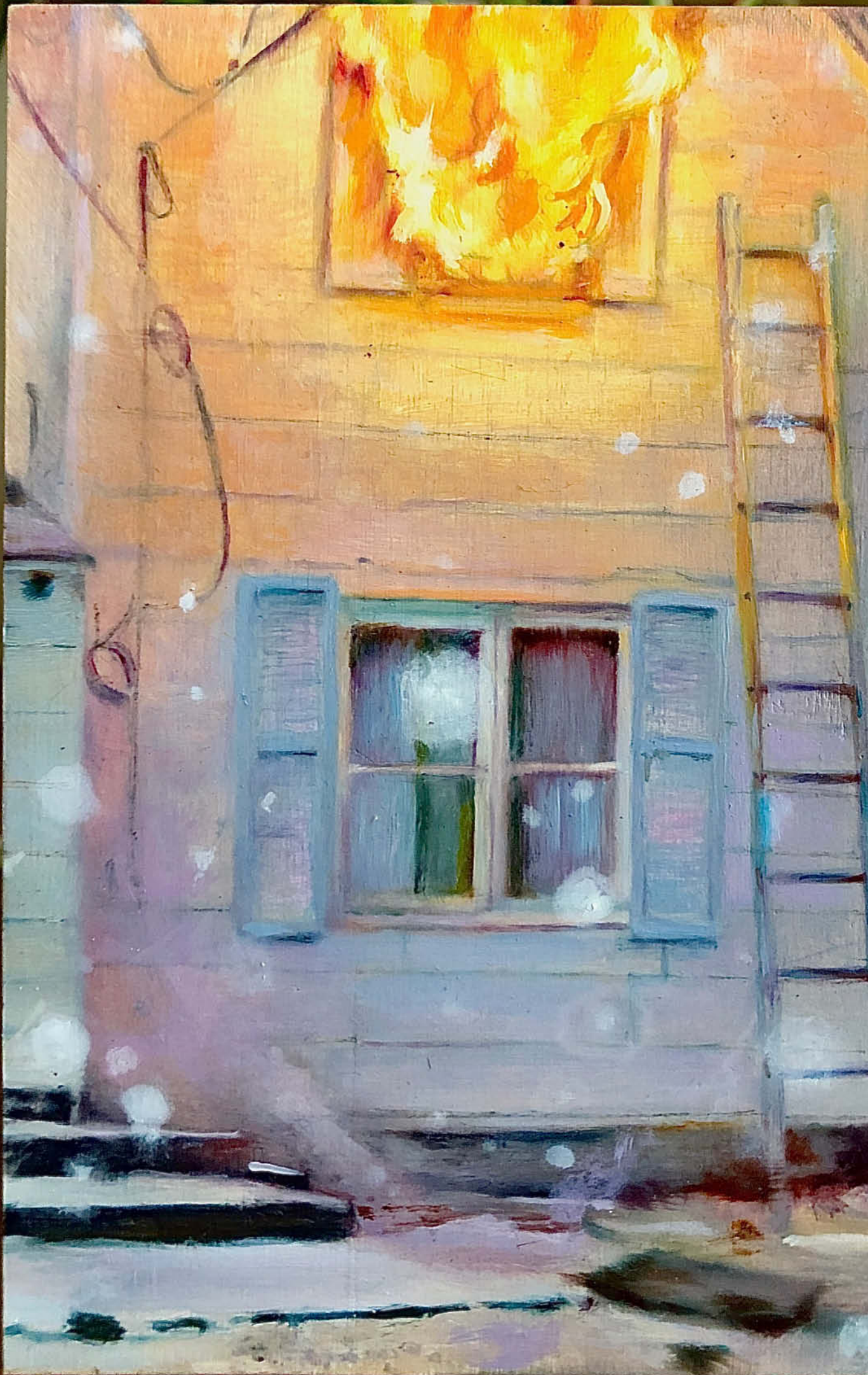
Essay Commentary – Mariana Mazzucato, Founder of the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose

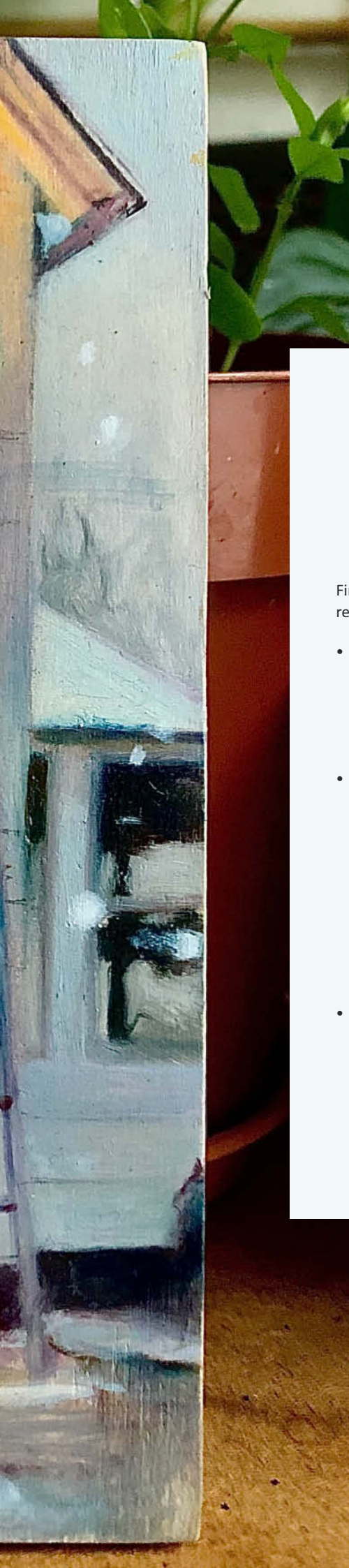
It is vital that the next generation of 21st century researchers, public servants and business leaders engage with the climate and health crises as global challenges that require inclusive, sustainable and innovation-led solutions. These essays give me hope that they are able to rise to this challenge! The authors demonstrate a range of important approaches, from considering 'who is sitting around the table' for a sustainable transition, to how governments can take a hands-on role, and how societies can take up ambitious climate and public health missions.

Sarah Strachan

The air we breathe, 105 x 42.5 x 84 cm, sculpture –
wooden cabinet, clear acrylic boxes, found objects, 2019

Sarah's sculpture brings together a collection of found objects, in an indexical cabinet of acrylic boxes, exchanged by post with children and their families around the world. The boxes contain a record of a generation's diverse personal experiences of air quality in their local environment.





Sustainability First – Conclusions and Recommendations on Business Leadership, Governance and Practice

Financial systems and structures, investors and businesses all need to play a key role in delivering a resilient recovery through:

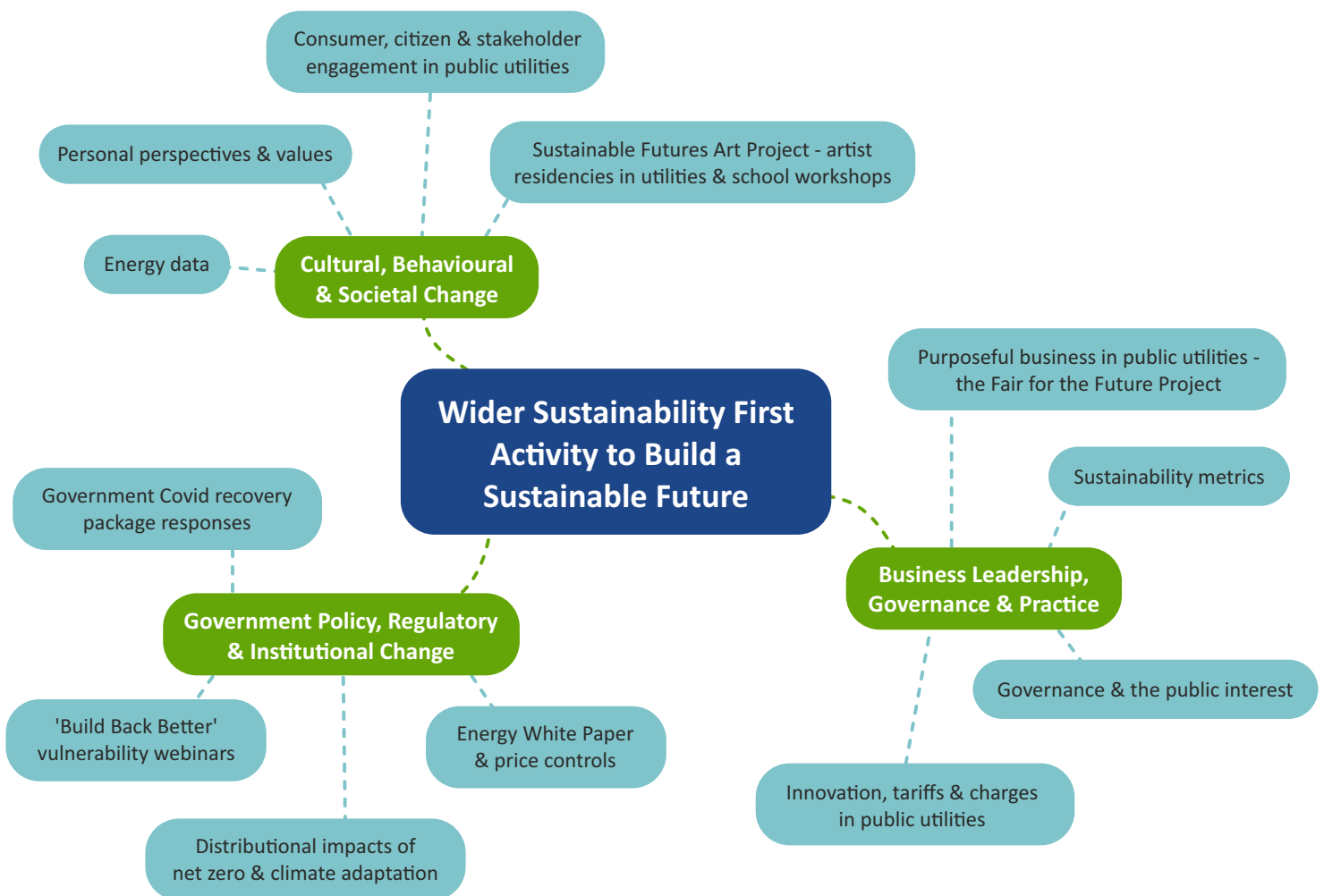
- **Mainstreaming impact investing** – investors need to fundamentally re-evaluate the core business models in which they invest and actively consider the environmental, social and governance impacts of their investments. By engaging with businesses, regulators and policymakers, investors can use their money to help drive beneficial outcomes for customers, employees, the communities in which they invest and the natural environment.
- **A step change in the focus on corporate purpose and sustainability metrics** – the pandemic shows that we need to up the level of ambition and activity in this area. When companies are a key part of the fabric of society and use private capital to deliver public value (such as utilities and other essential services), it is vital that they develop their corporate purpose with their stakeholders. For these businesses, an ongoing dialogue with stakeholders is essential to understand changing needs and expectations, how to fairly share risk and reward and, where appropriate, to develop innovative partnerships that can deliver co-benefits. The diversity of leadership teams is vital here (in terms of different characteristics, professional backgrounds and ways of thinking). Diverse boards can help build trust, avoid groupthink and increase resilience; ensuring companies are prepared for the next ‘shock’ to the system.
- **Innovation** – is key to a sustainable future. Innovations around homeworking in the pandemic have brought many benefits, including to the environment. Business now needs to work with national and regional government to understand fully what the impacts of this may be (including in terms of equality) so that they can truly facilitate more sustainable ways of operating. But we also need to see innovations in business models, institutions and governance frameworks – that recognise businesses are a key part of society and have an ongoing role to play in delivering social and environmental outcomes. There have been some great examples in the pandemic. This type of creativity must continue if we are going to tackle problems like climate change.

Sam Schmitt

May you live in interesting times, 10 x 13 cm, oil on panel,
2020

‘Looking out the window on a snowy day, it’s easy to miss the apartment upstairs is burning.’ Sam seeks to draw attention to the things we do not notice. The overwhelming events of this year are a cascade of interconnected crises. We need to see the apartment upstairs, the effect the family’s condition has on our seemingly separate way of life. Developing a climate movement that is more intersectional – with understanding of how social and political identities might combine to create unique modes of discrimination and injustice.

“We need to see change in all three areas; by people, government and business. Shifts in individual behaviours are necessary but not sufficient. Lifestyle changes need to be accompanied by structural change at scale and pace if we are going to create a sustainable future”



Next Steps

The submissions to the Sustainability First Art and Essay Prizes have provided fantastic insights into how we can build from the corona crisis to a more sustainable future. It has been truly inspiring to be able to share in the visions and thoughts of the young and creative people who entered their work into the competitions. We are already feeding many of these ideas into thinking on the government's pandemic economic recovery package⁵³ and other activity in this area.⁵⁴ And they will continue to shape our wider work on building a sustainable future – as illustrated in the following diagram.

Over the coming months we will carefully consider what further work Sustainability First can do to use these insights to ensure recovery from the pandemic is smart, fair and green so that the social and economic reset as a result of the crisis puts us on a more sustainable footing for the future. We will share this book with decision-makers and other stakeholders to ensure these ideas are heard widely.

Two clear messages from this work stand out. The first is that as the pandemic has touched every area of our lives, it has understandably led to many deep emotional reactions. Some of these may dissipate, as people get on with their lives, while others require a more fundamental rethink. Our experiences over the last few months may have been radically different, so the response to the pandemic needs to take into account 'hearts as well as minds.' Leaders – in government, policy, regulation and business circles – need to listen. The entries to our competitions have shown the high expectations of many artists and young people in this area.

Creative insights from the arts, and new dialogues with those outside the 'usual suspects', can help guide the way here. The network of students, early stage researchers and artists that we have created during this process is an example. It is part of 'participatory engagement' in action. It is a way of collectively charting our course through uncertainty and the unknown – that builds on 'crowdsourced' insights and challenge.

Sustainability First hopes to continue this dialogue with many of those involved. We want to understand what sits behind many of the proposals made and images shared and to test how practical ideas for the future may be. And we would like to facilitate discussions with decision-makers in companies, investor groups, regulators and government as to how these ideas might be put into action in their areas of work.

The second clear message from the competitions is that the pandemic is perhaps just one in a series of shocks that we are likely to experience in society in the coming decade. To get better at addressing these, and to build a more resilient future, many of our essay entrants told us that education is key. Education that does not just describe things like climate change and biodiversity loss but explains how to tackle these issues, at every level of our lives. We will be exploring what we might do further in this space.

Sustainability First is a small charity. We have carried out this project and funded the prizes using our own reserves. We have 'invested ahead of need' as the economists say. If you would like to support our work going forward, or to collaborate with us in these areas, please do get in touch.

Through the Sustainability First Art Prize we aimed to give artists a platform to share their experiences of lockdown and visions for a more sustainable future. We were overwhelmed by the response – with around 1,150 entries – varying in scale, medium and subject. For artists, it was a challenging brief to capture both the current situation of the pandemic and give a sense of hope for the future. We are grateful to our independent judging panel for producing the following shortlist of 19 artworks and selecting the prize-winners – these are exhibited on the Sustainability First website. Judges included artists, a curator, art critic, academic and leader in renewable energy investment.

Annex B: Sustainability First Essay Prize and Survey

We received over 100 essay submissions, with areas of expertise ranging from energy to community relations. The quality of work was outstanding, covering almost every facet of sustainability, to answer the question:

‘How do we build from the current corona crisis towards a more sustainable future?’

We asked entrants to consider this question from one or more of the following perspectives:

- Cultural, behavioural and societal change;
- Government policy, regulatory and institutional change; and/or
- Business leadership, governance and practice.

Each with their own unique perspective, the following shortlisted and prize-winning entrants represented the best cross-section of work, offering both radical and practical solutions to our question. We are grateful to our judging panel, which included people with expertise in climate change, sustainability, behaviour change, communications, investment and data.

This Annex summarises the prize-winning and shortlisted essays. To read the essays in full, please click on their names.

Yash Dewan (First Prize) – Combining broader conceptual frameworks with a range of short- and medium-term solutions, Yash’s essay provides a holistic approach to building from the coronavirus towards a sustainable future, with reference to stimulus packages along with the water and energy sectors.

Dylan Ngan (Joint Second Prize) – A wild card among the entries, Dylan’s philosophical angle centred on the use of a value-based approach to uncertainty and how, to effectively lead us out of crisis, we must question what is important and why.

Manjot Heer (Joint Second Prize) – Building on personal experience, Manjot’s essay centred on the use of innovation hubs to develop renewable energy projects between academia, government and business, facilitating the step change in creativity and collaboration needed for a sustainable future.

James Poston (Third Prize) – Including primary research, James’ work mapped out clear, practical actions for government, businesses and civil society to recover from coronavirus in a way that builds back better.

Alicja Boryn – Alicja’s essay focused on culture, policy and business responses to the pandemic. Her essay covered everything from food chains, to legal frameworks for political accountability and measures to protect the unemployed.

Anneli Tostar – Anneli’s essay emphasised the need for tax reform to free up funds for the future. By backing income support packages, more tailored forms of engagement with under-represented groups and provisioning extra support for renewable projects, her suggestions called for a sustainable, equitable future.

Parth Devalia – With an emphasis on leveraging the moment to redefine social contracts and forge a new economic model which values preparedness, Parth’s essay gave a variety of recommendations ranging from a one-off wealth tax, to investor action and purpose-led business.

Patrick Hinton – Providing both a government-led and community-centred approach to achieving a sustainable future, Patrick’s suggestions ranged from the need for a green recovery, via economic stimulus packages, to youth empowerment.

Sergiu George Jiduc – With a strong economic focus, Sergiu’s essay put forward guiding principles for a green economic recovery, as well as practical green stimulus interventions available for policymakers in the short term.

Survey

At the same time that we were running the essay prize, we also conducted a survey with students and early stage researchers on the theme of ‘How do we build from the corona crisis towards a sustainable future?’ We received 43 responses to this – from Strathclyde to Southampton. This book also draws on this work.

Most thought a change in consumption patterns was the most important measure to ensure recovery from the pandemic was smart, fair and green – followed by changes to levies and taxes. Opinion was evenly split on some proposals, such as universal basic income.

Key priorities for policymakers and regulators identified in the survey included:

'Introduce more decentralised regulation capacity, but with greater communication between decentralised states; in combination with rolling out nationwide schemes focusing on economic well-being and carbon-emission reductions.' **Master student**

'Trial different ways of rebuilding post-corona – e.g. how do we move forward without falling back to relying on ever-increasing levels of consumerism?' **PhD student**

customers workers economy improving safety local health possible
support protect use adapt employees maintaining
business better work increase people measures
travel help staff sustainability reduce impact services
sector sustainable use policy system crisis must
pollution economic need maintaining future

Word cloud of results from survey monkey survey, regarding priorities for policymakers and businesses during and after coronavirus.

Annex C: Art and Essay Competitions Procedure

- The Competitions were open to all living British and international artists/persons based in the UK (with a UK address, or studying or working in the UK) over the age of 18 years.
- The Judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.
- Artists will allow Sustainability First to use submitted photographs for the purposes of promoting the exhibition, including: catalogue, press and publicity, website and in ongoing communications. Such permission for the use of photographs shall be without charge and in perpetuity.
- The Art Competition entailed an internal sifting round and then judging of the shortlisted entries by the panel.
- By entering the Essay Competition, entrants agree that their essay may be published on the Sustainability First website and subsequently in an e-book of commended Competition entries and that quotes/extracts from the essay may appear in other Sustainability First publications and social media. Essays and any quotes/extracts from these shall always be attributed to the author.
- The Essay Competition entailed two internal sifting rounds and then judging of the shortlisted entries (on an anonymous basis, without names or university affiliations etc.) by the panel.
- In the internal sifting rounds, if an entrant was known to the assessor, their submission was reviewed by another member of the team.

<https://www.sustainabilityfirst.org.uk/bridging-corona/essay-prize/essay-prize-rules>

<https://www.sustainabilityfirst.org.uk/bridging-corona/art-prize/art-prize-rule>

Annex D: Acknowledgements

Firstly, thank you to the hundreds of entrants who submitted their work to the Art Prize and Essay Prize and completed our survey. Using this corona crisis as an opportunity to leverage change, the ideas and creativity give hope that we can create a shared vision for the future, which is smart, fair, green and builds towards a sustainable future.

Thank you to the institutions and organisations who kindly distributed the entry details of both competitions and the survey, publicising them on their own social media, webpages, university departmental newsletters and mailings lists.

A huge thank you to the members of both of our high-profile judging panels for giving so much time to reviewing, scoring and engaging in discussion about the entries to decide on our winners, as well as for participating in our series of personal perspective interviews.

Finally, thank you to our Associates at Sustainability First, industry representatives and expert contacts who supported the shortlisting process, gave feedback on the content of this virtual book and provided their professional insights and commentary on key ideas emerging from the competition entries.



Kathy Bruce

Transitory Landscape where Ruins Grow, 35.6 x 40.6 cm, paper collage, 2020

Kathy's work captures the isolation, fear and distancing we are all living with as the result of this pandemic, while highlighting the nurturing relationship people can have with nature. She produces images of plants and humans/hope from despair.



Shortlisted and Credited Essay Entrants

Adeola Awoyomi
Alexander Oxley
Alicja Boryn (Shortlisted)
Anneli Tostar (Shortlisted)
Arlene Barclay
Dylan Ngan (Joint Second Prize)
Ellen Fletcher
Holly Ayesha Smith
James Poston (Third Prize)
Joey McAleese
Maddy Pearson
Manjot Heer (Joint Second Prize)
Matt Madden
Matthew Bone
Nurah Niazy
Oliver Lack
Paloma Ortega
Parth Devalia (Shortlisted)
Patrick Hinton (Shortlisted)
Sergiu Jiduc (Shortlisted)
Shilpita Mathews
Sophie Corcut
Yash Dewan (First Prize)

Shortlisted Artists

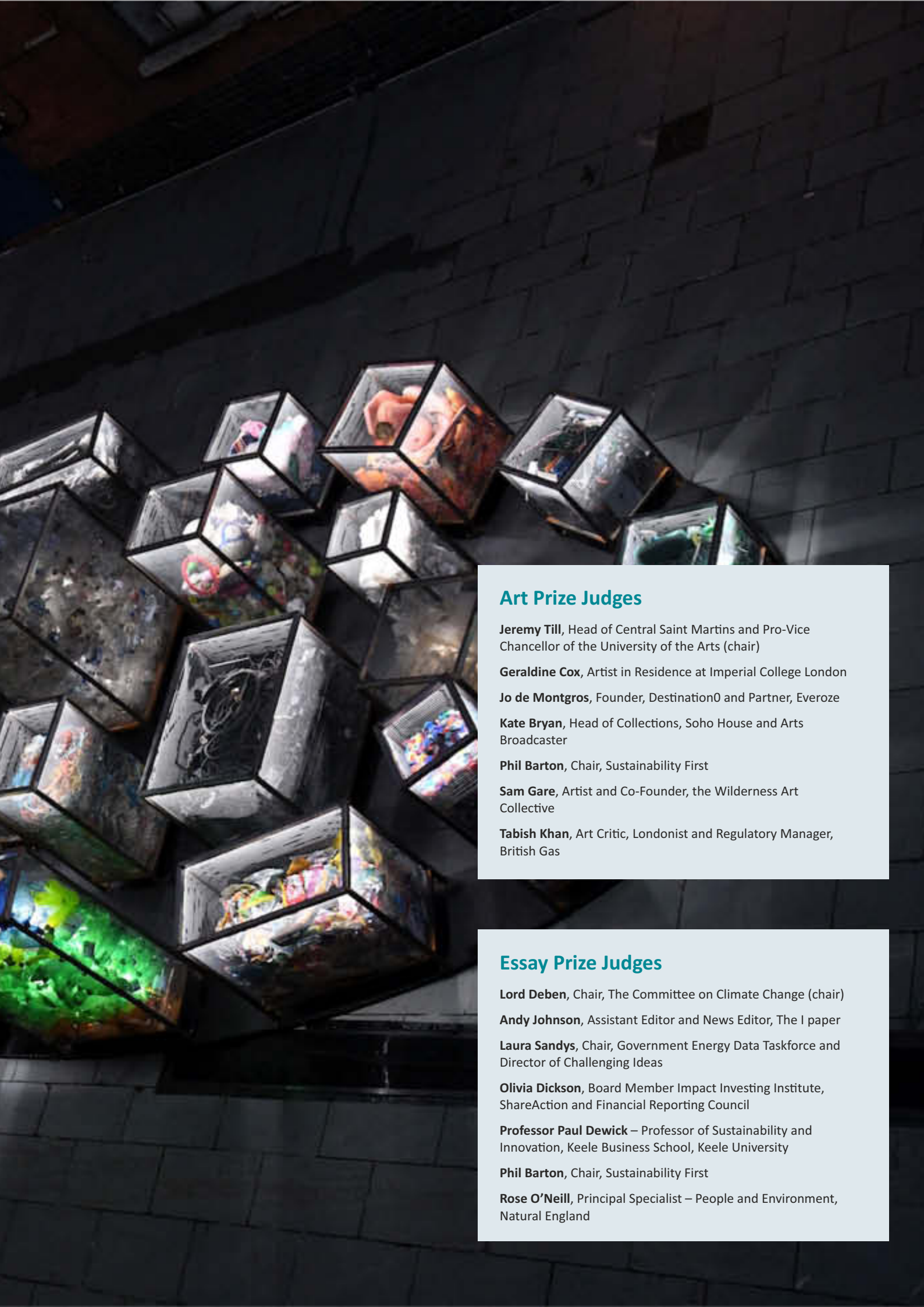
Adam Sadiq
Eleanor Shipman (Highly commended)
Estelle Woolley
Freya Moffat (Third Prize)
Georgia Tucker
Geraint Ross Evans (Highly commended)
Jacob Weeks
Jasmine Pradissitto
Kathy Bruce
Liz Elton (Second Prize)
Maria Arceo
Tere Chad
Rachael Mellors
Rachna Garodia
Rebecca Harper
Sam Schmitt
Sarah Strachan
Stephen Bennett
William Bock (First Prize)



Maria Arceo

Future Dust, variable heights, 4m x 12m, Thames plastic waste, wood, metal and light, 2017

Maria constructed a footprint-shaped light installation, made with plastic collected in forty clean-ups along the Thames from Teddington Lock to the sea. It was commissioned for the Thames Festival 2017, but the image has new resonances in the context of the social isolation and containment of lockdown.



Art Prize Judges

Jeremy Till, Head of Central Saint Martins and Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of the Arts (chair)

Geraldine Cox, Artist in Residence at Imperial College London

Jo de Montgros, Founder, Destination0 and Partner, Everoze

Kate Bryan, Head of Collections, Soho House and Arts Broadcaster

Phil Barton, Chair, Sustainability First

Sam Gare, Artist and Co-Founder, the Wilderness Art Collective

Tabish Khan, Art Critic, Londonist and Regulatory Manager, British Gas

Essay Prize Judges

Lord Deben, Chair, The Committee on Climate Change (chair)

Andy Johnson, Assistant Editor and News Editor, The I paper

Laura Sandys, Chair, Government Energy Data Taskforce and Director of Challenging Ideas

Olivia Dickson, Board Member Impact Investing Institute, ShareAction and Financial Reporting Council

Professor Paul Dewick – Professor of Sustainability and Innovation, Keele Business School, Keele University

Phil Barton, Chair, Sustainability First

Rose O'Neill, Principal Specialist – People and Environment, Natural England



Christine McGourty, Water UK's Chief Executive

'Read this book! It couldn't be more timely. It contains ideas from artists and students that are both challenging and inspirational. They help us to reimagine what a more sustainable and resilient future might look like as we work towards a clean, green recovery from the pandemic.'

Baroness Martha Lane-Fox, Chair of the House of Lords Covid-19 Committee

'Young people who have responded to our Committee see covid as a catalyst for change, what they are less clear about is whether it is change for the better or worse. After the silence people are getting back in their cars and traffic is getting back to normal levels. People are getting on with their lives. The role of government is vital in terms of how we build back, what we are building towards.'

Tabish Khan, Art Critic, Londonist and Regulatory Manager, British Gas

'We don't want to go back to where we were before the corona crisis. We want to be greener and for society to rebound. Energy will play an important role in this, as will the art we use to reflect societal change and the recovery.'

Rebecca Harper

Digging up the Dirt, 24 x 35cm, acrylic on paper, 2020

Rebecca explores the emotional and heightened relationships lockdown and how this time has enabled a refocus on well-being and encouraged people to appreciate local green spaces like never before. Through semi-fictional characters she shares the experience of finding mental space and solace in the garden; injecting colour, planting flowers, sowing seeds, pruning hedges, attracting birds and bees. Contributing to the regrowth of the planet a little from home by enabling the garden to flourish. Nurturing for our environment can also remind us to nurture one another.

References

All websites accessed 11 July 2020

-
- ¹ Oxford English Dictionary online. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/429843>
- ² To tackle climate change, the government has committed to 'net zero' carbon emissions by 2050 (2045 in Scotland).
- ³ For example, see <https://www.gov.scot/groups/just-transition-commission/>
- ⁴ https://www.sustainabilityfirst.org.uk/images/publications/fair_for_the_future/SF_F4TF_Mid-Way_Briefing_April_2020.pdf
- ⁵ Artist Support Pledge. <https://www.instagram.com/artistsupportpledge/?hl=en>
- ⁶ Wood, 2020. *Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-uk-lockdown-end-poll-environment-food-health-fitness-social-community-a9469736.html>
- ⁷ Townsend M. revealed: surge in domestic violence during Covid-19 crisis | Society | The Guardian [Internet]. *The Guardian*. 2020 [cited 27 May 2020]. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/12/domestic-violence-surges-seven-hundred-per-cent-uk-coronavirus?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other
- ⁸ British Heart Foundation, 2020. <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/heart-matters-magazine/news/behind-the-headlines/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-bame-patients>
- ⁹ Kousoulis A., McDaid S., Crepaz-Keay D., Solomon S., Lombardo C., Yap J. et al. The COVID-19 pandemic, financial inequality and mental health | Mental Health Foundation [Internet]. 2020 [cited 27 May 2020]. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/coronavirus-mental-health-pandemic/covid-19-inequality-briefing>
- ¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733093/PHOF_Health_Equity_Report.pdf
- ¹¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/09/5-reasons-why-we-need-to-reduce-global-inequality/>
- ¹² Theodore Zamenopoulos, 2008. 'A complexity theory of design intentionality'. Department of Design, Development, Environment and Materials, Open University, Milton Keynes, UK.
- ¹³ Hakovirta, M. and Denuwara, N. 'How COVID-19 Redefines the Concept of Sustainability'. *Sustainability* 2020, 12(9), 3727.
- ¹⁴ Le Quéré, C., Jackson, R.B., Jones, M.W. et al, 2020. 'Temporary reduction in daily global CO₂ emissions during the COVID-19 forced confinement'. *Nature Climate Change*.
- ¹⁵ Waters. 'Like an emotional Mexican wave': How coronavirus kindness makes the world seem smaller | Life and style | The Guardian [Internet]. [cited 2020 May 23]. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/mar/21/like-an-emotional-mexican-wave-how-coronavirus-kindness-makes-the-world-seem-smaller>
- ¹⁶ *BMJ* 2020; 369 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1557> (Published 27 April 2020).
- ¹⁷ Nisbet, E., Zelenski, J. and Murphy, S., 2008. 'The Nature Relatedness Scale'. *Environment and Behavior*, 41(5), pp. 715–740.
- ¹⁸ Graver, B., Zhang, K. and Rutherford, D., 2019. CO₂ Emissions from Commercial Aviation, 2018. https://theicct.org/sites/default/files/publications/ICCT_CO2-commercl-aviation-2018_20190918.pdf

-
- ¹⁹ Just Transition Commission. <https://www.gov.scot/groups/just-transition-commission/>
- ²⁰ RTPI (2019). ‘Groundbreaking’ crowdfunding initiative wins top prize at RTPI Awards. <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/briefing-room/news-releases/2019/april/%E2%80%98groundbreaking%E2%80%99-crowdfunding-initiative-wins-top-prize-at-rtpi-awards/>
- ²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jun/10/uk-economy-likely-to-suffer-worst-covid-19-damage-says-oecd>
- ²² IRENA, 2019. ‘Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2018’, International Renewable Energy Agency, Abu Dhabi.
- ²³ Global Commission on Adaptation, 2019. ‘Adapt now: A global call for leadership on climate resilience’ World Resources Institute.
- ²⁴ The New Climate Economy, 2018. ‘Unlocking the inclusive growth story of the 21st century: Accelerating climate action in urgent times’, World Resource Institute.
- ²⁵ Sharma, R., 2019. ‘How many trees each party has promised to plant in their general election campaigns’. <https://inews.co.uk/news/environment/plant-trees-general-election-2019-manifesto-policies-parties-climate-labour-conservative-green-lib-dems-1326696>
- ²⁶ Van den Bergh, J., 2011. ‘Environment versus growth – A criticism of “degrowth” and a plea for “a-growth”’. *Ecological Economics*, 70(5), pp. 881–890.
- ²⁷ Raworth, Kate. *Doughnut Economics*. Random House UK, 2018.
- ²⁸ Boffey, 2020. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/08/amsterdam-doughnut-model-mend-post-coronavirus-economy>
- ²⁹ Carrington, 2020. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/28/eu-green-recovery-package-sets-a-marker-for-the-world>
- ³⁰ Harvey, 2020. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/15/leading-uk-charities-urge-pm-look-for-green-recovery-covid-19>
- ³¹ Hepburn, C., O’Callaghan, B., Stern, N., Stiglitz, J. and Zenghelis, D. ‘Will COVID-19 fiscal recovery packages accelerate or retard progress on climate change?’ Oxford Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment. 2020; Working Paper 20-02. <https://www.smithschool.ox.ac.uk/publications/wpapers/workingpaper20-02.pdf>
- ³² World Bank, ‘Proposed Sustainability Checklist for Assessing Economic Recovery Interventions’, April 2020. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/223671586803837686/Sustainability-Checklist-for-Assessing-Economic-Recovery-Investments-April-2020.pdf>
- ³³ Costa Dias, M., Farquharson, C., Griffith, R., Joyce, R. and Levell, P., ‘Getting people back to work’, Institute for Fiscal Studies, May 2020. https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/Final-BN286-Getting-people-back-to-work-final-for-website_.pdf
- ³⁴ Baicich, P., 2017. ‘The US Needs A New Civilian Conservation Corps’. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/the-us-needs-a-new-civilian-conservation-corps/>
- ³⁵ Holland, B., Glassman, J., Roseland, C., Frisch, C. and Banker, M. (2020). *Global Stimulus Principles*. Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI).
- ³⁶ Sandbu, M., 2020. *Wealth tax redux* | *Financial Times*. <https://on.ft.com/2MkVB9E>

-
- ³⁷ https://www.taxjustice.uk/blog/progressive-groups-call-for-tax-reform-post-covid?fbclid=IwAR1DE9iZ_CHYWBCI_qIn-L9IelqnbzFpOAXWwEm9XX404KAauerfNOvtU
- ³⁸ Tetlow, G., Marshall, J., Pope, T., Rutter, J. and Sodhi, S., 2020. Institute for Government. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/overcoming-barriers-tax-reform.pdf>
- ³⁹ Willis, R., 2019. 'The role of national politicians in global climate governance. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2514848619887464>.
- ⁴⁰ Munene, M., Swartling, Å. and Thomalla, F., 2018. 'Adaptive governance as a catalyst for transforming the relationship between development and disaster risk through the Sendai Framework?' *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 28, pp. 653–663.
- ⁴¹ Rentschler, J., Hallegatte, S. and Walsh, B., 2018. 'Building Back Better: Achieving resilience through stronger, faster, and more inclusive post-disaster reconstruction'. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29867/127215.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>
- ⁴² Guan, D., Wang, D., Hallegatte, S. et al, 2020. 'Global supply-chain effects of COVID-19 control measures'. *Nature Human Behaviour*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0896-8>
- ⁴³ Posner, 2020. 'Coronavirus Pandemic Reveals Our Economic Inequality'. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelposner/2020/05/14/coronavirus-pandemic-reveals-our-economic-inequality/#79a4487b79fe>
- ⁴⁴ Krivanek, D., 2020. Impact Investing Institute. <https://www.impactinvest.org.uk/the-global-impact-investing-community-is-coming-together-to-respond-to-coronavirus/>
- ⁴⁵ MacDonald-Brown, N. and MacLennan, S. 'How have sustainable companies performed during the Covid-19 crisis?', *Schroders*, 4 May 2020. <https://www.schroders.com/en/insights/economics/how-have-sustainable-companies-performed-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>
- ⁴⁶ Brunori, G. and Galli, F., 2016. 'Sustainability of Local and Global Food Chains: Introduction to the Special Issue'. *Sustainability*, 8(8), p. 765.
- ⁴⁷ Spaargaren, G. et al, 2012. *Food Practices in Transition*, 1. Routledge, London.
- ⁴⁸ Kirwan, J. et al, 2017, 'Acknowledging complexity in food supply chains when assessing their performance and sustainability', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 52, pp. 21–32.
- ⁴⁹ Haffar, M. and Searcy, C., 2019. 'How organizational logics shape trade-off decision-making in sustainability'. *Long Range Planning*. 52(6), 101912.
- ⁵⁰ Barclays CEO says 'putting 7,000 people in a building may be thing of the past', Reuters [Internet]. [cited 28 May 2020]. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-barclays-results-offices/barclays-ceo-says-putting-7000-people-in-a-building-may-be-thing-of-the-past-idUKKCN22B101>
- ⁵¹ Ji, Q., 2020. 'The Impacts of Reducing Renewable Energy Subsidies on China's Energy Transition by Using a Hybrid Dynamic Computable General Equilibrium Model'. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenrg.2020.00025/full>
- ⁵² Venter, C., 2016. 'A review of collaborative planning approaches for transformative change towards a sustainable future', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 142. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309427067_A_Review_of_Collaborative_Planning_Approaches_for_Transformative_Change_Towards_a_Sustainable_Future

53

https://www.sustainabilityfirst.org.uk/images/publications/consultations/BEIS_economic_recovery_roundtables_Sustainability_First_23.6.20.pdf

54

https://www.sustainabilityfirst.org.uk/images/publications/bridging_corona/Consumer_Vulnerability_Ensuring_Affordability_Final_150520.pdf



Stephen Bennett

Same Planet, Different World, 20 x 16 inches, Giclée Print (Edition of 10), 2020
Stephen's data visualisation gives a glimpse of the wilding of London, enabled by Covid. Lighter pixels show lower levels of air pollution in March 2020 compared to March 2019. Stephen explores the intersection of art, science and policy. His starting point is how data increasingly penetrates our everyday lives while remaining abstract, vast, disembodied and unknowing. This, combined with globalisation and the growing complexity of society, is contributing to citizens feeling dislocated from public decision-making. In response, he seeks out information from online sources and then materialises it in analogue, organic and sensorially diverse ways. By making scientific evidence something that can be visualised, touched and played with, he aims to empower people.

Sustainability First is a think tank and charity that promotes practical, sustainable solutions to improve environmental, economic and social well-being. We are a trusted convenor on public utility issues and have a strong track record of bringing stakeholders together in multiparty projects in the public interest.

Registered Charity Number: 1078994



Click
sustainabilityfirst.org.uk



Write
C/o IEEP, 3rd Floor,
11 Belgrave Road,
London, SW1V 1RB



Follow
[@SustainFirst](https://twitter.com/SustainFirst)



Email
info@sustainabilityfirst.org.uk



Watch
www.youtube.com/channel/UCav-zSvntQznFlJj5pJ-cig



Follow
[@sustainability_first](https://www.instagram.com/sustainability_first)